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Editor's report August 2025

It is my pleasure to present the 20th issue of Explorations. The present issue consists of eight papers published under the 'Articles' category, one conversation, one reflexive essay and four book reviews. The August 2025 issue of the ISS e-Journal presents an interdisciplinary research. The collection of articles delves into the persistent and evolving dynamics of social stratification, identity politics, gender construction, and developmental interventions. A unifying theme across many papers is the critical examination of the gap between public discourse/constitutional ideals and the lived experiences of marginalized communities along the lines of caste, gender, tribe, or region. This report provides a synthesized exploration of the key arguments and findings presented in this issue. A significant cluster of articles rigorously challenges the myth of withering of caste's, tracing its manifestations from the drawing rooms of the elite to the violent confrontations in rural India.

This issue of the journal starts with a conversation with Professor Gattu Satyanarayana, a noted Indian sociologist, who shared his academic experiences with teaching and research, which is a great learning experience for the young generation of sociologists in India. This issue also consists of a reflexive essay by Professor Antony Palackal.

The first article, "Passing-Trespassing: An approach to the study of caste in Bengali middle-class spaces," challenges the perceived "exceptionalism" of Bengal regarding caste. It argues that while the Bengali middle-class publicly professes a progressive, caste-agnostic identity, this is a conscious act of "keeping caste under wraps." The article posits that caste remains a critical, albeit suppressed, determinant of life chances. It builds on a historiography that establishes caste as a central factor in Bengal's past, including the Partition, and suggests that its contemporary "disappearance" in post-Partition West Bengal is a social and political performance that merits deeper ethnographic inquiry.

The study "Gendered Identity Construction: An Empirical Study of the Education scape in Bihar and Jharkhand, India" introduces the novel concept of the "education scape", the linguistic landscape of educational institutions. Through a multimodal analysis of signs in higher educational institutions, the research finds that these spaces are active sites for perpetuating gender-stereotyped identities. The physical and textual environment of campuses in Bihar and Jharkhand, despite institutional commitments to SDG-5 (Gender Equality), continues to reinforce rampant gender inequality.

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The paper titled "Women's Body and the Politics of the Meira Paibis in Manipur" offers a critical perspective on the famed women's movement. The author argues that the Meira Paibis' protests, while powerful, are inherently targeted at preserving a specific notion of domesticity and the Meitei nation. The paper contends that the movement resonates with an "ideal Manipuri womanhood," thereby conceiving women's bodies as national markers that must be kept within prescribed cultural norms and values, thus engaging in a politics of bodily control even while protesting.

The paper titled "Political Elites and Social Transformation in Bikaner City:An Empirical Study of Differentiation and Closure" is based on empirical study including 43 interviews with political elites across municipal, legislative and parliamentary arenas. It explains the shifts and stability in the authority structure of an Indian city by situating their governing political elites within the specific regional context of Bikaner city. The findings show that democratization has diversified elite recruitment to include Scheduled Castes elites, intermediary castes i.e. OBC, yet entrenched mechanisms of exclusions continue to privilege historically dominant groups. This research aims to explore the causes and consequences of elite contestation in Bikaner. The study demonstrates how democratization can coexist with persistent closures, offering comparative insights into elite reproduction in postcolonial societies.

The paper titled "Empowering Adolescent Girls in Rural Bengal: Empirical Insights from Malda District" provides a nuanced evaluation of the Kanyashree Prakalpa scheme. While acknowledging its impressive statistical gains in girls' education and delayed marriage, the qualitative data reveals complex ground realities like "silent dropout" and nominal participation. The study strongly advocates for an intersectional approach, considering caste, religion, and poverty, to recalibrate policy for more effective, context-sensitive support.

The paper titled Women's body and the politics of the *Meira Paibis* in Manipur seeks to understand the various ways in which women's bodies figure in the idioms and methods of protest the *Meira Paibis* adopt and argues that their movement is inherently targeted at preserving the notion of domesticity and the nation. The notion of ideal Manipuri (read Meitei) womanhood is resonated in their activities and engagements with various issues that capture their attention. Women's bodies continue to be conceived as national markers by their movement, which needs to be kept within prescribed norms and values.

The paper titled Evaluating Swachh Bharat Abhiyan: "Impact of Swachh Bharat Abhiyan on Sanitation Practices Prevalent among Tharu Tribe" presents a mixed-methods study on the flagship sanitation campaign. While noting increased

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awareness and toilet usage, particularly among women and children, the research highlights persistent challenges like water scarcity, cultural practices, and resource limitations. It makes a crucial sociological argument that sanitation is not merely an individual habit but is deeply embedded in social structures, cultural norms, and gender relations.

The paper titled "Laxmipeta Massacre: A Notable Case of Growing Dalit Assertion Antagonising Dominant Castes in Andhra Pradesh." analyzes a 2012 massacre to demonstrate how newfound Dalit consciousness and assertion are met with systemic violence from dominant Other Backward Classes (OBCs). It highlights a critical shift in rural power dynamics, where OBCs, having gained economic and political prominence, emerge as the "newest oppressors," unwilling to tolerate Dalit challenges to the established social hierarchy.

The paper titled "Exploring the Impact of Language Variations on Child Readers: An Ideational Metafunctional Analysis of Comic Stories in 'Balarama'" employs Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics to analyze Malayalam comic stories. The research finds a predominance of dialogic interactions (Verbal Processes), which reflect real-world spoken activities. The study concludes that the authors of Balarama strategically use language to construct social realities and cultural norms, thereby engaging and educating young readers and enhancing their socio-linguistic competence, especially during the disruptive context of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The paper titled "Navigating Barriers and Opportunities in Primary Education: A Sociological Study of the Kutia Kondha Community in Kalahandi District, Odisha", investigates the multifaceted barriers and emerging opportunities in primary education among the Kutia Kandha community, a Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Group (PVTG) residing in Kalahandi district, Odisha. Employing both qualitative and quantitative methods, the study critically examines how geographical isolation, poverty, linguistic constraints, and socio-cultural traditions impede educational participation. Findings indicate that inadequate infrastructure, scarcity of trained and culturally sensitive teachers, and gender-based inequalities continue to marginalize Kutia Kandha children within the formal education system.

The paper titled "Curriculum in School Education: A Comparative Study of History Textbooks Of CBSE and State Board of Odisha In India" presents a comparison of history textbooks of Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) and the Odisha State Board in India, with a focus on class IX and X books. The comparison has been done using qualitative content analysis. The paper is based on Althusser's (1971) theory on ideology and Apple's theory of

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education and power to highlight how school textbooks reflect dominant ideologies. The paper finds that CBSE history textbooks are better structured and provide a nuanced understanding of a particular topic, which is absent in the Odia textbooks. However, they are similar in the way they provide primacy to the Nationalist perspective and overlook subaltern perspectives.

The issue consists of five book reviews by Akash Sulochana, K.V.Reddy, A.Muthulakshmi and C.Devendiran, P.G. Jogdand, Mohamed Fazil.

The August 2025 issue of the ISS e-Journal successfully demonstrates the vitality and critical engagement of contemporary Indian sociology. The articles collectively argue that understanding modern India requires peeling back layers of public narrative to examine the underlying structures of caste, the institutional and social construction of gender, the powerful role of language in socialization, and the complex interplay between policy and deep-seated cultural and ecological practices. Explorations invite your contributions to future issues of the journal. We would appreciate your feedback or suggestions on the journal. All the articles reflect diverse sociological interpretations of social facts across the states in India.

I sincerely thank all the authors for choosing the explorations for publishing their articles. I am sure that the explorations enrich scholars' sociological imaginations across India's states.

Thanks & Best Wishes

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Conversation: Gattu Satyanarayana in conversation with Trilok Chandan Goud

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Prof Gattu Satyanarayana in conversation with Trilok Chandan Goud

[Transcript of the interview held on August 1, 2025]

Introduction

The Indian Sociological Society (ISS) confers its highest honour, the Lifetime Achievement Award for 2024, upon Professor Gattu Satyanarayana, an eminent sociologist whose life and work embody the very objectives of this prestigious award.

Professor Satyanarayana's journey is a testament to the power of rooted scholarship. Hailing from a farming family in Ghanpur, Telangana, and his academic path began in a Telugu-medium village school and led him to the pinnacles of global sociological discourse. His work is distinguished by its unwavering commitment to understanding and illuminating the pressing social issues of contemporary India, particularly those affecting the agrarian sector, displaced communities, and marginalized groups.

Trilok Chadnan Goud (TCG): On behalf of the Editor of E-Exploration (ISS E-Journal), I sincerely thank you for agreeing to have this conversation. At the outset, I would like to congratulate you for receiving the Life Time Achievement Award of the Indian Sociological Society. For your information and the readers of the ISS E-Journal, we should keep this discussion only to academic contribution and institution building.

Gattu Satyanarayana (GSN): Thank you very much, Dr Trilok Chandan Goud, for reaching out on behalf of E-Explorations and its Editor Professor Nagaraju in particular. I consider it my privilege to share my academic and institutional experience through E-Explorations with the entire sociological fraternity. I also have the pleasure to thank you for greeting me on receiving the Life Time Achievement Award of the Indian Sociological Society last December 2024 at the 49th All India Sociological Conference.

TCG: Can you tell us about your place of birth and where you grew up?

GSN: I was born on 1st January 1950 as per school records in a small village called Ghanpur (Station) in the Warangal district of Telangana. I grew up there, immersed in the realities of rural life. My initial education was in the Telugu medium in my native village itself, which kept me deeply connected to my linguistic and cultural roots.

TCG: What were your parents' backgrounds?

GSN: I come from a family of farmers belonging to the Gouda community, which is classified as an Other Backward Class (OBC). My parents were intimately connected to the land. Their lives of hard work, their understanding of the soil, and their experiences within the village social structure were my first, and perhaps most profound, lessons in sociology, though I didn't know it at the time.

TCG: Can you describe your experiences during primary and secondary education?

GSN: My primary and secondary education in the Telugu medium in Ghanpur was foundational. It was not just about learning the alphabet or mathematics; it was about understanding the world from a specific cultural and social vantage point was much challenging. Studying in one's mother tongue allows for a deeper connection with concepts and a more nuanced understanding of one's immediate social world. This period instilled in me a sense of curiosity about the society I was a part of.

TCG: Could you share your experiences during your undergraduate (B.Com.) and postgraduate (M.A.) studies?

GSN: I did my graduation from C.K.M. College in Warangal, which was affiliated with Osmania University. After B.Com. My intellectual interests broadened. I developed a deep interest in Law, Philosophy, and Sociology. However, it was my desire to understand the various social issues and problems I saw around me that ultimately led me to join the M.A. programme in Sociology. I also did LL.B in the due course of time. This decision was a turning point. The highly intellectual and committed professors of that time had a profound impact on me. They helped channel my inquisitiveness into a structured, scholarly pursuit.

TCG: When did you first come into contact with the field of sociology, and how did that shape your academic interests?

GSN: My formal contact with sociology began during my M.A. at Osmania University. This encounter was transformative. It changed my view of life and my understanding of society from an individualistic perspective to a social orientation. The complex and subtle nature of the subject, its methods of sociological enquiry, and its theoretical perspectives played a crucial role in sharpening my understanding. It provided me with the tools to analyse the very structures of inequality and agrarian issues I had observed growing up.

TCG: Can you reflect on your time at Osmania University, both as a student and as a research scholar?

GSN: Osmania University has been my academic home for most of my life. As a student, it was a place of intellectual awakening. As a research scholar, it provided the environment and guidance to delve deep into specific areas of inquiry. The university, with its rich tradition of scholarship and its location in a region ripe with social movements, agrarian issues and development dynamics, was the perfect laboratory for a budding sociologist. It was here that I truly learned the meaning of rigorous sociological research.

TCG: Who was your research supervisor? Explain your relationship with him/her?

GSN: My research supervisor for my Ph.D. was the eminent Professor G. Viswanatham. I consider myself fortunate to have been guided by him. He was not just a supervisor but a mentor who shaped my academic career. He

provided the right balance of freedom and guidance, allowing me to explore my research interests in "Changing Agrarian Structure and Labour Relations" while ensuring academic rigour. My relationship with him, and with other inspiring teachers like Prof. Hasan Askari, Prof. Rathan Shaw, Prof. C. Lakshmanna, and Prof. J.V. Raghavender Rao, Prof. Y.B. Abba Sayulu was based on deep respect and a shared commitment to the discipline.

TCG: When did your career as a teacher in sociology begin?
GSN: My career as a teacher began soon after I completed my post-graduation and embarked on my M.Phil. & Ph.D. The transition from being a student to teaching students is a continuous learning process. It began formally when I was appointed to the faculty in the Department of Sociology at Osmania University.

TCG: How did you secure a position at Osmania University?

GSN: Before completing my doctoral studies and having presented and published my research, I applied for a teaching position when an opportunity arose. My academic record, my research publications, including the paper presented at the All India Sociological Conference in Meerut in 1980, and my deep interest in teaching and research likely played a significant role in securing the position.

TCG: What were some of your notable experiences at Osmania University during your academic journey?

GSN: There are many. Presenting my first research paper at a national conference, obtaining my Ph.D., and later guiding my own Ph.D. students are all cherished milestones. Serving as the Head of the Department, Chairman of the Board of Studies, and even as the Principal of the University College of Arts and Social Sciences were notable administrative experiences that taught me a great deal about institution-building. My term as the General Secretary of the Osmania University Teachers' Association (OUTA) from 1994-96 was also a significant experience in academic leadership and advocacy.

TCG: In your opinion, what is the most fulfilling aspect of being a sociologist?
GSN: The most fulfilling aspect is the ability to understand, interpret, and contribute to solving real-world problems. When my research on development-induced displacement or my work on the agrarian crisis and farmers' suicides, women in grassroots governance can shed light on human suffering and inform policy, which is the ultimate satisfaction. It is a profession that allows you to bridge the gap between theory and praxis, to give a voice to the marginalized through your work.

TCG: How did you contribute to the development of the Sociology Department at Osmania University, alongside your colleagues?
GSN: Alongside my dedicated colleagues, I contributed by helping to modernize the curriculum, strengthen the research culture, and secure prestigious grants like the Special Assistance Programme (SAP). We worked

to ensure the department was not just a teaching centre but a vibrant hub of research, hosting national and international seminars. Guiding a large number of M.Phil. and Ph.D. scholars was also a key part of building the department's research legacy.

TCG: Given the increasing relevance of teaching sociology in regional languages, what is your perspective on this trend?

GSN: I am a strong advocate for it. As someone who began my education in Telugu, I understand the power of learning in one's mother tongue. It democratizes knowledge, making complex sociological concepts accessible to a wider audience. It allows for a more authentic engagement with local contexts and social realities. We must promote research skills and inquisitiveness and quality textbooks and resources in regional languages without compromising on the theoretical depth and rigorous methodological analysis of the discipline.

TCG: As a member of the College Service Commission, what were some of the most significant changes or reforms you contributed to in terms of faculty recruitment and educational standards?

GSN: My focus was always on ensuring transparency, meritocracy, and a commitment to social justice in the recruitment process. We worked to streamline the selection procedure to identify the most capable and dedicated teachers. Upholding the constitutional mandate of reservations was a key priority, ensuring that the faculty represented the social diversity of our student body, thereby enriching the educational environment.

TCG: Your involvement in the Minimum Wage Board was crucial for the welfare of workers. Can you share some of the key initiatives or decisions you were a part of during your time there?

GSN: My sociological research on labour relations and inequalities directly informed my work on the Board. The key initiatives revolved around using empirical data to argue for fair and liveable wages for the most vulnerable sections of the workforce, particularly in the unorganized sector. We worked to revise wage structures to keep pace with inflation and ensure they reflected the true cost of living, always keeping the welfare of the worker at the forefront of our deliberations.

TCG: What initially drew you to study the agrarian crisis and the issue of farmers' suicides in India?

GSN: The roots of this interest are deeply personal, having grown up in a farming family. I witnessed first-hand the vulnerabilities and pressures faced by farmers. Later, as a sociologist, my Ph.D. was on agrarian structure and labour relations. So, when the crisis deepened and the tragic phenomenon of farmer suicides became rampant, especially young farmers it was a natural and urgent area of study for me. My Emeritus Fellowship on "Agrarian Crisis and

Farmers Suicides" was an attempt to use sociological tools to understand this human tragedy and suggest meaningful interventions.

TCG: What has been your experience with the Indian Sociological Society (ISS), and how has it contributed to your understanding or involvement in the field of sociology?

GSN: The ISS has been my primary academic community. It has been an invaluable platform for intellectual exchange, debate, and collaboration. From presenting my first paper on "conflict in country side" at the Meerut conference in 1980 to serving on its Management Committee and Editorial Advisory Board, the ISS has been central to my academic journey. It has exposed me to the diverse currents of Indian sociology and helped me place my work within a larger national context.

TCG: Could you share your experience with the annual conferences of the ISS? How have these conferences influenced your own academic journey and sociological understanding?

GSN: The annual conferences are the pulse of Indian sociology. They are where new ideas are presented, and rigorous debates take place. Added to presenting my early work on the reservation agitation and later on the crisis in higher learning at international forums provided me with critical feedback that shaped my research. Listening to stalwarts and young scholars alike has constantly refreshed my sociological understanding and prevented intellectual stagnation.

TCG: What advice would you give to young sociologists or students interested in becoming more involved with the Indian Sociological Society?

GSN: My advice is to engage innovatively/intellectually active and fearlessly. Start by presenting your empirical research reflecting you at the conferences, even if it feels daunting. Read the Sociological Bulletin thoroughly. Do not be a passive observer; participate in discussions, raise questions, and network with scholarly sociologists from across the country. The ISS is a community, and you will get back what you put into it. It is the best place to find your intellectual tribe.

TCG: What are some of the biggest challenges you have faced in your research journey, especially when it comes to securing funding, finding research gaps, or engaging with the broader academic community?

GSN: Securing consistent funding for long-term, field-based sociological research is always a challenge. One has to persistently write proposals that can convince funding bodies of the project's relevance. As for research gaps, the key are to stay deeply connected to the field and to theoretical debates simultaneously. The gap often reveals itself at the intersection of a pressing social issue and an underexplored theoretical angle. Engaging with the global academic community was challenging initially, but presenting at World

Congresses of Sociology, like the ones in Madrid and Germany, Sweden, China, South Africa helped me overcome that.

TCG: Lastly, what do you envision for the future of sociology in India?
GSN: I envision a sociology that is even more robust, reflexive, and relevant for the eminent challenges in development with equity at justice. It must continue to grapple with the monumental changes in Indian society from digital divides and climate change to new forms of inequality and identity politics. I hope it will become more interdisciplinary while retaining its core strengths. Most importantly, Indian sociology must fearlessly speak truth to power, uphold scientific temper, and remain committed to the ideals of social justice and emancipation. The future is bright if young sociologists embrace the field with the same passion and sincerity that my teachers instilled in us.

Gattu Satyanarayana retired as a professor of sociology from Osmania University, Hyderabad Telangana

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Reflexive essay: Between Utopia and Praxis: The Sociological Legacy of Michael Burawoy

Author: Antony Palackal

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Between Utopia and Praxis:

The Sociological Legacy of Michael Burawoy

--Antony Palackal

Introduction

The global academic community was left stunned by the tragic and untimely death of the eminent British Marxist theorist and sociologist, Michael Burawoy, who was fatally struck by a car while crossing a street in Oakland, California, on February 3rd, 2024. At the time of his passing, Burawoy was 77 years old and held the position of Professor Emeritus at the University of California, Berkeley. His demise marked the end of an era in critical sociology, but his intellectual legacy continues to illuminate and provoke scholarly and activist thought across the world.

Since the anti-apartheid movements of the 1980s in Africa, Burawoy had remained a transformative presence in the public sphere of the human sciences, particularly sociology. He persistently offered new directions in both academic discourse and activist scholarship, combining theoretical depth with an unwavering commitment to social transformation. Burawoy's leadership extended to the global academic stage. He served with distinction as the President of the American Sociological Association (ASA) and later as the President of the International Sociological Association (ISA), positions that underscored his intellectual stature and influence within global sociological thought.

What distinguished Burawoy from his contemporaries was his praxis-oriented approach, through which he reimagined sociology as a form of resistance, not just an academic pursuit, but a tool to challenge authoritarian political regimes, neoliberal economic orders, and corporate-driven capitalist development. Central to his work was a deeply humanistic critique of power, and a relentless commitment to foregrounding marginalized voices in the global conversation on justice and rights. His activism was never abstract. Burawoy consistently condemned human rights violations, engaging in scholarly advocacy that linked local struggles to broader systemic critiques. For example, he played an active role in the American Sociological Association's statements and discussions in solidarity with Palestine, demonstrating his belief in sociology as both a disciplinary lens and a political force (Burawoy, 2005).

From England to the World: Burawoy's Formative Trajectory

Born in England on June 15, 1947, Michael Burawoy entered the world just three months before India's independence from British colonial rule, a historical irony that would later resonate profoundly with his lifelong opposition to imperialism and his incisive critiques of colonial power structures. His personal background added further complexity to his

intellectual evolution. Burawoy was the son of Jewish refugees who had fled the anti-Semitic pogroms and Stalinist repression in the Russian Empire, seeking asylum in England in 1933. The intergenerational trauma of imperial violence, displacement, and authoritarianism deeply shaped his worldview and later informed his profound critiques of power, exploitation, and exclusion.

Burawoy's early academic pursuits soon gave way to a politically charged sociological imagination. He rose to international scholarly prominence with his seminal work "Manufacturing Consent: Changes in the Labor Process under Monopoly Capitalism" (1979). This groundbreaking ethnographic study offered a rethinking of Marxist labour theory through meticulous observation of factory-floor interactions, hierarchy, consent, and resistance. Conducted while working as a machine operator in a Chicago factory, this work remains a classic in industrial sociology. For Burawoy, the sociologist was not a distant observer but an immersed participant, capable of grasping the nuanced interplay between agency and structure. He later extended this immersive ethnographic method in Hungary, Zambia, and the former Soviet Union, offering comparative insights into how capitalism and socialism alike shaped everyday labour experiences (Burawoy, 1979).

What set Burawoy apart was not merely his theoretical acumen but his methodological courage. He pushed the limits of ethnography, transforming it into a tool of reflexive, participatory inquiry. He bridged empirical labour studies with larger political-economic frameworks, making sociology a space where workers' voices and lived experiences could contest dominant ideological narratives. This effort culminated in his co-edited volumes, such as "Ethnography Unbound" (1991) and "Global Ethnography" (2000), in collaboration with his students. These works proposed a radical reorientation of the discipline, arguing that sociology must be embedded in the everyday realities of people living under global capitalism (Burawoy et al., 2000).

Over time, his research diversified beyond traditional industrial sites into contemporary areas such as agricultural knowledge dissemination, assistive technologies, and disability studies, fields often overlooked by mainstream sociology. Yet Burawoy's unwavering commitment remained: knowledge production must be public, action-oriented, and rooted in the struggles of the marginalized. In *"*For Public Sociology*"* (2004), he mounted a powerful critique of the ivory tower, calling for democratization of academic knowledge and institutional reform that prioritizes dialogue between academia and civil society (Burawoy, 2004). His vision of public sociology was both a call to action and an ethical imperative, one that positioned sociologists as critical agents in the struggle for justice and equality.

In his later years, Burawoy increasingly turned his attention to the pedagogical dimensions of sociology. He saw university classrooms as sites of intellectual empowerment, where critical consciousness could be cultivated and reproduced across generations. He mentored a vast network of students and scholars across the globe, inspiring them to view sociology not merely as an academic discipline, but as a form of engaged activism. His lectures, whether

delivered in Berkeley or Johannesburg, São Paulo or Delhi, were never confined to theory alone, they were mobilizing experiences, calling on audiences to reclaim the public relevance of sociology. In this pedagogical turn, Burawoy exemplified the core ethos of public sociology: to speak truth to power, to expose injustice, and to render sociological knowledge intelligible, accessible, and empowering for ordinary people.

Thus, Burawoy's life and work together trace a remarkable arc, from the trauma of empire to the factory floor, and ultimately to the classroom and public sphere, all anchored in a deep belief that sociology must confront the world, not retreat from it.

From Factory Floors to the Corridors of the Academy

By the early 21st century, Michael Burawoy, once deeply embedded in the material and symbolic world of factory floors, from the steel plants of Hungary to industrial workshops in Chicago, had pivoted his analytical gaze toward a different kind of institution: the university. His ethnographic immersion in the labour process had earlier allowed him to critique monopoly capitalism from within. However, with changing times and the rapid corporatization of higher education, Burawoy recognized a shifting terrain of power. In his view, the university had become the new factory, no longer simply a site of intellectual inquiry but a bureaucratized and commodified space of knowledge production that functioned to reproduce the dominant ideologies and epistemologies of ruling elites. As neoliberal logics of audit, competition, and marketization permeated academia, Burawoy began to reconceptualize the university itself as a key site of ideological reproduction and potential resistance.

Applying a historically grounded and reflexively critical lens, Burawoy sought to deconstruct the structures of higher education that were increasingly aligned with the imperatives of neoliberal capitalism. The corporatization of the academy, exemplified in rising tuition fees, precarious labour conditions for adjunct faculty, publication-based evaluation metrics, and institutional partnerships with corporate and state actors, prompted him to ask: For whom is sociology being produced, and to what end?

These concerns led him to delineate what has since become one of the most influential analytical frameworks in contemporary sociology: the four-fold division of sociological knowledge. In his influential writings and lectures, Burawoy reimagined the discipline as consisting of four interconnected but distinct types of sociological practice:

1. Professional Sociology: This domain focuses on generating empirical and theoretical knowledge primarily for academic peers. It centres on publishing in peer-reviewed journals, teaching disciplinary norms, and training future sociologists. Professional Sociology is the backbone of institutional academic practice and is essential for maintaining disciplinary rigor and coherence.

2. Critical Sociology: Functioning as a form of internal critique, it examines the assumptions, blind spots, and power dynamics embedded within Professional Sociology. It interrogates paradigms, methodologies, and epistemological stances, offering a reflexive turn that challenges orthodoxy from within the academy.

3. Policy Sociology: Concerned with practical application, Policy Sociology aims to inform decision-making processes by providing actionable insights for governments, NGOs, and other institutions. It speaks to an audience beyond academia and is often instrumental in crafting public policy, though it risks becoming technocratic if divorced from critical reflection.

4. Public Sociology: Perhaps the most radical and transformative of the four, Public Sociology entails a dialogical engagement with civil society. It is premised on the belief that sociological knowledge must not only serve elite institutions but must also be co-produced with, and accountable to, the broader public. In this vision, the public is not a passive recipient but an active participant in the sociological enterprise (Burawoy, 2005a).

   Among these, Public Sociology became the signature of Burawoy's intellectual legacy. His 2004 Presidential Address to the American Sociological Association (ASA), titled *"For Public Sociology,"* did more than define a new branch of the discipline, it constituted a call to arms for a sociology committed to social transformation. In that address, Burawoy insisted that sociology must reclaim its moral and political relevance in a world marked by inequality, ecological degradation, and systemic injustice. His conceptualization sparked both global enthusiasm and intense debate, revitalizing sociology's public mission and challenging scholars to step beyond disciplinary boundaries (Burawoy, 2005b).

   This landmark address was later expanded and revisited in the 2021 volume *Public Sociology: Between Utopia and Anti-Utopia*, published by Polity Press, where Burawoy delved into the tensions between the idealism of sociological engagement and the structural constraints imposed by academic institutions, market forces, and political regimes. He critically reflected on the practical difficulties of engaging publics across diverse geopolitical contexts, while affirming the normative aspiration of sociology to be a public good (Burawoy, 2021).

   One of the most evocative moments in Burawoy's ASA address was his invocation of Walter Benjamin's "Angel of History", taken from the philosopher's ninth thesis on the philosophy of history. In Benjamin's allegory, the angel faces the wreckage of the past, debris piling upon debris, while being propelled into the future by a storm called progress. Burawoy appropriated this image to depict sociology itself as the Angel of History, a discipline that must bear witness to the historical catastrophes wrought by capitalism, colonialism, patriarchy, and racism, while salvaging the remnants of hope, justice, and solidarity from the wreckage of modernity.

This allegory became a powerful metaphor for sociology's ethical and political imperative. As Burawoy saw it, the discipline was born out of a deep moral project, the aspiration to construct a better society. Foundational thinkers such as Marx, Durkheim, and Weber, despite their differences, envisioned sociology as both a science and a tool for societal transformation. However, this emancipatory vision gradually eroded.

Public Sociology – Praxis of Hope

By the mid-20th century, especially in the United States, sociology had been tamed and professionalized, with figures like Talcott Parsons promoting structural-functionalism, a paradigm that emphasized order and equilibrium, often at the expense of conflict and change. Similarly, the Chicago School, while empirically rich, frequently mirrored dominant liberal ideologies and shied away from systemic critiques of power. This intellectual drift, according to Burawoy, divorced sociology from its radical roots, turning it into a bureaucratic instrument for diagnosing and maintaining the status quo.

He described this intellectual stagnation as the "deadwood of orthodoxy," wherein sociology ceased to challenge hegemony and instead accommodated itself to it (2005:17). In response, Public Sociology emerged as a counter-hegemonic project, aimed at reinvigorating the critical and transformative potential of the discipline. It demanded that sociologists engage with movements for social justice, speak against authoritarian regimes, and ally with oppressed communities in their struggles for dignity and rights.

In an era defined by rising authoritarianism, climate collapse, racial capitalism, and epistemic injustice, Burawoy's articulation of Public Sociology remains profoundly relevant. It offers not only a critique of existing power structures but a methodological and ethical roadmap for scholars committed to a more just and humane world. His work challenges us to ask: What is the purpose of knowledge if it does not serve the oppressed? And who are we, as sociologists, if we do not speak to, and with, the publics who are silenced by dominant institutions?

Public Sociology, in Michael Burawoy's formulation, locates its primary domain of engagement within civil society, that historically contingent, ideologically fraught, and politically contested arena that exists between the state and the market. For Burawoy, civil society is neither a neutral sphere of rational dialogue nor a pristine repository of democratic ideals. Rather, it is an arena of antagonisms, marked by struggle, exclusion, and reconfiguration—a terrain where hegemonic and counter-hegemonic forces vie for influence over cultural meanings, social norms, and political priorities.

Crucially, Burawoy's conception of civil society transcends the narrow liberal understanding that reduces it to formal institutions like political parties, NGOs, or advocacy groups. Instead, he theorizes civil society as a heterogeneous social space comprising labour unions, religious and faith-based communities, educational institutions, social movements,

neighbourhood associations, and diverse forms of cultural production, including independent media, art, and literature. In this expansive view, civil society is a plural and dynamic field, characterized by uneven access to power and differentiated capacities for resistance and mobilization.

Historically, civil society in its modern form arose in 19th-century Western Europe as a counterweight to the absolutist state and the unchecked violence of emergent industrial capitalism. It was imagined as a domain where citizens could develop collective agency, form associations, and articulate grievances free from the immediate coercive apparatus of state or capital. However, Burawoy insists that this vision was never fully realized. Civil society was born exclusive, deeply shaped by patriarchal, racial, and class-based structures. In the United States, for example, civil society was constructed around the normative subjectivity of white, property-owning men. Women, enslaved persons, Indigenous populations, and the working poor were historically excluded from the civil contract, relegated to the margins of political discourse and collective action.

Over time, as marginalized communities fought for entry and recognition within civil society, the terrain itself became more complex and contested. The expansion of rights and recognition, driven by movements for racial justice, feminism, queer liberation, decolonization, and labor—transformed civil society into a site of both radical possibility and intensified surveillance. As Burawoy astutely observes, the widening of civil society's boundaries also facilitated the encroachment of the state and the market, blurring traditional boundaries and weakening the autonomy that civil society once promised.

In this light, civil society is not a sanctuary; it is not immune to the dynamics of power, nor is it inherently progressive. It is, as Burawoy argues, a terrain of ideological contestation, shot through with contradictions, exclusions, and possibilities. This recognition is critical to understanding the political function of Public Sociology. The task of Public Sociology is not to romanticize civil society, but to engage it critically, to amplify subaltern voices, interrogate dominant ideologies, and forge solidarities that can resist and reimagine existing power relations.

This theoretical orientation gains urgency in the context of authoritarian retrenchment and neoliberal restructuring in the 21st century. Burawoy draws attention to historical and contemporary episodes where the erosion of civil society has coincided with the collapse of sociological discourse itself. In regimes like Stalin's Soviet Union, Nazi Germany under Hitler, Fascist Italy under Mussolini, Chile under Pinochet, or Uganda under Idi Amin, civil society was brutally dismantled, public dialogue was stifled, and sociology—as a discipline committed to critique, was delegitimized, censored, or altogether destroyed. Sociology, in Burawoy's view, cannot thrive in a vacuum; its vitality depends upon the existence of vibrant public spaces where contestation is possible and dissident voices are heard.

Conversely, moments of democratic opening and civil resistance, such as Perestroika in the former Soviet Union, the anti-apartheid movement in South Africa, or the Arab Spring, demonstrate that sociology can play a pivotal role in articulating new imaginaries, in reconfiguring understandings of justice, and in legitimizing subaltern knowledge. In these contexts, Public Sociology becomes a praxis of hope, functioning as both witness and participant in the struggles that redefine civil life.

However, Burawoy is not naïve about the limits of Public Sociology. He is aware that civil society can host reactionary, exclusionary, and fascist formations. The resurgence of right-wing populism, xenophobic nationalism, and religious fundamentalism across the globe, including in established democracies, testifies to the ambivalence of civil society. It can serve as a seedbed for both emancipation and repression. Hence, the normative commitment of Public Sociology must be made explicit: it must stand for human dignity, social justice, epistemic inclusion, and participatory democracy. Neutrality in the face of structural oppression is not an option.

In today's globally fragmented order, characterized by rampant economic inequality, climate emergency, digital surveillance, gender violence, and post-truth politics, Burawoy argues that Public Sociology offers a uniquely situated response. Not as a utopian project, but as a grounded, reflexive, and dialogical engagement with publics who are actively seeking alternatives to the dominant order. It is, in his words, a way of revitalizing the sociological imagination, reanimating its capacity to decode ideology, reveal hidden structures, and open up spaces for resistance and solidarity.

Public Sociology thus becomes a double movement, simultaneously epistemological and political. It challenges the professionalization and privatization of knowledge within academia, and it contests the colonization of civil society by neoliberal rationality. It invites scholars to abandon their detachment and engage ethically and collaboratively with movements, communities, and publics. In so doing, it reclaims sociology not merely as a science of society, but as a democratic and moral practice, committed to a more just and liveable world.

Burawoy in India: Engagements and Encounters

Michael Burawoy's intellectual engagement with India was not incidental or peripheral, but rather an integral expression of his lifelong commitment to building a decolonized, dialogical, and globally relevant sociology. Across multiple visits, public lectures, and collaborations, Burawoy established a deep rapport with the Indian sociological community. His presence resonated not only with senior scholars but also with early-career researchers, students, and social activists, many of whom found in him a rare combination of academic brilliance, political clarity, and moral courage.

Burawoy's critical solidarity with India stemmed from his acute awareness of the complex social hierarchies, political contradictions, and historical burdens

borne by postcolonial societies. He did not approach India as a distant observer, but as an engaged interlocutor, attuned to its caste system, communal tensions, gender-based inequalities, and the structural marginalization of Dalits, Adivasis, Muslims, and other oppressed groups. He understood the specificities of Indian democracy as a site of both promise and peril, deeply contested, yet full of transformative potential. In public forums and academic writings, he consistently voiced concern about India's democratic backsliding, erosion of civil liberties, and the rise of authoritarian populism, offering pointed critiques grounded in both empirical observation and sociological theory.

A key moment in this intellectual relationship occurred in 2011, when Burawoy delivered the keynote address at the Diamond Jubilee of the Indian Sociological Society (ISS), held at Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU), New Delhi. His lecture, "The Importance of Social Movements," marked a watershed moment in the evolving relationship between global sociology and Indian sociological practice. Rather than treating social movements as peripheral to sociological analysis, Burawoy argued that they were central to understanding the dynamics of structural transformation in contemporary societies. Drawing from global examples, including labour uprisings, anti-racist campaigns, feminist mobilizations, and indigenous resistance, he emphasized that social movements function both as symptoms of systemic crises and as agents of political innovation. In the Indian context, where movements led by Dalits, Adivasis, farmers, feminists, students, and environmentalists continue to redefine the contours of democratic struggle, Burawoy's insistence on centring social movements was especially resonant.

He urged Indian sociologists to go beyond abstract theorization and methodological orthodoxy, and to take seriously their responsibility to the public. In line with his now-canonical framework of *Public Sociology*, he encouraged Indian scholars to engage more deeply with grassroots realities, to co-produce knowledge with marginalized communities, and to resist the co-optation of academia by corporate interests or majoritarian ideologies. Burawoy was particularly critical of the marketization of higher education in India, the decline of public universities as spaces of critical inquiry, and the political repression of dissent within campuses, developments he saw as detrimental to the democratic ethos of both education and sociology.

Decolonizing Sociology

Burawoy's relationship with Kerala, one of India's most politically aware and educationally advanced states, was equally profound. In 2022, Burawoy delivered the Jacob John Kattakayam Memorial Lecture, organized at the national level in honour of Professor Jacob John Kattakayam, a towering figure in Indian sociology who had played a pivotal role in popularizing social gerontology, caste studies, and applied sociology. The annual memorial lecture series, instituted by a collective of around forty of Kattakayam's doctoral scholars, was designed to sustain his vision of publicly engaged and socially responsive sociology.

Burawoy's lecture, titled "Decolonizing Sociology – The Significance of W.E.B. Du Bois' Imagination of India," offered a groundbreaking intervention in both historical and contemporary debates on decolonial thought. The lecture traced how Du Bois, though never having visited India, maintained sustained intellectual engagements with Indian anti-colonial thinkers, including Rabindranath Tagore, Lala Lajpat Rai, Mahatma Gandhi, B.R. Ambedkar. Du Bois's admiration for India's freedom movement, coupled with his correspondence with Indian intellectuals, served as evidence of a long-standing Afro-Asian solidarity. Burawoy interpreted these connections as a foundation for a global decolonial sociology, a sociology rooted in shared struggles against racism, casteism, imperialism, and economic domination.

In this lecture, Burawoy argued that W.E.B. Du Bois, the African American intellectual and civil rights leader, developed a unique anti-colonial consciousness through his reflections on India, especially its anti-imperialist struggles and philosophical traditions. According to Burawoy, Du Bois' writings on India, particularly his admiration for B.R. Ambedkar and Mahatma Gandhi, represented a global convergence of subaltern solidarities, linking race and caste, colonialism and capitalism, the American South and the Indian subcontinent. This connection, Burawoy maintained, could serve as a foundation for reimagining sociology as a global, decolonial, and justice-oriented discipline.

The lecture was later published in the Sociological Bulletin (July 2023), the official journal of the Indian Sociological Society, and has since been widely discussed in both Indian and international academic circles. It stands today not only as a testament to Burawoy's enduring intellectual generosity but also as a symbol of his deep affective and analytical investment in Global South dialogues. In linking Du Bois' imagination of India to contemporary calls for decolonization, Burawoy articulated a powerful transnational vision, one that challenged Eurocentric epistemologies, celebrated local histories of resistance, and reasserted sociology's mission as a tool for collective liberation.

Moreover, Burawoy's frequent invocation of Ambedkarian thought, especially in relation to caste, dignity, and constitutional morality, struck a deep chord among Indian sociologists committed to Dalit-Bahujan perspectives. Although he never visited India during Ambedkar's lifetime, Burawoy saw in Ambedkar's emancipatory project a kindred spirit to Du Bois, and an inspiration for sociology's political reorientation. He often emphasized that Du Bois' conceptualization of "colour-caste" and Ambedkar's critique of Brahminical hegemony were parallel strands in the global struggle for justice, both undermined by mainstream sociology's complicity with dominant power.

In calling Indian sociologists to action, Burawoy was not issuing a critique from afar. Rather, he spoke as a global citizen of sociology, someone who stood with the Indian academic community in its struggle against institutional silencing, authoritarianism, epistemic exclusion, and social injustice. He expressed deep concern over the shrinking spaces for academic freedom in India, the rise of majoritarian nationalism, and the co-optation of public

universities into state machinery. Burawoy's appeal was clear: Indian sociology must not retreat into ivory towers, but must rise to the challenge of its historical moment, reclaiming its moral and political vocation.

In the final analysis, Michael Burawoy's relationship with India was neither superficial nor symbolic, it was deeply grounded in a shared ethical orientation toward the oppressed, a mutual commitment to democratizing knowledge, and a desire to transform sociology into a practice of freedom. His legacy within Indian sociology is likely to endure, not simply as an imported theoretical influence, but as a collaborative partner in a global project of epistemic justice, public reason, and radical solidarity.

Colour Caste: W.E.B. Du Bois and B.R. Ambedkar

One of Michael Burawoy's most profound intellectual contributions in his later years was the strategic and philosophical reorientation of global sociology through the lens of decolonial thought. Central to this reorientation was his decision to recentre the legacies of two of the most radical and socially committed thinkers of the 20th century, W.E.B. Du Bois and B.R. Ambedkar, whose contributions had long been marginalized, misrepresented, or entirely excluded from the dominant sociological canon.

Burawoy's commitment to reviving Du Bois, the first African American to earn a Ph.D. from Harvard and a founding figure in the discipline of sociology, was not merely an exercise in intellectual recovery but a deliberate political act. In repositioning Du Bois at the core of his decolonial project, Burawoy directly challenged the hegemonic structure of Western sociology, which had historically silenced Black, Brown, and Indigenous voices, and elevated positivist, Eurocentric frameworks as the universal norm. In Burawoy's view, Du Bois embodied the very essence of Public Sociology: a critical, engaged, and ethically grounded mode of knowledge production that arose not from detachment but from lived experience, collective struggle, and moral commitment.

Du Bois's landmark work, *Black Reconstruction in America* (1935), which Burawoy referred to as a form of "sociological fiction," offered a searing critique of racial capitalism and reimagined the American historical narrative through the agency of Black labour. Burawoy celebrated Du Bois's methodology as pioneering, not only because it fused history and sociology, but because it foregrounded intersectionality, years before the term entered academic discourse. Du Bois's epistemology was insurgent, informed by grounded narratives, ethnographic detail, historical materialism, and a radical political commitment to justice. He offered a subaltern view of modernity, one that exposed the entanglements of race, class, gender, and empire.

Yet, as Burawoy repeatedly noted, Du Bois remained largely erased from the sociological mainstream, not by accident, but by design. In Aldon Morris's influential study *The Scholar Denied* (2015), which Burawoy often cited, it is shown how white sociologists in the early 20th century—particularly those

associated with the University of Chicago, systematically excluded Du Bois's work from the emerging canon of American sociology. His scholarship was dismissed, ignored, and rendered invisible, despite its originality, empirical rigor, and critical depth. Burawoy saw this erasure not merely as historical injustice, but as an ongoing epistemic violence, reflective of the ways in which elite academia silences dissenting, decolonial, and non-white voices.

In a parallel intellectual gesture, Burawoy sought to bring Du Bois into dialogue with Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, the Indian jurist, social reformer, and principal architect of the Indian Constitution. Though the two never met, and lived worlds apart geographically, Burawoy identified them as kindred spirits, intellectuals who spoke from the margins, who understood oppression as structural, and who envisioned liberation through both political activism and intellectual rigor. Both were trained in elite Western institutions, Du Bois at Harvard and the University of Berlin; Ambedkar at Columbia and the London School of Economics. Yet both rejected the ideological assumptions of colonial modernity, and used their education to critique the very systems that excluded them.

Du Bois, in his later writings, invoked the concept of "colour caste" to describe the rigid, hereditary, and inescapable racial stratification experienced by African Americans. Burawoy drew a direct analogy between this and Ambedkar's analysis of caste, not as a cultural residue, but as a deeply material and political system of graded inequality, designed to uphold Brahminical supremacy. Both thinkers understood the necessity of institutional reform, grassroots mobilization, and cultural transformation for emancipation. Du Bois's "Talented Tenth" and Ambedkar's "Educate, Agitate, Organize" bear structural and ideological similarities: both advocated for the political awakening of the oppressed through intellectual empowerment and social critique.

Importantly, Burawoy highlighted that mainstream sociology in both the Global North and South failed to construct meaningful bridges between these thinkers. In his view, a comparative sociological framework that connects Du Bois's racial critique with Ambedkar's caste critique could offer a powerful epistemic rupture from Eurocentric sociology, paving the way for a truly global, plural, and decolonial discipline. This comparative horizon, Burawoy argued, would allow sociology to break free from its colonial legacies and re-anchor itself in anti-imperialist solidarities, subaltern knowledges, and ethical praxis.

Kerala's sociological tradition nourished by debates around caste, land, gender, and labour, offered fertile ground for the kind of Public Sociology that Burawoy championed. In many ways, his ideas serve as both an endorsement and a provocation, affirming what has already been achieved, while demanding deeper engagement with the structural challenges of our times. Ultimately, Burawoy's engagement with Du Bois and Ambedkar is not merely an intellectual synthesis, but a manifesto for a decolonial sociology that speaks truth to power, listens to the subaltern, and dares to imagine alternative

futures. It is a call for scholars across geographies to build epistemic solidarities, to reject elitism and methodological nationalism, and to reclaim sociology as a force for justice, both within and beyond the university.

The Comet of Public Sociology

Michael Burawoy stood out as an unwavering public sociologist, a passionate advocate for the democratization of knowledge. Through numerous public lectures, media interviews, and participation in policy consultations, he remained an engaged presence in the public sphere, constantly striving to create democratic spaces for sociological dialogue. His writings, marked by both clarity and empathy, served as an epistemic bridge between intellectual discourse and everyday lived experiences. Burawoy persistently challenged and exposed the deeply entrenched and anti-democratic structures of humiliation and exclusion that define social life across axes such as gender, race, caste, class, and power. By interrogating and problematizing societal conventions, traditions, and power hierarchies, he inspired civil society to become an agent of social transformation.

Burawoy's enduring contribution to public sociology lies in his resolute commitment to bridging the gap between academic inquiry and the conflicted realities of everyday social life. Burawoy never viewed sociology as a discipline confined to the ivory towers of abstract theorization. Instead, he envisioned it as a scientific, analytical, and moral tool that could engage with the public to expose, analyse, and respond to the systemic inequalities of society. For Burawoy, the transformative potential of sociological knowledge resided in its ability to inform public policy aimed at equality and well-being, empower grassroots humanistic movements, and ignite the internal energy of social change.

In this sense, Burawoy's own intellectual journey became a living testimony of Public Sociology. His deep commitment to civil society and social justice was not merely theoretical but actively shaped his public engagements and scholarly interventions. His epistemic labour enriched academic practice while simultaneously producing tangible contributions toward social empowerment and policy reform. Through his embodiment of the principles of Public Sociology, Burawoy left an indelible mark on the academic and civic landscape. He became the moral conscience and intellectual spirit of a discipline seeking to build a more just, compassionate, and socially aware world. His legacy, rich in intellectual vigour and public engagement, now stands as a beacon for future generations, a comet blazing through the sociological firmament, illuminating pathways to a more egalitarian and empathetic world.

In an era marked by deepening global inequalities, authoritarian populism, and crisis-driven governance, Burawoy stood out as a brilliant comet in the sociological sky, a thinker who held up a critical mirror to the world, offering clarity, resistance, and hope. His legacy compels us to revisit the political

responsibilities of sociology and the urgent need to reclaim its public relevance.

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Article: Passing-Trespassing: An approach to the study of caste in Bengali middle-class spaces

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Passing-Trespassing: An approach to the study of caste in Bengali middle-class spaces

--Sarbani Bandyopadhyay

Abstract

This paper is based on my current longitudinal study of the participants I sampled for my doctoral fieldwork (April 2012-December 2014). This multi-caste sample was composed of school, college and university teachers of Kolkata and nearby districts. I studied the unfolding of the caste question in the formation of the Bengali middle class. Revisiting the older sample, I trace through their experiences the reproduction and transformation of caste relations in educational spaces. It is furthered through a study of the experiences and mobilities of their children and, in a few cases, their grandchildren. This paper focuses on three Dalit participants from the older sample, their children and a grandchild of the eldest Dalit participant. In this paper I suggest a spatial analysis of caste through the concepts of passing and trespassing.

Key Words: *Passing and Trespassing; Spatial Analysis of Caste; Caste in Bengali Middle Class; Dalit Intergenerational Mobility.*

I never applied for stipend for SC students, I was afraid I would lose my friends (Krishnendu Baity Scheduled Caste, 53 years old in 2024)

Despite doing so well some of my upper caste friends think we somehow manage to get in through the back-door (Krishnendu's daughter Ronjinee 21 years old in 2023)

When I told my colleagues I was an SC, most did not believe me and some asked why did I not tell them this when I had joined as a lecturer… it seemed it suddenly was not my place anymore (Pradip Biswas, Scheduled Caste, 84 yearsold in 2024)

Introduction

Despite the increasing literature on caste in Bengal, caste still does not feature here, at least publicly, as a major determinant of life chances of individuals or as a political mobilising force as in many other parts of India. Bengal seems to be marked by exceptionalism (Nielsen, K 2019), part of which is accounted for by the alleged lack of significance of caste here. There is a belief among the middle class that caste is not progressive, but the increasing casteist assertions against the marginalised castes also point to some conscious efforts at keeping caste under wraps. Some major studies of caste in Bengal (Bandyopadhyay, S 2011, 1997, Bandyopadhyay, S 2012, 2016a, Guha, 2022, Sanyal, H 1981, Sen, D 2012, 2014, 2016, Sen, U 2014) along with historical documents covering the colonial period and the years after Partition have established a fact that caste was a critical factor in the life of Bengal and indeed the Partition had as much to do with caste as it had with religion/communalism. Caste contestations and movements were one of the

central features of colonial Bengal (Bandyopadhyay, S 2011, Bandyopadhyay, S 2022, 2023). Yet, caste seemed to have disappeared in post-Partition West Bengal. Partition facilitated to delegitimise caste as part of public lexicon in West Bengal. It was considered as divisive for the new nation in the making during the early years of nation-building as the heated debates and Assembly proceedings from West Bengal show. With the rise to dominance of Left politics here, particularly since the late 1970s, the discourse of class further turned caste and public discussions around it taboo. Ruud (1994) discusses the ways in which the rhetoric of class politics and policies pursued by the Left government helped to displace caste as a mobilising force in rural West Bengal.

Deposing before the Mandal Commission the Left Front government stated that '[p]overty and low levels of living standards rather than caste should, in our opinion, be the most important criteria for identifying backwardness'. Thus, the then Chief Minister Jyoti Basu could claim that in West Bengal there were only two castes: the rich and the poor (Ghosh, A 2001). Through their policies, through their organisations such as cultural fronts, workers unions, peasant fronts and teachers' associations etc the Left government had nurtured and propagated class politics as the only legitimate and desirable form of discourse and politics in West Bengal. Rana & Rana (2003) following the 2001 census shows that upper castes accounting for about 6% of the total population of West Bengal have control over 90% of modern professions, over education and over cultural activities and associations. Residential patterns also reflect to an appreciable extent the influence of caste (Haque, I et al. 2021). Refugee rehabilitation too demonstrates a caste-based pattern (Bandyopadhyay and Basu Ray Chaudhury 2022). I have argued elsewhere (Bandyopadhyay and Sarkar 2022) that one of the ways to approach the caste question in post-Partition West Bengal is through weaving together the caste and the Muslim questions. Based on my fieldwork I carried out during April 2012 and December 2014 and again between October 2023 and December 2024, I suggest another way of studying caste in our contemporary context: using the concepts of passing and trespassing in the spatial analysis of educational institutions.

The marginalised often voluntarily or involuntarily take recourse to 'passing' to enter the domains socially forbidden for them. Passing whether voluntary or involuntary, as we learn through Goffman's seminal work Stigma (1969) and some others that followed in its wake such as Renfrow (2004), often places the onus on the 'passer' and normalises privilege, inequality dominance; trespassing on the other hand I would argue turns the focus on the privileged/dominant. Trespassing is openly entering a domain without possessing the rights to do so. Passing keeps the dominant in an absent-present mode: the dominant/privileged is present but is in the background, having a covert presence. This absent-present mode is legitimised and facilitated by caste and its dominant common-sense understanding whereby caste is equated with the marginalised castes and the privileged upper castes appear as 'casteless'. Although caste stands against civility and the spirit of the

Constitution, as Subramanian (2015) points out *'ironically what allowed for the translation of caste capital into modern capital was the constitutional mechanisms providing redress for historical discrimination. In the very effort to account for historical injustice through the reservation of seats for low castes in education and employment, those who fell under the non-reserved, or "general category," were by extension deemed casteless'*. Trespassing as a concept can explicitly focus on the dominant/privileged. They are now no longer in the shadows, but are out in the open accusing the marginalised castes of 'trespass'. For marginalised castes it is less about the possibilities of passing and more about their refusal to pass as upper caste that complicates the caste question in educational spaces. The line between passing and trespassing is thin indeed but I want to make this distinction in terms sketched above for it has the possibilities of foregrounding in less unequal measure both the privileged and the marginalised castes as castes. These concepts of passing and trespassing help us trace the unfolding of the caste question in the coveted spheres of the Bengali middle class: in this case that of educational institutions.

The present article is part of my current longitudinal research on intergenerational mobility. This research focuses on my previous sample[1] (2012-2014) and up to their next two generations. This current generation falls within the age group of 15-24 years. This research intends to study the older sample across time, and examine the mobility and experiences of their children/grandchildren. My current research thus intends to study the reproduction and transformation of caste in educational institutions. It builds on the qualitative data collected and analysed then. The method followed is qualitative: life narratives and in-depth interviews.

The older retired generation of marginalised caste teachers (then aged between 65 and 83 years) from my doctoral sample claimed that they would not be able to help me in my research if my main search was for caste discrimination. Other than a few incidents in their long professional and social lives they pointed out that they have not been subject to discrimination based on caste. Whereas, in the case of the later generation of that sample those who were then in their 30s and 40s gave me a completely contrasting picture. I assumed that the older generation was shy and embarrassed to talk about caste. Chatterjee (2016) begins his essay with this idea of shyness around caste that marks conversation and research over caste in West Bengal. The Mandal

[1] Fifty-one participants from my doctoral research were drawn from school, college and university teachers located in educational institutions in Kolkata and nearby districts. They were then aged between 35 and 78 years and were from a wide caste range: the three traditional upper castes of Brahmins, Kaysthas Baidyas; dalit castes of Namasudra, Paundra, Rajbanshi, Dhoba; Barujibi, Goala, Jogi who are categorised as Other Backward Classes (OBC) and a few who came under the 'General' category but lay between the upper and OBC sections of the population in terms of caste status and prestige. Random and snowball sampling methods were used for selecting participants for the study. Most of the sample was arrived at through random sampling through records maintained by the universities, colleges and schools and also at different meetings or seminars I attended. A substantial section of the Dalit participants was also sampled from the records maintained by Dalit organisations or from the list of participants in meetings and seminars organised by these organisations. However, the older generation of the participants who were then retired were mostly sampled through the snowballing method.

Commission[2] recommendations and the upper caste agitations against them in 1990 could be seen as the first public appearance of caste in post-independence India. So perhaps, I thought that may account for less embarrassment on the part of the younger generation around speaking about caste. Further fieldwork was to problematise this assumed shyness around caste derived via Chatterjee (2016), as a casteist position in itself. Indeed such an assumption helps in perpetuating the myth of a casteless Bengali society despite evidence to the contrary. Such a position undermines the significance caste holds in Bengali society and may even lead Bengali upper-castes into self-delusion and aid in the reproduction of caste. It therefore may be related to a 'politics of ignorance' or, drawing from Mills' Racial Contract (1997), with an 'epistemology of ignorance': "…*an epistemology of ignorance, a particular pattern of localized and global cognitive dysfunctions (which are psychologically and so cially functional), producing the ironic outcome that whites will in general be unable to understand the world they themselves have made*" (Mills, 1997: 18). Although the context for Mills is the USA it is also helpful for understanding the continued reproduction of caste in India.

Education was not a sphere that was open to marginalised, in particular, "ex-untouchable" castes in Hindu society. Colonial rule beginning in Bengal had at least notionally opened up this area to those who could afford it. George Campbell's education policy (1871-74) and the reactions of the Bengali bhadralok[3] to it is symptomatic of the politics of repression that the middle class pursued to keep the marginalised castes in their place. Campbell attempted to introduce elementary education in the indigenous language of the province by diverting a part of the funds for higher education. It was met with fierce opposition from the middle classes (Bhattacharya, T 2005, Mandal, A 1975). Writing on modern education, the Brahman Samaj (1916) argued that the problem with it was that it made education a common property instead of hierarchising access to it in terms of the needs of each caste and this had unnecessarily provoked the marginalised castes into seeking modern education. Attempts by marginalised castes to seek education and move into the modern secular professions was greatly derided by the bhadralok (Bhattacharya, T 2005). It was in this kind of a context that one of the largest Dalit castes the Namasudras under the leadership of Guruchand Thakur organised their movement for education for all untouchable castes at the beginning of the 20th century (Bandyopadhyay, S 2011, Bandyopadhyay, S 2015). The world of modern education and secular modern professions thus became a contested domain since the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Colonial Bengal from the late 19th century had seen strong and

[2] In 1990 the VP Singh government at the Centre decided to implement the Mandal Commission Report that since the late 1970s was kept on the back burner. Briefly, the Report upheld the policy of reservations and recommended 27% reservation for the Other Backward Classes category. The upper castes euphemistically called the General category (see Deshpande:2013) reacted with alarm at the possibility of more than 50% of reservation. The Supreme Court placed a cap of 49.5% for reservations. The upper caste agitations against the Mandal Commission then (and later in 2013 for the expansion of reserved category seats in institutes of higher education along with a concurrent expansion of the General category seats) were full of caste symbols.

[3] Genteel cultivated folk often translated as the Bengali middle class.

vibrant forms of Dalit assertions and movements that had kept the upper caste Bengali Hindu bhadralok struggling to maintain its dominance[4]. The social reform movements around caste, the large-scale attempts at building Hindu unity through sangathan politics of Hindu Mahasabha and Bharat Sevashram Sangha, and finally the Partition of 1947[5] all go on to show the severe challenges upper caste dominance faced in late 19th and 20th century colonial Bengal (Bandyopadhyay, S 2011, Bandyopadhyay, S 2015, Chatterji, J 1994, Sen, D 2012).

Post-Partition caste seemed to have 'disappeared' from the landscape of West Bengal. Several explanations have been provided by social scientists for this 'disappearance'[6]. I am not going into the details of these explanations here. I only want to point out that through the Partition and a discriminatory refugee rehabilitation policy pursued by the state, the upper caste refugees who, through their formidable networks, had easier access to the city and the corridors of power could settle themselves mostly in Kolkata and its surrounding areas. The marginalised caste/Dalit refugees, who arrived in large numbers but later had to rehabilitate themselves in the more interior and remote regions often displacing the local Muslim population there. State government's refugee camps were teeming with such refugees (Bandyopadhyay, S 2016, Ganguly, I 1997, Sen 2013). In particular Kolkata, where upper castes were rehabilitated, remained mostly out of bounds for Dalit refugees (Bandyopadhyay, S 2016, Sen, U 2013). The city seemed to be a 'casteless' landscape. In such a context educational institutions were seen to be naturally a place for upper castes to inhabit. Dalits or marginalised castes could only seek entry into these institutions by either passing as upper caste or making a forcible entry through 'reservation'. The narratives I present here bring to light how caste lives its existence in these places in Kolkata and its surrounding areas. This paper is based on the narratives of three Dalit teachers from my primary sample and their next generations.

The marked and the unmarked

As we shall see through the following narratives the central arguments of upper castes against 'caste' were pitched in terms of merit and equality of opportunity. Reservations or compensatory discrimination (Subramanian 2015) were seen by them as *the* tool with which merit was slowly being killed. Deshpande (2013), Bandyopadhyay (2015), Subramanian (2015) have argued that traditional caste capital was with colonial rule converted into modern day merit. Subramanian (2015, 2019) through her study of the IITs points out that analysing claims to merit through both the transformation of privilege into

[4] The contests indeed involved questions of access to resources: education, modern professions, land rights, removal of caste disabilities, and political representation. The nature of the marginalised caste challenges was clearly anti-Brahmanical. They also threatened to separate from Hindu society and pursue a separatist politics. In undivided Bengal under colonial rule these assertions had significantly undermined upper caste dominance. See Bandyopadhyay (2015) for a detailed account.

[5] Dwaipayan Sen (2012) calls the Partition as the nationalist resolution of the caste question

[6] See Sen (2012), Chatterji (2016), Bandyopadhyay and Basu Ray Chaudhuri (2023).

merit and through responses to subaltern assertions[7] *'allows us to see the contextual specificity of claims to merit: at one moment they may be articulated through the disavowal of caste, at another through caste affiliation… The claim to merit is presumed to be a disclaimer of social embeddedness. Far from the progressive erasure of ascribed identities in favor of putatively universal ones, what we are witnessing today is the re-articulation of caste as an explicit basis for merit.'* (2015, 293-294). As Subramanian (2015) shows in her study and as we have seen through our own experiences in educational institutions, the 'general category' list for admissions is often termed as 'merit list'. Such admissions are seen as merit-based ones. *'The semantic equivalence between the general, the casteless, and the meritorious reinforces the idea that those who fall within the general category do so, not on the basis of accumulated caste privilege, but by dint of their own merit. By definition, then, those who fall within the "reserved category" do so by virtue of their caste'* (ibid.). Such a categorical distinction has thus allowed the members of the privileged castes as the merit-based general category to claim universal, unmarked status and reject any notions of them being, in large measure, products of historically constituted privileges (ibid.).

West Bengal was a state where violations of statutory provisions for reservations for persons belonging to Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes was so high that only in 1976 the state government passed the West Bengal Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Reservation of Vacancies in Services and Posts) Bill, 1976 (WBLAP). During the debates in the West Bengal Legislative Assembly in 1976 over this Bill and West Bengal Scheduled Castes Development and Finance Corporation Bill, 1976 the CPI MLA Harasankar Bhattacharya pointed out that they welcomed them not because they had changed their position on primordial identities but because these *"Scheduled Castes formed part of the very poor productive class of Indian society…. It is necessary to still state one important point in this context. Among these Scheduled Castes the majority are landless labourers, but there are such landless labourers among the upper castes also. We must bear this in mind that when we think only of Scheduled Castes and establish such a corporation for them, we are leaving out the lower middle class, the landless, and the property-less among the upper caste"* (Assembly Proceedings, March, 1976). We see that through the term 'poor productive class' the illegitimacy of caste was reinvoked against the question of the supposedly more universal and legitimate category of class.

Although passed and turned into an Act in 1976, the proper implementation of the Reservations Act through the maintenance of a roster took several more years to start. However, this violation allowed Dalits with appropriate credentials to enter these places unmarked which otherwise were forbidden for them. Pradip Biswas (72 years old in 2012) was a refugee from East Pakistan who had first class Bachelors and Master's degrees in Physics. Pradip's younger uncle came over in 1950 and was able to buy a house in a border

[7] For colonial Bengal see Bandyopadhyay (2015).

district. To ensure Pradip could complete his education his parents and elder uncle sent him to live with his younger uncle in 1954. He enrolled in Class V in the district government sponsored school and received a stipend for Scheduled Caste students that allowed Pradip to continue his studies without too much of a problem. By the time of his graduation he was well-versed in Bangla and Marxist literature which immediately brought him close to several intellectual circles. The ties of friendship formed here were with upper castes as these circles were predominantly upper caste. In any case *"caste did not matter here"* as Pradip would recount. However, Pradip was soon to become a little disappointed: *"my friends had read Marx, Lenin, but they failed to acknowledge the role of caste. I initially had raised it but was dismissed right away. Caste was something that could not be brought up here to better understand Marx and Lenin in our context"*.

Pradip learnt of a teaching vacancy in a reputed college in Kolkata from one of his friends, a Brahmin by caste whose father was associated with the CPI(M). Pradip went with his friend; he was introduced to the principal who in turn asked Pradip to take a lecture class for Physics Honours students in their first year of their undergraduate programme. The principal, also a Brahmin by caste and a refugee, noted how Pradip was teaching and after the class was over he offered Pradip the post of lecturer in Physics. That was in 1968.

Pradip's caste never figured till about the 1980s, when he started insisting on the maintenance of staff recruitment and student admission rosters. The West Bengal Reservations Act, 1976, only started getting implemented from the 1980s and his colleagues were baffled by the zeal with which Pradip went about ensuring creation of such rosters and asked why he was interested in matters that were of benefit to Scheduled Castes.

Pradip pointed out that he was a Namasudra, a Scheduled Caste himself. His statement evoked mixed reactions from his upper caste colleagues. While all his colleagues were stunned with this revelation, some shook it off as a joke on Pradip's part, marvelling at his sense of humour, some challenged him for hiding his identity for so long. While the first reaction denied Pradip his personhood, the second one directly accused him of trespass. However, these reactions also pointed to a major success: Pradip had successfully passed off, *until then*, as a bhadralok middle class person. This very passing off, I sensed from his narrative, has reinforced his marginality as if this was telling him he otherwise could not have belonged to the middle class.

Why was it expected that Pradip should have stated his caste to his colleagues when he had joined the institution? Pradip's counter question as to why, despite having a proven track record of academic excellence, he was being challenged around his caste identity was not answered but it is probably not difficult to know the answer. It is the doxa, the common sense (Bourdieu, P 2002): the unquestioned, taken-for granted belief that it is the bhadralok, as individuals from that unmarked category, who could be in these institutions; however, as we know from the literature on the bhadralok, upper casteness was a central aspect of the status category of the bhadralok (Mukherjee, S.N,

1970, 1975, Sarkar, S 2004, Sarma, J 1982). Pradip refused to be identified only or primarily in terms of his caste especially since his upper caste colleagues appeared as 'casteless' and possessing nothing other than 'merit'. His refusal made Pradip appear as a 'trespasser' to his once-friendly and welcoming upper caste colleagues, Pradip's presence in such an institution and his claims on his caste identity also brought to the fore the deep-seated presence of caste. It is in these moments that the absent-presence of caste moves to its full-blown presence. The discomfort around talking about caste on the part of the middle-class/bhadralok is also largely about keeping its privileges invisible and uncontested. Further Pradip's experience points to another aspect of teacher recruitment: familiarity helped in forging networks for dissemination of information and recommendation, and caste was a critical source of such familiarity and network-building. Pradip had all the qualities that the dominant common sense associated with being upper caste. The circles Pradip belonged to and the networks he forged, were to an appreciable extent, based on the assumption that he was upper caste.

Our history, particularly post-Partition, had contributed to the emergence of this taken-for-granted beliefs and practices that make social structures and unequal arrangements around caste appear natural and therefore legitimate. Free of challenges from outside, it makes upper caste belonging to these places natural. In that context Pradip's declaration of his caste some 15 years after he joined the college seemed shocking to his upper caste colleagues. Further, it seemed as an encroachment on upper caste territory. Turning to history we see that in Bengal by the early 19th century, an increasing economic crisis made salaried job the best possible respectable way for livelihood for upper castes. One of the key markers of bhadralok identity was their dissociation from manual labour. Education was then seen as the best form of private property one could possess without risking the negative aspects associated with ownership of private forms of property (Bhattacharya, T 2005, Sarkar, S 1997). This property was sought to be closely and zealously guarded by the upper caste bhadralok from encroachment by others – those *"found to be wanting in money and position, were lacking in education, and were of low caste ranks"* (Sarma, J 1980:102). The middle class feared that education would be the first step towards the erasing of distinctions between the upper caste bhadralok and the chotolok (Bhattacharya, T 2005, Sarkar, S 1997). The bhadralok was apprehensive that with education the chotolok would leave behind their traditional manual occupations and compete with the bhadralok for salaried jobs. The bhadralok dreaded that this competition may push them out of the secular non-manual occupations (ibid.). Such worries of being pushed out of respectable occupations marked upper caste agitations against Mandal Commission and the policy of reservations (Rege, S 2006).

Caste contestations and the emerging presence of a Dalit middle class in colonial Bengal had considerably undermined the dominance of the Hindu upper caste bhadralok: it was particularly evident in the political domains. This however, did not lead to in Bengal what Fuller (1999) notes as having happened for Tamil Nadu: the dissociation of Brahmanical cultural values

from the Brahmin caste and their availability as universal values for all Tamils. The real possibilities of disjunction between caste status, class position and political power was cut short by the Partition of the Bengal Province in 1947. Since then, West Bengal had witnessed a large-scale re-securing of bhadralok domination in all spheres. Caste domination took a new turn through the emergent Hindu-refugee identity, discriminatory refugee rehabilitation policy and later through class politics that was again conceptualised and led by the middle-class/bhadralok. Consequently, the process of a certain amount of dis-empowerment that Fuller (1999) identifies as having contributed to the dissociation of Brahminical values from the Brahmins could not develop here. It was in this context of a recalibrated bhadralok dominance that the question of merit played a crucial role. Reservations was seen as undermining merit, the Constitutional promise of equality and therefore as an aberration that needed to be done away with.

Hence in the case of Bengal these upper caste cultural values buttressed by renewed political and economic dominance have not been dissociated from bhadralok/middle class ones. The aspiration to internalise these values as non-Brahmanical/universal by the marginalised castes is not simply available to them. Any attempt at these by Dalits could then be seen as a potential form of trespass as Pradip's narrative shows. To repeat, Pradip did not enter the profession through reservations. In terms of degrees, cultural cultivation, demeanour and mannerisms he was indistinguishable from the upper caste middle class/bhadralok. Yet he came to be identified and treated by the bhadralok centrally, in terms of the supposedly pre-modern identity, that of caste, while the upper caste bhadralok as the 'bearers' of merit, modernity and secularism could remain outside of such regressive identities. In other words, it is the marginalised who gets marked for their alleged inability to escape or go beyond such pre-modern identities: they seem to be immutably trapped in these identities. Such an understanding has been much more sharply experienced by Dalit college teachers who joined between 2006 and 2009 which I will take up later in this section.

Krishnendu Baity, Scheduled Caste, had joined as Assistant Teacher of English in a government sponsored Higher Secondary school in north Kolkata in 1998. Till then there was only one teacher of English in the secondary and higher secondary sections. Being a school where mostly first-generation learners enrolled, the success rate in English was low. Krishnendu's teaching in the first three years helped the school record a very low rate of failures in English which in turn pulled up the success rates of students passing the Madhyamik (Secondary) and Higher Secondary examinations. From Krishnendu's narrative (and my own observations over several long visits to the school) we learn that he was a popular teacher among his students and also among most of his colleagues. While one could sense notes of rivalry or jealousy those emerged out of his relatively better success rather than for his caste. Indeed, it appeared his caste was not a matter of concern. But all these suddenly changed when the time to appoint an Acting Head Master came. The appointment of the Acting Head Master was a routine affair in a government

aided school after the retirement of the Head Master. The School Service Commission usually took several months to appoint a Head Master. Till then a 'competent' teacher from the school was chosen by the teachers' council to serve as Acting Head Master. When Krishnendu's name was proposed by the Principal, a couple of senior teachers and the Head Clerk the reactions to this proposal were vitriolic. These reactions showed that Krishnendu seemed to embody only one identity, he was Scheduled Caste. He noted: *"after much controversy, a lot of which was plainly in bad taste, the senior most teacher a Brahmin was appointed as Acting Head Master although he did not fulfil even a single criterion necessary to become an Acting Head Master"*. All boundaries seem to have been transgressed by this proposal of placing a Scheduled Caste at the topmost position in the school. It seemed to have placed the bhadralok and the chotolok on the same plane. In 2024 I learnt that this Acting Head Master was finally selected by the Commission for the post of Head Master of the school.

Krishnendu belonged to a marginal landholding Namasudra family of a village in Burdwan district. He was known there as a studious, good-natured boy. His first introduction to caste happened at an early age when his friend's grandfather passed away and he was invited to the shraddha ritual on the 10th day from his death. When he went there with a garland, incense sticks and a box of sweets, they were taken from him by one of the relatives there and kept aside. Krishnendu noted that those items brought by others were placed in front of the large framed photograph of his friend's late grandfather. That was when he learnt he was very different from his friends: he was "lower" than his friends were, for he was a Namasudra. *"My friend felt sad but that did not affect our friendship in the village"* Krishnendu stated. The early death of his father forced Krishnendu's mother to take up a job in a small factory in the town. The earnings were meagre but both Krishnendu and his sister managed to complete school.

When Krishnendu came to Kolkata in the 1990s to study in a college for an Honours degree in English, he had very little money with him and most of it was spent for his admission and for lodging in a boarding house near the railway station. With the help of other boarders and classmates he started giving tuitions and was earning enough to carry on with his studies in the city. Krishnendu learnt from the Head of his Department that there was a monthly government stipend for poor Scheduled Caste students of the college. While he had his caste certificate with him, his higher secondary marks helped him secure a seat in the General category in this college. So he did not produce his caste certificate. His percentage of marks made him appear as upper caste to the staff dealing with admissions in the college. Somewhere his old caste experience advised him not to mention his caste especially since he was not seeking entry under the reserved category. His friends were all upper caste, or if there were any like him at least that was not known. Out of anxieties Krishnendu did not apply for the stipend. *"I perhaps did not want to lose my friends; they were really good. I don't actually know. I did not want to feel humiliated. I continued with giving tuitions to a few more students. I managed*

and passed with a high second class. I completed my B.Ed. and got this job under the first School Service Commission (SSC) in 1998 in the General category. So, you see I got the job like others did in this panel." Despite his achievements, it was finally his caste identity that became central in his workplace and remains so even now, although in a more muted manner.

It was a similar fear of losing friends, of becoming an object of unsavoury discussions, of feeling humiliated that Pradip began avoiding as much as he could his college principal's company soon after his recruitment as a lecturer. The principal had a young niece and wanted Pradip to marry her. Pradip felt if he had agreed to the proposal his caste was bound to have been revealed. He did not know exactly what could have happened but he felt it might turn out to be embarrassing for both himself and his college principal. Inter-caste marriages between Brahmin brides and Scheduled Caste grooms were rarely heard of in the Bengal of the 1960s. It was the very nature of groups he was part of, the people he was friends with, his colleagues, the content of discussions and a general sense of dismissal of any caste-related issue, that provided him with a common sense, the 'stock of knowledge' to take help of Alfred Schutz's conceptualisation. Pradip understood caste prejudice was a part and parcel of what he was part of. Pradip, like Krishnendu, could never fully belong to these places.

A few years before his retirement Pradip began teaching in one of the Left parties' schools for cadres. He soon became popular for his expositions on caste and class, especially because the cadres from the 'lower' castes could identify with his lectures. He had also around that time written a tract on the Communist Party programme on revolution in India. There he critiqued the Communist Party stance of treating caste as merely superstructural. His family in eastern Bengal had owned land on which sharecroppers were employed. He learnt from his family elders that during the Tebhaga[8] movement many of the Namasudra sharecroppers agreed to taking less than two-thirds share while this was not the case in many other regions of Bengal. A shared caste identity of both the landowners and sharecroppers, Pradip concluded, inhibited the formation of class consciousness. He came to the conclusion that while caste contributed significantly to the structuring of production relations caste identification may also act as impediments in a struggle for equality and democracy.

Pradip's book, once sold by the Party's well-known publication agency, has been withdrawn from their shelf. In some senses he was wary of caste. But he had been part of caste organisations of Bengali Dalit refugees that sought to deal with the major rehabilitation and citizenship issues Dalit refugees faced and to ensure that the reservations policy was followed. Pradip was finally taken off from these Party schools on different pretexts: his age, the distance between his house and the school, problems with timings, none of which

[8] A massive movement of sharecroppers led by the CPI in the 1940s that demanded two-thirds of the share of the produce in the place of the existing one-third or half.

Pradip believed was a real problem that could compromise his commitment or the quality of his lectures.

Lata Biswas[9] like most of the marginalised caste participants asserted that she did not face caste in her village in Nadia district. Nadia is one of the Namasudra majority districts where the refugees from East Pakistan/Bangladesh form the bulk of the population. The upper caste Hindu households were much less in number in Lata's village. Lata's parents migrated to Nadia from East Pakistan in the 1950s. She and her elder brother were born in this district. Lata passed her bachelor's and master's degrees in Bangla literature in the first division, completed her B.Ed. and joined a school as a teacher in 1992. The school was located in an interior village of Burdwan district. Lata was the only Dalit teacher there. Her first day in school was uneventful. From the second day however, she was referred to as 'schedule' and soon her chair was taken away and she was asked to sit on the floor. Lata faced other forms of discrimination that clearly told her that she did not belong to a middle-class space like this school. Lata faced discrimination not only from upper caste colleagues but also colleagues and administrators from middle ranking dominant castes[10]. Considered ritually less impure than the Dalit castes, they could claim their higher status by distancing themselves from their impure other, the Dalits and by aligning with upper castes. Some of these castes have later been incorporated under the OBC category.

What led to such animosity toward Lata? Middle class/bhadralok society has a certain imagery about its 'other' the 'lowly' people or the chhotolok. They are seen as uneducated, lacking in culture, consciousness and agency, as docile and in perpetual need of enlightened bhadralok assistance. Lata disrupted this imagery. She was a good teacher, was assertive and could argue well without losing her temper. Lata thus posed a danger: she was the liminal figure that threatened to disrupt boundaries between the bhadralok and the chhotolok and the assertion of middle classness by the local bhadralok and clean caste/jalchal teachers in the school. In an interior village school, the need for policing and reproducing the boundaries of middle classness was felt more by these teachers who formed a small segment of the local population. Lata was therefore an anomaly: she did not exhibit 'feminine' qualities, or those of her 'caste'. She seemed to have trespassed into forbidden territory.

Through school to the university Lata seemed to have been shielded by her grades: she never needed to use her caste certificate. This allowed her to glide through these institutions. But in this workspace despite her grades Lata was taken in not as a General Category candidate but in the reserved category.

[9] The section on the experience of Lata Biswas is largely drawn from my previous article (2016a) article published in openDemocracy (21st April 2016), www.opendemocracy.net

[10] Srinivas' concept of dominant caste (1959) is applicable to them. In Bengali Hindu society they are referred to as jalchal castes i.e. castes from whom Brahmins are allowed to accept water. It is this jalchal-ajalchal divide that has been the most important basis of the caste system in Bengal (Sanyal, H 1981).

When Lata left the school and joined a college[11] on the outskirts of Kolkata in 2006 her problems compounded.

Lata was one of the 300 reserved category candidates recruited between 2006 and 2009. This was a special drive recruitment which was in turn a result of the large-scale agitation led by a Dalit organisation Dalit Samanvyay Samiti (henceforth Samiti). This organization was close to the ruling Left Front. In 2005 the Samiti led a state-wide agitation against the systematic denial of posts to reserved category candidates. It demanded the filling-up of reserved posts for college and university lecturers through special recruitment drives. According to the Samiti[12], collecting data on vacant reserved posts was a hard task because data was not properly maintained by neither the Government department of Higher Education nor by the College and Public Service Commissions. The Samiti arrived at a figure of a minimum of 900 such posts that were kept vacant as in the beginning of 2005. The total number of reserved category candidates was 450. Between 2006 and 2009 some 300 reserved category candidates were recruited in colleges across West Bengal through special recruitment drives. This sudden recruitment of such a large number of reserved category candidates within such a short period of time heightened the anxiety of the upper caste middle class. Earlier, subversion of the Reservation Act had led to a diminishing visibility of reserved category candidates thereby reproducing the bhadralok common sense of upper castes being the bearers of merit and educational spaces as legitimately upper caste ones. Now this special drive seemed to lead to a sense of being "under siege"[13] from the reserved category candidates. It was as if they had gate crashed into these spaces and "polluting them with their lowly caste politics". The Bengali middle class "once revered as the amongst the most enlightened" ones have "now degenerated, only because of this politics".[14]

Lata was subject to rude behaviour from the new college principal, Brahmin by caste, and most of her high caste colleagues. After she received her doctoral degree neither the prefix 'Dr.' nor her PhD degree was added to her name in the college calendar/diary as had been the case with her high caste colleagues. This was despite several reminders on the part of Lata. During her last reminder an angry principal blurted out in a demeaning way *"your PhD has the same value as you"*. This comment may be placed in its wider context. In many instances I have come across upper caste teachers lamenting the loss of value education and qualifications such as a doctoral degree once held. Indeed, for them the decline of the middle class as the moral class and as the moral standard for society saw a sharp decline with the entry in large numbers of reserved category persons in this class.

When Lata threatened to bring in charges against the Principal under the Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe (Prevention of) Atrocities Act 1989,

[11] Recruited through the special recruitment drive of the College Service Commission.
[12] Interview with Nitish Biswas founder president of the Samiti on 16th June 2013, Kolkata.
[13] A common theme for upper caste participants.
[14] These two were a common recurrent discussion brought in by upper caste respondents save one.

Lata stated *"the college forced some of my students, including some Scheduled Caste students, to write a letter to the Principal against me complaining of my lack of knowledge, my lack of impartiality and my sub-standard lectures. After I stood my ground some of my colleagues told me not to take action against the principal as I stayed alone with my daughter. My husband had a transferable job. Then after several months two of those students, one SC and another upper caste, who wrote that letter came to be, apologised and told me about how they were forced to write the letter. I have forgiven them. It has been another one of those struggles for being SC".*

While caste cannot be articulated in the workplace it is nonetheless incessantly expressed and sometimes in conjunction with other hierarchies. Here the high castes categorised as the General Category claim that they are uncasted whereas the Scheduled Castes who come in through a different category of caste do not have access to such privileged forms of denial. They are seen as permanently casted. Therefore, not only Lata, but Pradip and Krishnendu also were not a person, they were only a caste, marked and categorised as the 'other' of the meritorious upper caste 'self', as inferior and inadequate to the 'unmarked', 'universal', 'general category'.

The workplace was a middle-class space whose boundaries seem to have been transgressed by Pradip, Krishnendu, Lata. Historically such spaces were almost beyond the reach of non-bhadralok Hindus. In order to become a bhadralok, what was required was access to caste capital[15]. Using Bourdieu's complex of economic, cultural and symbolic capital (Bourdieu, P 1986) I argue that such forms of capital in India were circumscribed by caste and which from colonial rule onward functioned and was misrecognised as modern forms of capital deployed by the middle class for the furthering of its interests. Caste capital is a strong determinant in the reproduction of inequalities.

Later Generation(s): Reproduction or transformation of caste?

Revisiting Pradip in 2024, at 84 years he feels cut-off from caste organisations he was part of. He came to the understanding that these organisations had nothing to offer other than *"only regressive identity politics, and no good can ever come out of such politics"*. He is also largely cut-off from the Party save

[15] First conceptualised in April/May 2013 in a paper draft for the Oslo Workshop and cited in several publications I recently developed on the initial formulations for a journal article. Briefly caste capital is as follows: Upper castes were quickly able to convert themselves into the colonial middle classes (or the bhadralok) with the beginnings of colonial rule in Bengal (Ghosh 2001). The conversion, quick and secure, of 'upper' castes into the middle classes in early colonial India was made possible by the cultural, social, economic and political resources they enjoyed from pre-colonial times. These kinds of resources themselves were products of the caste system which I refer to as 'caste capital'. Cultural and social capital in the Indian context give the impression that they can be achieved by any group through an interplay of allegedly non-caste factors such as a modern education, diligence, modern profession, mobility etc. Right from the colonial period as already discussed in the introductory section of the paper, the colonial bhadralok/upper caste middle class tried to maintain property-like boundaries around modern education that was the gateway to the modern professions. Deploying the modern language of class and secular identities this middle class used various ways to prevent dissemination of these forms of cultural and social capital to the marginalized/Dalit castes (Bandyopadhyay, S 2025).

a couple of old colleagues and the editorial collective of a Bengali periodical he contributes to. A Dalit publication house still publishes his books.

Pradip's daughter Jayanti, 45 years old in 2024, studied in a Bengali medium school. Pradip associated his decision for opting for a state-sponsored Bengali medium school with his communist ideology[16]. While Jayanti was studying in Class XII, the headmaster of the school advised Pradip to apply for a Scheduled Caste certificate. Otherwise, he was told it could amount to suppression of information[17]. Pradip had his caste certificate that helped him financially while he was completing his secondary school. For his intermediate studies he came to Kolkata and enrolled in a reputed college. Since he was among the district toppers, he was given free boarding in a Students' Home in Kolkata run by a Hindu religious organisation. However, he had to give up his stipend to the Students' Home administration although non-Scheduled Caste students did not have to pay anything there. On 26th January 1960 at the Home's Republic Day celebrations Pradip denounced the way the celebrations were turned into a religious event in a secular republic and had to pay a price for that. Pradip passed his Intermediate in Science in the first division. However, his application to stay at the Students' Home for his graduation was turned down with the comment that he *"did not fit into the Mission's ideals"*. He was no longer receiving the government stipend since the Mission authorities refused to give him his caste papers back when he was asked to leave the Home. Since then, he never applied for the certificate. *"I was a self-made man, my connections helped but that help came because of what I possessed, knowledge and culture. I never came across as a peasant (chasa). This was important even for communist circles. Now you know why we can never have a revolution in this country… My knowledge, my argumentative habit and physical features all helped. I did not want my daughter to be dependent on reservations, she should be able to stand on her own feet, not on a crutch".*

This certificate, however, impacted Jayanti, since then on, her friends and even teachers appeared to believe that Jayanti had an undue advantage over them. Jayanti qualified as part of the General category for her undergraduate and B.Ed. degrees but for the Master's degree she had used her caste certificate for admission. *"I secured a little less than the General category cut-off, but I completed my Master's degree with first class marks. Still, when I was recruited under the SSC, I was placed in the reserved category."* Her husband is a doctor in a government hospital and both of them decided that for their daughter (i.e. Pradip's grand-daughter) Nandini, they would not apply for a caste certificate. They believe that such a decision could save Nandini from going through a bad experience.

[16] For reasons of space I am not going into the details here.

[17] Several of Dalit participants stated this: they did not want benefits of reservations for their children for that would be unfair against other needy members of the community. But they had to finally get the caste certificates because legal interpretations varied and they did not want to hide their caste identity.

Jayanti enjoyed teaching there but felt that her colleagues could not interact freely with her, and she also felt the need to limit her interactions with them. Occasionally while criticising the policy of reservations, her colleagues would become mindful of Jayanti's presence, *"and I did not understand that. I got higher marks in my Masters than even some of the General category teachers. When they talk against Muslims they don't hide their views, but that changes when they talk against caste reservations"*. Did her colleagues suddenly remember she was Scheduled Caste? Or was it their civility (*bhadrata*) that forced them to put a leash on their criticisms? Or was it Jayanti's academic profile that sort of set her apart as 'exceptional'? Whatever be the reason, it reproduces the sense of ownership among upper castes in these institutions. Did Jayanti's presence disrupt the smooth and unacknowledged reproduction of caste capital and casted spaces? Did it force her colleagues to confront their own castedness? Just like her father Pradip disrupted caste reproduction in these middle-class spaces of his time by making public his caste, Jayanti too unsettled the dominant commonsense through her presence.

Nandini is 17 years old and studying in Class XII in the Science stream in one of the reputed private English medium schools in Kolkata. As a doctor her father was able to build up social capital through networks of marginalised caste and a couple of like-minded upper caste colleagues. Jayanti's much smaller network consisted of upper caste colleagues from her school and old friends, who found Jayanti, although an 'SC', to be a good teacher whose demeanour and knowledge was close to their own. Jayanti appeared to be almost like them. These networks helped Jayanti and her husband to get important information about potential schools and how to prepare themselves for interviews for admission to selected schools.

Nandini is unaware of her caste identity. When her parents were discussing if they should still get a caste certificate for her, Nandini rebelled against the idea claiming *"she was not SC"*. Indeed, she believed she *"neither looked like them, nor behaved like them"*. When I asked her what she thought an SC was like without any hesitation she stated *"they look ugly, very dark, they are very loud, often uncouth in their behaviour, and are always demanding more and more even if they do not have the necessary merit"*. Her grandfather, Pradip, mildly laughed and interjected *"you have no idea about SCs. Many SCs I know will never fit your description of them"*. Nandini did not seem to be affected by her grandfather's comment. She heard her classmates discuss their future options in situations where *"reservations will not allow them a fair competition"*, she read in newspapers the problems with reservations, *"it is unethical, unfair, you cannot let merit be less important than caste or politics"*. Pradip and Jayanti remained silent. These I found to be ironical especially since it was coming from a young girl whose mother and grandfather were denied their personhood by the very dominant idea of merit Nandini was upholding. This silence on the part of Jayanti and Pradip has possibilities of contributing to the reproduction of caste capital and inhibiting its transformation into a more open form of capital.

In contrast to Nandini, Lata's daughter Ragini, aged 29 years in 2024, who is now an Assistant Professor of English in a district college, has been assertive about her caste identity. Biswas is a surname that upper castes as well Dalits may have. Being a rank holder in school and having graduated in the first class Ragini changed her surname to Mondol while she was studying for her Master's degree. Mondol is a readily recognisable marginalised caste surname. Ragini stated *"I have nothing to hide. In fact, I never liked when classmates and teachers in school thought I was upper caste. I had to clarify myself and well then obviously things weren't so sweet, you know. Somewhere my grades and my caste did not match"*. She has had an upbringing where she learnt about *"the glorious history of the Namasudras, and Brahmanical cunning against us"* and believed in asserting her caste identity even if it was a stigmatised one. Ragini's comment brings to my mind the reaction her mother, Lata, faced from the Principal of her college with regard to her PhD degree, that her degree had as much value as her caste. This 'mismatch' between her grades and her caste that Ragini referred to is what captures the critical aspect of caste capital. It is not merely cultural and social capital that given certain conditions could be accessed by the castes hitherto excluded from such forms of capital. The very access or denial and forms and extent of this capital's dissemination have been historically conditioned by caste. Even when necessary and sufficient conditions are materialised the dissemination of these forms of capital to marginalised castes is seen to be a product of 'reverse discrimination' or 'reverse casteism'. Such dissemination indeed, from an upper caste perspective, undermines the moral worth of this capital.

Ragini's experience has been mixed. Her closest friends are upper castes, a colleague who defended her rights against the administration in her workplace is a Brahmin. She pointed out that the Secretary of their Teacher's Council was from the OBC category and that she faced discrimination there from the OBC administrators and colleagues. Such an experience that Ragini had, emerges out of the reproductive logic of caste. The rivalries among marginalised castes have been an historical fact like those among the upper castes. However, because of lack of access to caste capital these internal rivalries disadvantaged the marginalised castes to a much greater extent than they did the upper castes. This extension of help by Brahmins to Dalits that Ragini talked of may point towards possibilities of transformations of caste relations but it may be too early to argue for such a case. In my earlier study I did come across such examples of help being extended. But those had two distinct aspects, both equally dominant: one was the help extended by the sympathisers of Hindutva politics, where they expected marginalised caste/Dalit support for their politics; the other was bhadralok 'magnanimity'. Claims to enlightenment and compassion call upon the bhadralok to extend help to the 'deserving'. Such help as extended to the Dalit participants in my earlier study showed a curious characteristic. So long as those who received help remained under the tutelage of the bhadralok, under their wings, so to say, they had a relatively smooth time. Whenever they attempted to come out of the shadows of their benefactors they lost that patronage and their experiences often turned bitter.

Krishnendu's daughter Ronjini cleared NEET (Medical) in 2023 and was eligible for seeking admission in one of the reputed private medical colleges in south Kolkata approved by the state government. But she wants to reappear for NEET as she aspires to study in a government-run medical college. Therefore, in order to keep her chances, open, like many other students, she has taken admission in an undergraduate Honours course in Microbiology. Ronjini, like Ragini and Nandini studied in a reputed English medium private school. Unlike their parents or their grandparents all three of these participants could afford access to well-known private schools. This shift to private English-medium schools is an important marker of mobility. There's a growing belief that private schools offer not only good networking possibilities for the future but also the quality of education offered there is much better than the ones offered in government-sponsored ones. Since private schools are not required to follow the statutory reservation policy[18] a certain degree of class compatibility ensues among students. But if Scheduled Caste students were to perform badly in studies, my data show, they would be pulled up for their innate lack of merit, for their caste identity and for their lack of effort. For upper caste students, bad performance was usually attributed to spending too much time on frivolous activities, fun, leisure, but never to their innate lack of merit. It seems even leisure and fun are out of bounds for marginalised castes. For Ronjini and Ragini, their grades were also like passports and visas without which they would have had a tough time in these spaces.

"I often heard from my friends, including my best friend, that it did not matter how much I scored, for my troubles would be taken care of by reservations. They were worried about their grades because they did not have this advantage" Ronjini noted.

Ragini too stated something similar *"I was asked what I will do with so much of marks, after all I had reservations, I did not need marks, not so much as upper castes do"*. Dominant common sense teaches that reservations compensate not only for lack of merit, but also for lack of initiative, effort and creativity. The access to reservations thus makes their entry suspect; their good grades are still derided. They are not legitimately part of the middle class. The underlying understanding of having trespassed into a forbidden domain persists. That a large part of what is constructed as 'merit' has been a function of caste capital, as a form of encashment of that capital or of interest drawn from that initial privilege remains fundamentally unrecognised. The fact remains that access to such capital is largely governed by caste. That is why Pradip, Krishnendu, Lata and their next generations could not legitimately claim middle class or bhadralok status for their caste had pre-determined to greater or lesser degrees their preclusion from a middle class-bhadralok identity.

[18] This is also seen as an important reason behind private English medium schools being accorded greater prestige in the dominant common sense. Thus school education significantly impacts the life chances of individuals.

Conclusion

This longitudinal study has drawn attention to the persistence of caste in Bengali middle-class spaces with specific focus on educational institutions such as schools and colleges. Caste capital and the dominant assumption it produced that middle-class institutions and professions were domains where upper castes naturally belonged placed marginalised castes outside the margins of these spaces. Education during the colonial era, in principle, became accessible to those who could afford it regardless of caste or religious origins. This allowed the upwardly mobile sections of marginalised castes to access modern education and secular professions. In the late 19th century anxieties around economic life and status security amid increasing onslaught of marginalised castes against upper caste domination together played a role in the upper caste attempts of preventing further access of marginalised castes in these fields. Control over caste capital facilitated these attempts at blocking the democratisation of these domains, and these attempts in turn also led to reproduction and entrenchment of caste capital within upper caste communities. Since the marginalised castes then could seek entry primarily on the basis of special policies and reform measures of the colonial state they came to be marked as 'inferor'.

Partition of 1947 heavily affected the possibilities of a renewed marginalised caste challenge to upper caste domination in the new West Bengal. Caste capital could be reproduced through relative ease under such conditions although within a few decades the state had to take measures against the systematic violation of statutory reservation principles. Indeed, as discussed earlier, the policies and process adopted by the state enabled the recalibration of caste-based dominance. Over time it brought forth backlash from the entrenched upper castes who had preponderant control over caste capital and middle-class institutions. However, increasing visibility of marginalised caste/Dalit individuals in these institutions as a result of organised Dalit agitations and state policies, as well as their own individual achievements, have among the upper castes, led to a reluctant acceptance of the possibilities of 'merit' being available among marginalised/Dalit castes. The inter-generational study demonstrates this to be the case for the later generations of my doctoral sample. But their 'merit' is also under constant and close surveillance. It also demonstrates the reproduction of caste in these spaces despite such acceptance. It is instructive here, to bring in what Pradip once told me. In the course of the interviews Pradip remarked that many from the labouring castes had to face insurmountable obstacles in their quest for education and modern professional employment and quite a few of them struggled successfully to overcome those impediments, but none of them despite their struggles and sacrifices for securing an education, would ever be compared to a Vidyasagar, the noted Bengali Brahmin social reformer and educationist. Vidyasagar is said to have studied under street lamps because his family was too poor to be able to provide him with a lamp at home for his studies. This comparison with Vidyasagar that Pradip made, I think, drives home this significant point of caste and its contestations with merit. For

'merit' is an attribute and a form of property that seems to 'naturally' belong to upper castes, so for these castes 'merit' is a taken for granted matter while for the marginalised castes it is constantly an aspect that has to be negotiated and proven over and over again. Merit among these castes is seen in terms of an exceptional aspect, which in turn reproduces the caste-based idea that in general the marginalised castes lack in merit while upper castes are naturally meritorious. While caste capital is fractured, it has not become open and accessible to others. In subtle ways the battle between the reproduction of caste capital and its transformation to a form of capital more democratic, more open to marginalised/Dalit castes continues; it is also a battle between claims to legitimate belonging and accusations of passing-trespassing.

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Article: Women's body and the politics of the *Meira Paibis* in Manipur

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Women's body and the politics of the *Meira Paibis* in Manipur

--Diana Naorem

Abstract

This paper seeks to understand the various ways in which women's bodies figure in the idioms and methods of protest the *Meira Paibis* adopt and argues that their movement is inherently targeted at preserving the notion of domesticity and the nation. The notion of ideal Manipuri (read Meitei) womanhood is resonated in their activities and engagements with various issues that capture their attention. Women's bodies continue to be conceived as national markers by their movement, which needs to be kept within prescribed norms and values.

Keywords: Meira Paibi, womanhood, domesticity, women's movement

Introduction

In July 2004, twelve women shed their clothes in front of the 12 Assam Rifles' Headquarters in Kangla, located at the heart of Imphal, in protest against what was largely condemned as the 'extra-judicial killing' of a thirty-two-year-old woman, —Thangjam Manorama. These twelve middle and old-aged women were members of women's organisations in Manipur, popularly known as *Meira Paibis*. They were seen holding a banner that read 'Indian Army Rape Us' and reportedly shook the gate of the Assam Rifles Headquarters calling out at them to take their flesh.

The term *Meira Paibi*, translated as 'women torch bearers' denotes a form of collective mobilisation of women in Manipur that emerged in 1980, against '*army gi meeyot-meenei, meehaat-meepun*' (torture, detention, killing of people by the Army). They emerged out of a political condition of conflict that created an uncertain and unsafe situation for all. They were women who took care of the household, but mostly older women who have attained the age of embodying traditional woman/motherly authority. The late 1970s and the 1980s saw certain patterns of 'coercion' in the state's counter-insurgency practices in Manipur. These included enforced disappearances of persons, unjustifiable wanton arrests and torture of masses, indiscriminate actions of firing and killing of civilians, and assault on women, etc. To keep a check on these activities of the state forces, these women started having processions at night holding *meiras* (bamboo torches), and patrolling every street, nook, and corners of their respective localities. They slowly emerged as a vigilante force, guarding their neighbourhood against any of the aforementioned indiscriminate actions of the military.

The *Meira Paibi* movement, which began as a response to state violence against civilians, has grown into a formidable institution, symbolising a political and social entity that not only deals with crucial issues of the collective, campaigns and fights for the removal of AFSPA, territorial integrity, and protection of indigenous people, etc. but also plays the role of a

cultural moral brigade and guardian of the social order. These women have transcended from being street protestors to a significant civil society constituency over the years, engaging with other civil society bodies and devising effective modes of protest.

This paper seeks to understand the various ways in which women's bodies figure in the idioms and methods of protest the *Meira Paibis* adopt in their movement and argue that their movement is inherently targeted at preserving the notion of domesticity and the nation. The notion of ideal Manipuri (read Meitei) womanhood is resonated in their activities and engagements with various issues that capture their attention. Women's bodies continue to be conceived as national markers by their movement, which needs to be kept within prescribed norms and values.

Suppressed bodies and suppressed nation

On 11 July 2004, Thangjam Manorama was arrested from her home at Bamon Kampu, Imphal East District by personnel of the 17th Assam Rifles stationed in Kangla, Imphal (Manipur: Perils of War and Womanhood, April 28, 2013). A couple of hours later, her bullet-ridden body was reportedly found in a field near Ngariyan Maring, about four kilometres from her house. Her *phanek* (traditional wrap-around) had semen stains, according to the report from the Central Forensic Science Laboratory, and her body showed signs of torture, including gunshot wounds in her genitalia (Manipur: Perils of War and Womanhood, April 28, 2013, & Human Rights Watch Manipur). The news of Thangjam Manorama's death sparked profound shock, anger, and grief among the people. Twelve women *Meira Paibis* staged a nude protest in front of the Kangla gate in Imphal, holding a banner that read 'Indian Army Rape Us'.

While remembering the protest, Lourembam Nganbi, one of the 12 women protestors, narrated that it was an act of extreme defiance against the ever-increasing magnitude of army atrocities.

It was the long-suppressed anger and desperation that drove us to take such action. Our hearts were shattered by the incident. Which society and whose mothers would stand idly while their daughters were being preyed upon by men in uniform? We are not shameless beings, but we were overwhelmed by grief and anguish (L. Nganbi, personal communication, September 17, 2014).

The use of the body by the *Meira Paibi* women and the meanings that it generated point toward the claim of a dignified women's body that demands respect. Nevertheless the transgressions committed against such bodies by state agencies have led to the strategic use of the body as a 'weapon' not only to resist but also to shame and humiliate the perpetrators of these violations. Uma Chakraborty (2007) viewed the nude protest as representing the anger and anguish of women, highlighting a sense of agency through their act of asserting their sexual difference and attacking the security forces. Similarly Butalia (2004) contends that the naked protest used the body as a weapon, having the capability to 'shame and humiliate' the armed forces and the state which had persistently perpetrated abuses against the people of the Northeast.

The nude protest invoked a sense of agency according to Deepti Misri, and it 'evoked violation without suggesting victimhood'(2011, p-618). She sees the naked protest as appropriating 'naked female bodies from a normative discourse of feminine victimhood and shame, or of feminine seduction and guile, to one of (feminist?) resistance', thus challenging 'the rape script underlying the disciplinary violence of the state' (Misri, 2011, p-622).

The nude protest of the *Meira Paibis* should be seen at two levels: first as a protest of women as women and second, as a protest by women/mothers of Manipur. The above analysis can be used to understand the strategic use of women's bodies against a strong agency that can only be confronted with idioms equipped to women. The dialogue is done at a moral level, where the women bare themselves, not only to show the already violated and repressed body, deprived of any rights, but also a body that had exhausted all submissiveness. It was through the act of disrobing that they reclaimed the agency over their bodies. It can be seen as a pivotal 'moment' of exercising 'agency', for it was a moment when they gave up making claims to protection, and rather exposed that the capability of masculinity of the state is not in protecting but in repressing and violating the female body.

On the other hand, the nude protest has specific bearings on what it is like to be a woman in Manipur. Apart from the question of whether women's nudity in protest signifies agency or powerlessness, emphasis should be made equally on how the dynamics of conflict and a specific historicity imbibe or carve deeper meanings on women's bodies. According to Ananya Vajpeyi (2014), the protest was an expression of 'resentment' against the Indian state. Resentment as a political expression was brought out in the public realm and conveyed powerfully through the nakedness of the women protestors. It was '…resentment against a painful past, and against the anti-moral effect of the passage of time with respect to the irreversible and ineradicable effects of such a past' (Vajpeyi, 2014, p-44). According to her, the confrontation was not liberating, and the nudity was not 'intended to signify a weapon of the weak, but rather to call to mind that very weakness that makes the citizens of the Northeast vulnerable to such constant and terrible violence' (Vajpeyi, 2014, p-32). The nakedness was thus interpreted as an act to display the rightlessness of the people in the region. The above-cited Lourembam Nganbi's narration of the protest reflects the emotion of 'resentment' that Vajpayi espoused in her analysis. The long-suppressed anger that had accumulated over the years among the people was given an expression through their protest. Decades of political alienation coupled with the unaccountable state's exercise of power have distressed many lives and families. The people's movement consistently raised these issues, but each time they were rendered impotent. Grounding her analysis on both the historical context of the North-East and the emergence of the particular category of citizenship corresponding to the context, Papori Bora (2010) sees the protest as confronting the meaning of 'women', which, in the process, also confronts the meaning of a marginalised citizen within the context of post-colonial democracy. The protest against the AFSPA in Manipur is not just an opposition to a piece of legislation, according to Bora,

but to a 'troubled history, that has constituted the North-east and its citizens as incomplete national subjects' (Bora, 2010).

The Armed Forces Special Powers Act is predominantly viewed as the rallying point around which the protest and movement of the *Meira Paibis* revolves. This perception creates a possibility for viewing their movement as 'an acceptance of the basic premise of the liberal state… Their indignation stems from a problematic yet wholly rectifiable aspect of the state, which instead of protecting its citizens has turned upon it' (Gaikwad, 2009, p-305). The broader context of human rights violations and deprivation of dignified life within the ostensibly 'democratic' framework of the state serves as the backdrop against which the protest is understood. However, the understanding of the women's body or the notion of womanhood in the Manipuri context, alongside the protestors' perception of the body and the meanings behind their action, should also be taken into account while reading such a protest. On one level, the sexuality and body of Manipuri women is implicated in the consolidation of a shared past and culture. The use of the female nude body, a body that is culturally rooted as a symbol of the nation and national honour, coupled with the projection of 'women/mother as protector' by women themselves, symbolised an embodiment of the national whole, besides bearing individual women's identity. The nudity, therefore, is symbolic of not just the victimised women's bodies but also the nation, which is dispossessed of all its dignity and honour. The protest was an outrageous women's action that projected their desperation against rendering their domesticity and population vulnerable.

The nude protest by elderly women of the *Meira Paibis*, who are respectfully addressed as *Ima* (mother) by all, brought out the non-sexualised mother figure, which is stripped of all clothes. However, this non-sexualised figure of the mother paradoxically invoked female sexuality by baring her body and commanding the military holding the banner, 'India Army Rape US'. The non-sexualised body of the mother, by turning it into a sexualised vulnerable entity, these mothers and their command, enact the situation of contradiction, the extra-ordinariness under which Manipur is placed. A contradiction in which people called 'citizens' by law are killed, raped, and tortured within the same legal framework. 'We are fighting against this unjust system…why is AFSPA enforced in Manipur?' asked Keisham Taruni of Nupi Samaj (personal communication, November 21, 2013). Additionally there exist a dissonance between the political aspirations of the people and the political realities imposed by the state. Thokchom Ramani of Nupi Samaj also strongly asserted, 'We had to do it, for the future of our sons and daughters…we had to keep our shame behind, and fight for the people as a whole' (personal communication, November 26,2013). Furthermore, there is a contradiction in being part of the state structure while being excluded from the national imagination. 'How can the army torture people and assault women?….They have suppressed us all these years', said (late) Soibam Momon, then President of the All Manipur Tammi-Chingmi Apunba Nupi Lup (personal communication, October 19, 2013).

On another level, the women displayed their bodies as sites of violence where historical, and sanctioned gendered expressions of state power are manifested. The nudity is thus, an act of using the very site of violence, to counter the vulnerability that it is subjected to. 'Thinking of the future of our young girls of Manipur, we had to do something, we had to rise up…otherwise what will become of our community?' Lishram Gyaneswari said. She also added that, '…insecurity and risk of molestation is faced by all women all the time because of the presence of the security forces…we walked nude to teach a lesson to these military personnel and send a message to the whole world' (L.Gyaneshwori, personal communication, October 17, 2013). Thus, the female body with deep cultural and national implications and the body of an 'incomplete citizen' representing historical political claims intersected when the women protested nude. The body bereft of dignity and rights due to the 'incomplete' status, displayed what it was like to be a woman and a citizen in such a situation of contradictions.

Body as National Markers: Culture and Control

A.K. Janaki of Momnu Eerikhombi contends that the downfall of any civilization stems from the moral decline of both men and women (personal communication, 29 October, 2013). *Thakshi-khasi* (mannerisms) is considered very important when one deals with another individual. She laments about the deteriorating level of women's conduct and the inefficiency of mothers. When parents fail to exercise restraint in their eating habits and behavior, it is believed to have a direct impact on the child's development. The lack of clear boundaries between what a child should/should not see/eat is perceived as the reason behind the child becoming unruly and immoral. According to her, in the olden days, pregnant women were discouraged from attending street plays and entertainment houses. The good/bad scene that the mother sees somehow effects the child, she said, consequently how the mother spend her days during pregnancy is very important. It is not the child's intention to develop poorly and thus if all women took on the role of responsible mothers, she claimed, the ills of society will also be lessened (A.K.Janaki, personal communication, October 29, 2013).

Here, she emphasises women, mothers, as one of the active agents of the social and cultural development of the collective. The cultural constraints that regulate women's behaviour differently at various stages of their lives along with the assumed direct implications of any deviations on future generations have shaped and reshaped women's lives and experiences. Women are regarded as markers of cultural difference and are designated as reproducers and transmitters of authentic culture. As the bearer of culture, she must also carry the burden of being a 'proper woman' (Mohsin, 2007). They are expected to adhere to established norms and acceptable expressions of sexualities. The *Meira Paibis* themselves have evolved within these frameworks and have, over the years, tried to explore ways to preserve and safeguard Manipuri culture. By discussing some of their engagements that cater to cultural preservation, this section demonstrates how their movement

incorporates and reproduces, to a certain degree, the cultural nationalist ideas prevalent in Manipur.

Pamphlets of Kanglei Ima Lup (KIL), published on 15 May 2015, reiterate the notion of women as mirrors of society. Stating that the progress of a nation can be mapped from the attires, conducts, and mannerisms of women, it urged the need to uphold the traditions of the forefathers. The pamphlet strongly asserted that once the traditions are disregarded by women, the whole nation will soon be in ruins.

Once the fabric of the nation is ruined, women will no longer be respected. In order to save it from such a fate, women should surrender all desires of enjoyment and glamour, and realise that a good character should be cultivated by women who will be the mothers of tomorrow… (self-translation) (KIL, Kangleipak, May 15, 2015)

The good versus bad women debate remains pertinent when considering cultural and societal norms. A 'careless physical movement, an unthinking gesture or a wrong kind of dressing' can make one a bad woman at any moment (Menon, 2012). In Manipur, culturally embedded Meitei phrases like '*Nupi mawa bu wara*' (Women's opinion is no opinion), '*nupi di khongpam ama soiba di sibaga pangkhakni*' (a wrong step/action is almost like death for women)…[i]are used on a daily basis to not only inferiorise women but also to caution them to guard their actions at all times, constantly reminding them of their 'vulnerability'. One of the engagements of the *Meira Paibis* that embraces the principle of 'proper behaviour' is their policing activity against 'immorality'. It is a very difficult task to define what 'immorality' is, as it is subjective and conditional to the place and culture. Zygmunt Bauman (as quoted in Yuval Davis, 2005, p-46), suggest that human morality is inherently pre-social, which precedes rather than follows specific religious and other cultural systems, and this notion of morality arises when an individual becomes aware of the presence of an 'other', prompting questions about how this 'other' should be treated. The 'management' and 'boundary construction', in such definitions of morality lie at the heart of cultural moral systems (Davis, 2005). This task of boundary construction and management in Manipur is often performed by the *Meira Paibis*.

Among the various social 'cleansing' initiatives, the most enduring and extensive effort was the crackdown on small eateries and fast-food outlets. In the late 1990s and the early 2000s, Imphal and its surrounding area witnessed a proliferation of fast-food establishments having dimly lit, compartmentalised sitting arrangements. These places often had large custom make sofas or benches with high reclining backs for both comfort and privacy. Such venues, according to the *Meira Paibis*, provided a private space for teenage couples, and as a consequence, young and old women become victims of deceit and unwanted pregnancies. Therefore, such establishments were perceived not only as contrary to cultural values but also as a direct threat to the society's morale and tradition. The *Meira Paibis* of certain localities undertook the proactive step of raiding fast-food joints in their own neighbourhoods. This

effort quickly expanded into a state-wide campaign, leading to the formation of the Women's Association for Civic Action Kangleipak (WACAK), which coordinated and undertook major initiatives in this regard. 'We were actually disappointed…disgusted over the behavioural changes that we see in this young boys and girls', R.K Tharaksana of WACAK exclaimed (personal communication, October 25, 2013). Local newspapers reported on their raids and the methods they used to discipline couples found indulging in 'immoral' activities. According to R.K. Tharaksana, 'the couples were warned not to repeat the mistake…for the disobedient ones, their respective parents were informed of their actions…and in some extreme situations, the couples were even married off' (personal communication, October 25, 2013). Moreover, as part of their drives, the restaurant owners were given specific instructions regarding sitting arrangements, lighting, and private rooms. Non-compliance resulted in immediate closure of the establishment. The *Meira Paibis* consider such restaurants and fast-food joints as elements that abate crimes against women. In their street-corner meetings and awareness programmes, they have emphasized the importance of women being cautious and vigilant.

A notable event unfolded in October 2006, where a ban on fashion shows and beauty contests was indefinitely imposed in the state of Manipur, by *Meira Paibi* and women's groups. Poirei Leimarol, Nupi Samaj, AMKIL, and WACAK were the *Meira Paibi* organisations responsible for the ban, along with women's groups like Macha Leima and Kanglei Women's Society. These groups contended that such events cannot be justified under the guise of promoting peace. According to Ibetombi, then President of WACAK, such events were driven by the vested interest of certain commercially motivated individuals, leading to undesirable controversies, fights, and disorder in the state, which tarnishes the culture of the land. These events were mainly organised for commercial purposes treating women as commodities. The issue of banning beauty contests does not end there. In 2013, various groups engaged in seminars and dialogues over several months ultimately resolving to constitute a Preparatory Committee tasked with formulating rules and regulations for organization of such events. The committee comprises 9 individuals from different walks of life, including women leaders, social activists, academicians, and artists. A central focus of the guidelines was the promotion and 'upliftment' of culture and traditions of all communities. The regulations mandate that provisions be made to enable the *Meira Paibis* to oversee such events in a democratic and transparent manner, thereby empowering them to ensure adherence to the norms and values of society. A brief excerpt of their regulation is as follows:

…contestants should serve as representative models of the particular community she belongs to and through her, awareness of their attires, ways of life, culture and tradition should be spread….she should embody both beauty and intellect, possessing a comprehensive understanding of identity, culture, norms and values specific to her community…she should be one with high moral stature and character…vulgarity should not be equated with fashion and beauty…viewing western concept of beauty as the only concept of beauty should be abandoned and should seek to bring out the eastern, mongoloid

notion of beauty…promote *phanek* to the global world….the contestants should be able to create a soft symphony of ethnic and universal elements…[ii]

On the one hand, their assertion that beauty contests are a means to commercialise women's bodies represents a significant and radical advancement. Many women's rights activists and feminists have articulated similar perspectives regarding the use of women's bodies as sexual objects in show business and commercials. The commodification of women's bodies in fashion shows and beauty contests is a concern for the *Meira Paibis*. In addition, the underlying idea generated by a beauty contest, in which the parameters of women's beauty have been laid out by Western white-educated men, has been a problematic area. The *Meira Paibis* guidelines have many interesting points that challenge dominant ideologies by questioning the objectification of the female body. The regulation also shows their ambition of not just protecting and preserving the culture but also its spread by promoting certain fixed forms of attires that can be identified with the people and the nation. Therefore, along with the radical ideas that they have projected with regard to beauty contests, there were also concerted efforts to uphold cultural notions of femininity within Manipur.

Events like the Miss World Contest, remarked Mary E John, have explicit and implicit claims about the nation and culture, which are projected in opposition to the West and its globalising powers (John, 2000). *Meira Paibis*'attempt to regulate the Miss Manipur contest can be seen within the cultural-nationalist ideals that were taken as a step to revitalise the culture. Women's bodies as bearers of culture and tradition, through the invocation of a certain notion of domesticity and womanhood that we see in the formulation of the 'women as nation' thesis, are reinforced by the *Meira Paibi's* regulation. They employed the notion of an idealised Manipuri femininity and tried to shape the women participants into a cultural-nationalist ideal focused on valuing the traditions and culture of Manipur. These regulations positioned women as the reproducers of national boundaries, assigning them the responsibility of safeguarding the distinctiveness of their national identities by emphasizing the importance of understanding the norms and values of the shared collective 'imagined community'. Consequently women become pivotal in the production of gendered national identity, serving as sites to witness modernity in tradition, and where distinctions are drawn not only between ethnicities within the nation but also against 'other nations'.

At another level, in alignment with the idea of 'people as power' discourse, new *Meira Paibi* organisations are advocating the need for expansion of population of indigenous people of Manipur. One such *Meira Paibi* organisation is the Iramdam Kanba Ima Lup (IKAL), which has been mobilising around the issue of safeguarding the indigenous people of Manipur. Since 2014, this organisation has been actively engaged in raising awareness among indigenous people about the necessity of discontinuing small family policy. According to Luwangleima, the President of IKAL, the birth control programme has posed a serious problem for the indigenous population amidst the rampant population growth of non-indigenous groups (personal

interaction, May 2, 2015). Raising an alarm over the low population percentage of the indigenous people in comparison to outsiders, the organisation expressed the irrelevance of birth control policies in places like Manipur. In a move to encourage women to bear more children, IKAL identifies mothers who are *chayok ngayok phabi* (good bearers and nurturers of children), honours and pays respect to them in their own small ways (giving cash awards, certificates, etc.). Additionally, the organisation opposes the use of caesarean (CS) birth technique, as women who undergo these procedures may be limited in their ability to have more children (Luwangleima, May 2, 2015).

Idioms and Symbols of Protest:

The women's movement in the name of *Meira Paibis* has been a proactive force in Manipur. Their activism and engagement can be seen as discursive, given the nature and scope of the issues they engage with. As radical as they are in demanding the right to a dignified life free from oppression and violence, they are also seen to be employing a variety of idioms in their movement, which may otherwise posit different and often wide-ranging (if not contradictory) meanings and messages.

While the movement employs common methods of sit-in protests, rallies, and processions, or boycotting in their protests, there are certain idioms and symbols that their movement strategically uses, either to make their movement gain more mass appeal or to gain more efficiency. It is important to look at such idioms to understand the meanings generated from them and the overall orientation of the movement of *Meira Paibis*.

The Phanek as Symbol of Protest: an act of subversion?

In July 2015, during an episode of protest demanding the implementation of a legal mechanism to check the influx, settlement, and ownership of property by non-indigenous population (popularly called the movement for the implementation of Inner Line Permit System) in Manipur, it was reported that a locality in Imphal utilised old *phaneks*, hanging them across the main street using a long rope to obstruct the passage of patrolling police personnel during a curfew imposed to curtail the protest activities of the civil society bodies. This was one of the several instances where women used their attire in protest, supposedly as a 'demeaning' tool.

Phanek, a traditional wrap-around garment or sarong, is worn by women in Manipur. Cultural significance of the *phanek* is imbued with meanings that appear to be evolving over time. At one level, *phanek* is perceived as possessing potent energy. Historically it was used to pardon delinquents and convicts. Through the act of covering the convict with the *phanek* by Sugnu Hanjabi[iii], one's crime was exonerated and purified, symbolising a form of rebirth. The *phanek* of one's mother is considered particularly powerful, presumably embodying the protective qualities of the mother, in terms of warding off evil spirits and bad augury. A small piece of the mother's *phanek*, which was worn during one's birth, is often carried when travelling away from

home. It should be noted that the *phaneks* mentioned above are not all *phaneks* but those worn by specific people at a specific time. In both uses mentioned above, the meanings they generate may be subjected to interpretion and reinterpretation but they remain situated within the conceptual framework of the purity-pollution binary.

At another level, *phanek* in popular parlance is seen as signifying impurity. Connotations of inauspiciousness is associated with this attire, so much so that women of the household are prompted to ensure that it is not hung in the front yard of the house when a family member leaves for work. Strict instructions are given to the women by older members of the house not to dry *phanek* on the front lawn. It also represents a subordinate status, and is not meant to be touched by the male members. Therefore, male members refrain from touching or being touched by a *phanek* in public. Within this backdrop of how the *phanek* is perceived in contemporary patriarchal settings, the concern here is to explore the potential meanings associated with its use as a mode of protest by women in Manipur.

Angry expressions like *phanek na kuppu* (cover with the *phanek*) and *phanek na kanlu* (hit with the *phanek*) are some of the expressions used by *Meira Paibi* when they confront a male offender/adversary. A man being struck by a woman's *phanek* is considered the ultimate act of dishonour and emasculation. This practice serves as a means of humiliating or punishing men, rendering them unmanly for committing certain offences. Consequently when women use the *phanek* imbued with patriarchal values and meanings, it is often perceived as inadvertently reinforcing the institution and its embedded meanings. The act of displaying of *phanek* by hanging it across the road during a curfew is not seen as breaking the norms or posing a challenge to the idea of associating phanek with impurity and bad luck. Rather, it is seen as an invocation of the patriarchal idea that links it with bad-luck and emasculation, especially targeting the patrolling security forces. It is ironical, Soibam (2012) highlighted, that the armed men could not pass the barricade of *phaneks* and remove them with their own hands, though the same belief of the untouchability and impurity of the *phaneks* could not protect the wearer from being disrobed and raped by the same police personnel.

The use of *phanek* can also be seen as a subversive act. By employing the very object that signified their subordinated status, the women effectively disrupted public spaces. Contrary to the traditional regulations that *phanek* should remain confined indoors, these women displayed the object which symbolises 'impurity and untouchability', in the public domain to challenge patriarchal militaristic state agencies. By defying norms, these women positioned themselves against common expectations of feminine performance and compliance. Women, thus, use the object of their subordination to their advantage. Through the act of using the *phanek* to emasculate masculinist agents, they invert its symbolic meaning, demonstrating that the very object emblematic of women's subjugation also possesses the potential to defy and shame the agents of patriarchy with the same notions of impurity that these agents have associated with the *phanek* in the first place.

The Idiom of Motherhood: women as mothers of the nation and protectors of the nation

One can start with a statement given by (late) Thiyam Chaobi of the All Manipur Social Reformation and Development Samaj –

Ngashi amadi tungi meerol kalhousi, mamma gi amrita pithaktuna yoklaklaga ngashi di machada nisha pithakpa ngambi mama yaorakle, nupi eikhoi punshinduna nishabu maru phangna manghallasi. (Let us save the generation of today and tomorrow, we have nurtured them with pure mother's milk, today we see mothers who can feed their children with intoxicants, let all women unite and root out intoxicants.) (38th Anniversary Publication, Nupi Samaj, 26 June, 2014)

It was during the initial *Nisha Bandi*[iv] days that this statement was made to mobilise women and strengthen the movement against drug and alcohol abuse. The statement is particularly compelling as it appeals to all women, by emphasizing on their unique identity and the role of motherhood.

Second, the veneration of *Pari Kanba Numit* [v], a day when women successfully intervened to prevent the wrongful implication of an innocent individual, is commemorated every year. On that day, the mothers saved a beloved son from being falsely implicated. This incident brought maternal care into the political domain. Mothers, in many contexts, are viewed as caretakers of sons and daughters and are therefore endowed with a certain degree of moral authority to assume a protective role.

Third, during the nude protest of 2004, it was witnessed that the women who had stripped themselves protesting against the rape and killing of Thangjam Manaorama shouted, '…We are all Manorama's mother…Come take our flesh…' It was seen as a historic moment, when motherhood transcended the bond of blood and gave a universal appeal to it, by deconstructing the association of motherhood with biological birth.

Since its inception the *Meira Paibis* have consistently invoke the 'motherhood' paradigm, a concept they also embraced earlier during their activism against alcoholism under the banner of the *Nisha Bandi*. The notion of the 'mother' being used here embodies the 'protective mothers' who are entrusted with the duty of shielding their family, sons, and daughters from any 'external' harm. 'How can any mother stand by when her sons and daughters are feasted upon by cruel forces....? What is the meaning of our lives if our sons are dragged out of our bosoms and killed mercilessly...?' are some poignant questions that they frequently raise. The intrinsic connection between the purpose of their lives and the lives of their families and children has been repeatedly emphasized in their public engagements. Their display of a 'sacrificial' ethos for the protection of every aspect of their family and society has been a significant characteristic of their movement.

The use of the language of motherhood, as argued by many scholars, provides a space for women to protest in a conflict-ridden context. It is often argued that the use of values associated with motherhood has enabled women to raise questions and make claims against a state that is considered coercive. According to Jennifer Schirmer (1989), the language of sacrifice and the traditional values associated with motherhood served as important means of political protection for women. The invocation of the role of motherhood in protests, especially against the death and disappearances of sons and daughters, is seen by Mabel Belluchi (1999) as an act of politicising the traditional role, and in the process giving it new value. These women contest the notion that confines motherhood to the private realm, through their act of employing it in their protest against the injustice inflicted upon their children and consequently upon themselves as mothers. Furthermore, the invocation of motherhood as a metaphor of protest, as argued by Samir Kumar Das (2008), should not be seen as a 'reproduction of the traditional role', rather a political strategy, as motherhood is one of the few avenues for women to organise and assert themselves. The politics behind using the metaphor of motherhood is based on the notion that mobilized mothers can be effectively framed as 'apolitical' and expressive of some transcendent, moral-laden truth, making the political messages attributed to them difficult for others to dispute. Maternal framing, with attendant cultural notions of political innocence, pacifism, and self-abnegation, is emotionally evocative and thus effective in eliciting sympathy (Enloe, 2000 cited in de Volo, 2004). Women's use of the idiom of motherhood is also more acceptable and legitimate because it is seen as an extension of women's traditional role, that is their familiar role of caring for their men and children. Their struggle created a public space for them, which for ordinary women is quite a liberating experience (Manchanda, 2001). According to Sara Ruddick (1998), 'woman who acts as 'woman' in the public spaces transforms the passions of attachment and loss into political action, transforms the women of sorrow from icon to agent'.

Indeed, the idiom of motherhood has provided a space for the *Meira Paibis* in the public arena of protest and resistance. The maternal image is often seen as devoid of political connotations, which gives them ample space to escape any suspicion of political mobilisation and strategy. In a situation where mobilisation against the state entails considerable risks, the image of the mother cast them as natural guardians of their children, family, and society. During the researcher's conversation with several male civil society leaders, similar claims were made regarding the viability of using the identity of motherhood. According to them, 'Mothers are respected… They have the moral power to command everyone, officers and insurgents alike…. .' (Yumnamcha Dilip, personal interaction,1 May 2015) 'Things are simpler when we are accompanied by the *Imas* (mothers- referring to the *Meira Paibis*). A possible confrontation can be avoided when the *Imas* address anyone (army, politicians, or insurgents) as '*Imagi Ebungo*' meaning 'My beloved son', and lovingly stroke them on their head' (Phurailatpam Deban, November 23, 2015). The idiom of motherhood is not only used to avoid conflicting situations and create space for dialogue but also as a means to

access powerful political agents. They are also used to indicate an unthreatening actor, but without overlooking the potential of the mother's strength.

Several scholarly works have critically examined the limitations inherent in employing motherhood idioms in movements. It has been observed that such a mode of protest appears to endorse patriarchal values, wherein women assert their right to have a peaceful family life, where they can fulfill their role of nurturing and caring for the family and children. By advocating for a return to the 'natural' order of family and motherhood it is argued that women are openly embracing patriarchy and its values, which primarily define them as wives and mothers (de Alwis, 1998). According to Patricia Jeffery (1998), motherhood may have embodied and legitimate power that can frame women's activism, but it offers no potential to challenge the patriarchal status quo, as the ideas of devotion to duty and self-sacrifice are characteristics that cannot go hand in hand with women's rights.

The movement of the *Meira Paibi* provides a dual picture: one, an engendered public space with women's motherhood paradigm being efficiently and strategically used by both the *Meira Paibis* and their civil society associates; two, underscores the inability to address gendered power allocation and agency in each individual's life, despite the considerable influence and agency that collective mobilisation based on motherhood can exert. Reading the movement of the *Meira Paibis* as desperate initiative by mothers to safeguard their sons and daughters within a colonial/postcolonial militarised setting, while providing a simplified interpretation, nonetheless captures an essential element. However, the idiom of motherhood that the *Meira Paibis* invokes and employs extends beyond appealing for the protection of their children; it also embodies a much broader notion of the 'mothers for the nation' principle. The articulation of 'nation as mother' is prominently observed in movements advocating cultural nationalism and self-determination, suggesting an intrinsic alignment between the interest of women and mothers and those of the family and the nation. The movement of the *Meira Paibis* also mirrors such articulation of women's interests and roles. The nation is perceived as needing protection from the 'repressive' state, prompting these mothers to voluntarily assume the role of the protector. The notion of a 'mother protector' is articulated at various junctures, but the one in which they claim to have rescued a 'son' from the security personnel is significant not only empirically but also symbolically. It was at this juncture that the mothers reverted themselves from being the 'protected' to being a 'protector' of not just the family and its members but of the nation as a whole.

Conclusion

Women's bodies figure in multiple ways in the movement of the *Meira Paibis*. At one level, the body is a site of violence and resistance, especially in regard to their interaction with the state and its agencies whereby women's bodies with deep cultural and national implications possess the capacity to lay bare the rightlessness of both women and the collective. In this regard, their

movement repeatedly displayed the truth of citizens bereft of dignity and rights while simultaneously fighting against rendering their domesticity vulnerable to the excessive powers of the state. At another level, the interest of protecting the 'domesticity' is also expressed in ways that are presumably targeted at preserving the 'culture' and 'tradition' of the collective. Issues such as the 'decline of public morality', 'behavioural crises', 'corruption' and the 'rise of a new consumer class' in both material and cultural terms, amidst the entrenched conflict of the polity, are addressed by reemphasising the women's body as markers and reservoirs of cultural resources. The *Meira Paibis*, and their identity as women/mothers reflect their interests in alignment with certain nationalist notions, particularly in projecting women as cultural and symbolic reproducers and protectors of the collective. Although their movement is best known for fighting against state oppression, these women also contribute to the consolidation of a national project, which involves an attempt to re-strengthen Manipuri national identity.

[i]Cited in Civil Society Coalition on Human Rights in Manipur and the UN, Manipur: Perils of war and womanhood, A memorandum to Rashida Manjoo, ''Special Rapporteur on Violence against women, its causes and consequences, United Nations'', 28 April 2013, p. 15.

[ii] Self-translation of the Press release issued by 'Preparatory Committee on Miss Manipur Organisation', by AMKIL, CHITUWA, KANGLAMEI, PLMPA and WACAK, Dated 1st December.

[iii]Sugnu Hanjabi is the wife of Sugnu Hanjaba who was the chief of Sugnu village. During the 18th century, banishment and de-capacitation were major forms of punishment. Sugnu Hanjaba was given the responsibility of de-capacitation of convicts who has committed serious offences. The culprit's parents could approach Sugnu Hanjabi and pray for mercy and forgiveness.

[iv]Nisha Bandi, meaning banning of intoxicants, was a collective force of women that proactively fought against selling and consumption of alcohols, drugs and all forms of intoxicants.

[v] On December 29, 1980, the women of Maibam Leikai, Imphal mobilised against the arrest of three persons who were wrongly implicated in a bomb-fitting episode in the same locality. The women approached the Army camp in Canchipur and claimed the innocence of a man called Lourembam Ibomcha. They secured his release from the camp, but he reportedly bore visible signs of torture. Later, the women sought the release of the other two individuals. This day is commemorated as Pari Kanba Numit hereafter, the significance of which lies in the fact that the mothers have successfully saved a son from an unfortunate fate.

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Article: Political Elites and Social Transformation in Bikaner City: An Empirical Study of Differentiation and Closure

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Political Elites and Social Transformation in Bikaner City: An Empirical Study of Differentiation and Closure

--Suraj Beri

Abstract

Elite Studies in Rajasthan have traditionally focused mostly on rural and national level comparative contexts leaving urban, subnational elite formations in western regions of the state largely unexplored. Fewer studies have attempted to elucidate the subtleties of regional power systems in urban Rajasthan with a strong princely heritage and entrenched caste hierarchies. Drawing on Bourdieu's concept of 'field of power' and engaging with social closure theory, this research is based on empirical study including 43 interviews with political elites across municipal, legislative and parliamentary arenas. It explains the shifts and stability in the authority structure of an Indian city by situating their governing political elites within the specific regional context of Bikaner city. The findings show that democratization has diversified elite recruitment to include Scheduled Castes elites, intermediary castes i.e. OBC, yet entrenched mechanisms of exclusions continue to privilege historically dominant groups. This research aims to explore the causes and consequences of elite contestation in Bikaner. The study demonstrates how democratization can coexist with persistent closures, offering comparative insights into elite reproduction in postcolonial societies.

Keywords: political elites, Bikaner, field, Bourdieu, regional power, caste, city

Introduction

Rajasthan has been forever pigeonholed in the popular depiction about it. We often hear, people saying phrases like "Thar desert," "ancient forts," "barrenness," "immobility," "feudal," "timeless martiality," "Rajputana heroism," and so on whenever they talk about Rajasthan (Kotyal, 2016). This widely held and unmovable social picture hinders one's ability to contemplate the alterations taking place in social structure and urban environments in Rajasthan. These reified representations also obscure the dynamic reconfigurations of social structure and transformation that characterize contemporary Rajasthani society. Research on inequality and power in Rajasthan has focused mostly on rural and national comparative contexts when it examines and interrogates the elite question. A few studies have attempted to elucidate the subtleties of regional power systems in urban Rajasthan's social organisation. Similarly, discussions of power imbalances in Rajasthan tend to center on specific contexts of social and political transformation and mostly the implications and outcomes are interpreted in particular contexts i.e. Shekhawati region, or Jaipur city circles (Sharma, 1992). To analyse privilege and elitism without considering the macro process through which it is shaped and embedded in the nuanced material realities of inequality and power is to reify culture as a discrete, unified entity. Analysis of the question of their power struggles and aspirations for advancement via the elite structure and

manipulation of resources can be more fruitful. This would help to dispel the myth of a fixed and unchanging power structure, as propagated by orientalist discourses on caste and village (Jodhka, 2010).

The objective of this study is to inquire into the transformation of Rajasthan's political field through an examination of elite formation and reconfiguration in Bikaner. This research shows the shifts and stability in the authority structure of Indian cities by situating the dynamics of political elites in the regional context of Bikaner city. Studies have shown that despite upper-caste dominance of the state's government in the past, democratic procedures in Rajasthan have led to marginal shifts in power (Sisson, 1966; Narain & Lal, 1969; Rudolph & Rudolph and Singh, 1975). This research attempts to better understand the elite structure and dynamics of the developing urban centre of Rajasthan, namely Bikaner. The aristocratic structures of the various princely realms were influenced by the nature of their social ties to one another. What are the prevailing ideas of power in Bikaner's shifting state-society relations, and how do they affect the city's elites?

This study draws upon empirical fieldworks conducted in Bikaner town during 2017, involving 43 in-depth interviews with political elites, participant observation and archival research. By focusing on Bikaner city's elite structure, this article contributes to a growing body of elite research that moves beyond rural frames to capture mirco and macro dynamics of field of power (Savage & Williams, 2008). The elites of Bikaner and their interactions with the state throughout the city's formative periods are the major subject of this study. Three research questions guide this work: how have Bikaner's political elites diversified since independence; and how do closure mechanisms operate across different levels of the political field; and finally what are the ways in which caste shapes elite reproduction process and nature of relations in democratic politics in Bikaner. This research aims to clarify the causes and consequences of elite contestation in Bikaner. It explains how distinct establishments help articulate and advance specialised elite authority in local settings. Finally, this article would examine the reasons for and consequences of the changing relations between old elites and new elites.

Elite Formation in India: Contestations and Accommodations

In light of the role of political elites in contemporary institutions, political studies considered it important to analyse their socioeconomic roots. For instance, early work of Satish K. Arora's (1973) demonstrated in his paper "Social Background of the Fifth Lok Sabha" that most members of the political cabinet were upper-caste Hindus with advanced degrees (often from foreign colleges). In terms of their occupational distribution, law profession dominated among politicians apart from medical, education and engineering professions etc. (Arora, 1973, p. 1527). Politicians in the decades after independence tended to hail from the upper and middle classes, or "castes," which meant they had access to resources like land and money. It is this elite group who, after independence turned to party politics and started entered in the parliament and state assembly (Arora, 1973, p. 1526-1527). In a sense,

they advanced and reinforced (changing their social capital to political field) their social position via political authority.

T. B. Bottomore argues that "nationalist political leaders" were the new elites in independent India and were responsible for modernising the country's economic and political structure (Bottomore, 1965, p. 182). New bureaucrats, he says, are the privileged group (ibid.). With the formation of 'Congress Party' in India, it became the principal organisation of the new political elites of independent India. Although the Congress Party's social base included members of many different demographics, its leaders were able to come together behind a common goal of nation building once India achieved independence.

B. R. Ambedkar's work (1979) on caste offers a very important understanding of caste- based power structures. His analysis of graded inequality reveals how th ehierarchihcal gradation system creates multiple layetrs of dominantions and subordination. His concept of graded inequality differs from Western class based stratification understanding.

Rajni Kothari (1970) defines political evolution as an ongoing process that modifies the character of political parties and updates established cultural centres of power. The new political elites of India during colonial rule and the postwar era may be traced back to the emergence of a new political organisation named Congress, which has been studied extensively by political scientists (Kothari, 1970; Kochanek, 1974). It was controlled by higher castes Hindus and contained many ideological colours within it, from right to left to centre.

In many societies, new elites came to power as a natural result of the proliferation of new political opportunities made possible by the maturation of political institutions. Scholars also analysed the changes in rural power structure and character of rural elites (Oommen, 1970; Sharma, 1976; Chakravarti, 1976) In the post-independent period Indian society saw rising trend of 'ruralisation of politics' in India (Rosenthal 1970). According to D. Rosenthal, with the increase of district-level party organisation and the formation of bureaucratic institutions a new political class has developed. The upper class has also been successful in maintaining control over rural political systems (Sirsikar, 1970). Whether it is the struggle for social representation or the radicalization of intermediate caste groups, India's political transformation has mostly taken place in rural settings (Kothari, 1970). Studies that engaged with the creation of social elites at the regional level were quite rare. The rise of agrarian elites as a new power bloc is another major shift studied by social scientists. As was previously mentioned, the political elites of the nationalist movement tended to hail from the upper classes in India. With the 'ruralisation of politics' intermediary caste leaders also developed on the political scene although this attribute changes from area to region. In the case of Rajasthan, for example, feudal nobilities and landlords played a significant role in the state's political system post-independence (Narain & Mathur, 1990).

Reconfigurations of power have been linked by some researchers to the struggles between emerging contemporary political elites and old royal elites in the changing contexts (Beri & Schneickert (2016). H. L. Erdman's study of Swatantra Party is vital to understand how traditional elites battle their decline and strive to consolidate their dominance within contemporary democracy (1967). Swatantra Party was established in 1959 by the princely elites of Gujarat and Rajasthan as a counter to the new elites of democratic politics. The party attracted a large number of business executives who shared their opposition to the state's meddling in the economy. The party was founded on a clear rejection of socialist policies of state-led growth, and it has been actively marginalised by Congress as a result. C. Rajagopalachari led the party, and positioned itself as the sole viable option because of its emphasis on personal liberty. H. L. Erdman has offered a thorough overview of the birth and ideological position of Swatantra party and its ensuing fall in Indian politics (Erdman, 1967). Traditional elites (rajas, maharajas, zamindars, etc.) and a set of political leaders who advocated for a laissez-faire economic model were all represented by the party (Erdman, 1967). In some way, this phenomenon also symbolized the discontent of royal elites against their nominal presence in Indian politics and throughout Indira gandhi's tenure their position was further challenged by explicit initiatives against their princely status.

Critical effects of state policies on the geographical patterns of power, including rural and urban elites, may be observed. During the 'green revolution,' for instance, the feudal landed elite transformed into a new elite known as 'rich and wealthy farmers' due to land reform policies and battles over agricultural pricing. The large farmers in the northwest of UP, Haryana, and Punjab organised their own farmers' groups to negotiate with the powerful in Delhi (Jaffrelot, 2000, 2009; Jodhka, 2010). After the introduction of democracy, new regional political elites arose and, through electoral means, seized control of governmental institutions across the states like Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and Haryana. These shifts in the rural setting raise crucial concerns as to how democracy has impacted the power structures.

Elites and Ruling Class in Social Theory: Theoretical Lens

The term "elite" remains crucial to understanding dynamics of power concentration and widening inequality in modern societies. C. W. Mills defined 'elite' as those persons 'who are in charge of the key hierarchies and structures of the modern society' and whose power 'to make judgments have substantial consequences' for broader society (Mills, 1956, p. 4). He describes a triangle of power structure as - economic organisations, political organisations and military organisations as upper echelons of society (Mills, 1956). (Mills, 1956). The interconnectedness of these three spheres, he argues, means that the 'power elite' consists of leaders from three distinct institutions. That is to say, the 'power elite of America' consists of the very best and brightest from the business world, the political sphere, and the military establishment (Mills, 1956, p. 9). Furthermore, the accumulative aspect of privilege may be understood by considering the interconnection of several

areas. Mills argued that elite cohesion transcends diversity of social origins, and thus operated through institutional dependency.

Pierre Bourdieu transformed the class studies by highlighting the role of culture in reproducing inequality (Bourdieu, 1984). Bourdieu not only introduced new terminology to better comprehend social class and rank, but he also addressed the ways in which inequality is perpetuated through new themes such as class norms of behaviour, cognitive processes, and routines. Instead of discussing old Marxist categories of class consciousness and exploitation, Bourdieu focuses on how various classes' activities are constituted.

The presence of various power structures in a society is reflected in his conceptualization of fields. Bourdieu, in his book *The State Nobility*, describes a "field of power" as "a field of forces fundamentally constituted by the state of the relations of power among different kinds of capital" (Bourdieu, 1996, p. 264). Bourdieu, in his field theory, argues that people's preferences, likes, and dislikes are determined by their socioeconomic status, or "class habitus," which is moulded by their "class circumstances of existence" and further reinforced by the actions of those in higher or lower social classes. ‘Fields’ are categorised by Bourdieu according to the different types of capitals present. Capital maximisation is a contentious issue that must be debated in every sector (Bourdieu, 1996). Thus, a field of power is an arena in which key "agents", who can be called elites, and their "institutions" strive for positions of dominance using their respective economic, social, and cultural capitals (ibid). It's not only a competition to amass the most wealth; it's also about a quest to shape markets and "define relative worth of the numerous types of power that may be exerted in the various professions" (Bourdieu, 1996, p. 265). Empirically, social process of transformation and power contestation can become analyzable by examining the intsersection of group differentiation with field differentiation.

Social Closure Theory: Mechanisms of Exclusion and Monopolization

Broadly ‘social closure theory’, derived from Max Weber’s notion ‘monopolisation of goods, skills and products’, gives emphasis to study of ‘exclusion’ as a crucial element to understand class relationships (Parkin, 1979, p. 89). Drawn on Weber, schoalrs have developed a broader framework to explain "exclusions and usurpation" in inter-class interactions, (Parkin 1979; Murphy 1988). Based on Marx's emphasis on private property, Parkin develops a theory of class that is defined in terms of collective activity. As Parkin puts it, "one component of the subordinate class commonly employs exclusion methods targeted at what Weber called the monopolisation of opportunities against another, most often on the basis of race, sex, ethnicity, or some other collective trait." (Parkin, 1979, p. 82). Parkin’s ‘dual closure’ model helps in theorizing the exclusion (as downlward power exercise) and usurpation (as upward power exercise) yielding a more nuanced stratification analysis (Parkin, 1979).

Methodology and Data Collection

Questions regarding authority and the sources of inequality are at the heart of studies of the elites. It allows us to analyse state-society ties by focusing on the personalities of elites in various sectors. Three major concerns – i. accessing the elite, ii. constructing an analytical notion of the elite sphere in order to map their social life empirically, and iii. recruitment processes of elites etc. have all been at the center of the methodological discussion for elite studies in recent years.

By applying Bourdieu's paradigm in this way, we tried to develop nuanced understanding of the variety of elites and the deep fissures and bonds that exist among them. Bourdieu differentiation of fields allowed to capture differential elite power (Beri, 2019). The study has attempted to sketch out the numerous conceivable spheres or fields that have an organic link within the field of power in the city. Extending throughout the course of 2016 and 2017, the combined pilot research and fieldwork lasted around thirteen months in Bikaner city. This study used a qualitative approach, collecting data using means such as semi-structured interviews, ethnographic observations, and case studies. Several key informants in the field briefed the researcher on the city's administrative, political and economic order. In this paper, I have focused only on political elites and accordingly, 43 such respondents were identified and interviewed for the study based on a multi-stage purposive sampling combined with snow ball technique. The first stage was to conduct an institutional mapping of political institutions across identified three sub-fields: municipal corporation (60 wards), Legislative assembly (3 cosntituencies), Parliamnetary constituency. In the second stage, elites were identified based on positional crtiteria. Accordingly, a list of elites was compiled using the notion and definition of elites provided by Mills (1956) and Bourdieu (1996) which identifies *elites as people who hold positions of power in the most influential institutions in a given field i.e. politics, business and culture.* In the third stage, snowball expansion was done through initial respondents. As an academic researcher from Rajasthan but outside Bikaner shaped my positionality in the field. Academic affiliation with JNU, New Delhi as a PhD research student provided legitimacy, and also less familiarity of Marwari language also worked as a factor to neutralize my position within Bikaner's social space. Interviews were conducted in a mixed form of Hindi and Marwari language. Oral consent was obtained from respondents to use their details for the research. Researchers were given option of anonymization. Sensitive political information was verified through multiple resources before inclusion. Archival research was conducted in Rajasthan State Archives at Bikaner.

Approaching Elites in Rajasthan

Before independence, this region known as Rajputana formed twenty-two chiefdoms. Rule by monarchy rather than by elected representatives was the norm of governance in several regions of Rajasthan (Sisson, 1966). The

structures of caste and clan lineages are strongly ingrained in Rajasthani culture. The validity of caste and class remains crucial in the institutionalisation of governmental authority and power. In his empirical study of Rajasthan's political (legislative) elite (those who served as legislators between 1980 and 1985), R. C. Swarankar (1988) sought to clarify the extent to which the state's upper-class Hindu, Buddhist, Jain, and Muslim communities are internally split. Legislative elites serve as liaisons between the executive branch and constituent groups (Swarankar, 1988, p. 203).

K. L. Sharma (1976) concluded in an empirical research on stratification that "power elite includes of those social groups that wield political power, highly educated, and who have a considerable number of social ties" (Sharma, 1976, p. 58). The rural elite's influence stemmed from their status as landowners and their connections to the local caste system in Rajasthan. Studies reveal that the dynamics of caste, class, and politics have a significant role in determining the form and substance of power systems (Swarankar 1988).

Anand Chakravarti (1976) in his ethnography of a village in rajasthan argued about the changes in traditional authority in devisar village, where people explore new caste coalitions of power. He traces the dynamic interplay between erstwhile jagirdars and rise of new intermediary political entrepreneurs in shaping democratic politics and authority networks.

Rajendra Sharma (1999) in his work on Shekhawati area of Rajasthan in the late 1990s, found that a new "power elite" was forming from a blending of castes and social strata. His research highlighted the rural upbringing of Rajasthan's elites and the way that the state's affirmative action policies have led to a more diffused system of government (Sharma, 1999).

Rudolph & Rudolph (2011) suggest that Rajput nobles of Rajasthan have undergone a process of ‘middle classization’ during the 1990s, adopting hybrid identities that include elements of the landed class" along with that of the urban middle class. (Rudolph & Rudolph, 2011) Rajputs' foray into the luxury hotel industry has accomplished two things: (a) it maintains the credibility of their 'royal history,' and (b) it proves that they can successfully make transition into business. Despite the fact that most of these analyses focus on the changes in the rural authority system. Urban elites in India have received little attention from sociologists. C. L. Sharma (1992) also examines the dynamics of authority in the cities of Udaipur and Bhilwara. The political economics of these elites and its impact on city culture has not been addressed in his work.

Brief Profile of Bikaner: Changes in Elite Structure

The Great Indian Thar desert borders the Bikaner district in the northwest of Rajasthan state, where the area is located. It is located between 27° 11' and 29° 03' north latitude and 7154' and 7412' east longitude. Located in the northern region of the royal Rajputana, this region covered a total area of 233,311 square miles, making it the second biggest in terms of land area. It is 238

meters above sea level here. On the west, it borders Pakistan over an international boundary. The area of Jaisalmer may be found to the south-west. It borders the Jodhpur district to the south and the Nagaur district to the southeast. Toward Bikaner's north, its Sriganganagar, and to its northeast lies, Hanumangarh and Churu, they are positioned as neighboring districts in the state of Rajasthan. This district in Rajasthan is situated in a semi-arid region. Out of a total population of 2,363,937 in the Bikaner district of Rajasthan, 1,240,801 are males and 1,123,136 are females, as reported by the Census of India, 2011.

With an estimated 87.71 percent of the population, Hindus are the largest religious group (Census of India, 2011). Muslims make up around 9.99 per cent of the overall population with an estimated 235,741. Jains make up the smallest religious group at 1.31 percent. There are around 20.88 per cent people of scheduled caste (SC) in the district, whereas there are just 0.33 per cent people of scheduled tribe. Despite a growing presence in metropolitan areas, the majority of the Scheduled Castes population still lives in rural areas. With the introduction of adult franchise and the institution of panchayati raj, new organisations including as parties and panchayats were formed, contributing to new avenues of power and domination.

The political landscape in Bikaner is shaped by a web of interconnected institutions, economies, and individuals. The process involves the strategic application of institutional capital at several levels (Beri, 2021). Differentiation in the political field is facilitated by these processes at the city level. With the establishment of universal voting rights for adults and free and fair elections in the 19th century, institutions like caste and religion have acquired significance via the forms of collective mobilisation and interest groups. With the national political elites' agenda of nation-building was gaining hold, the key churning of social dynamics manifested itself in regional contexts. Several caste-based organisations and political parties emerged in Bikaner throughout the 1950s. There are two main aspects of this phenomena. First, during independence, princely monarchs, upper caste Hindus (including Brahmins and mercantile groups), and their western-educated professionals made up the bulk of Bikaner's political class. Second, many of these elites were instrumental in institutionalising political parties and corporate groupings, and in doing so, influenced the dynamics of the power landscape.

Bikaner's strange historical trajectory sheds light on the spatial dynamics inherent in power interactions. Within the fortified area was a residential neighbourhood, while to the outside were government buildings such the courthouse, magistrate's office, and police station. This geographical structure of the city transpired largely throughout the nineteenth century during the leadership of Maharaja Ganga Singh. Generally speaking, the meaning behind a place's or thing's name refers to its distinctive characteristics. It also gives individuals, communities, and events a sense of legitimacy and subjectivity. Bikaner is spatially organised and it reflects caste based elite claims to dominance, for instance. For instance, "who belongs to the city?" is connected

to the city's power hierarchy and this claim and question is quite prevalent in city's everyday social life. The ancient city's walled sector has traditionally been home to members of the upper castes, such as Brahmins and Baniyas, and royal elites also live in their forts and palaces within this area. While Scheduled Castes and other marginalised groups live just beyond the city walls, the Jats, Sainis, Chimpas, Gujjars, Malis, and others live in the immediate vicinity. Traditional spatial divisions and the symbolic importance of urban space have not lost their relevance to the modern political process.

Table 1 Caste backgrounds of Political Elites

Caste	Respondents
Scheduled Caste	6
Upper Caste:	
Brahmin	10
Rajput	7
Baniya	4
Muslim	7
Other Backward Classes	9
Scheduled Tribe	0
Total	30

Source: Fieldwork

Table 1 shows the caste profile of the elites interviewed during the study. In city politics, the presence of Rajput elites has come down sharply and the participation of other Hindu upper castes has increased significantly. While Scheduled Castes elites have been able to make a presence in parliamentary politics, they lack influence in town elite circles. Jat elites on other hand, have been struggling to enter city politics and gradually gaining influential positions with their presence in government institutions and strong community networks. Based on the ethnographic data and field study, the *political field of Bikaner* city can be classified into three major sub-levels:

i) *Municipal Corporation level politics*, which is the *first layer* of the elite sphere. Bikaner city has Municipal government of a considerably large area adjacent to *tehsils* (sub-divisions) like Nokha and Lunkaransar. There are in total sixty wards in Bikaner city's Municipal Corporation. In Bikaner, Municipal politics has long history, dating back to 19th century when Maharaja Ganga Singh formed the Bikaner Municipal Committee (BMC) primarily catering to the sanitation and medication purposes. He then brought an act to constitute the Municipal Board in 1923. Kotwal or some special officers supervised the committee during the formative years. The Municipal board

aimed to provide basic services like water supply, sanitation, graveyard for the local population [1] . Princely state also decided the provisions for the maintenance of the fund for Municipal board to invest in the infrastructural activities and payment of the office bearers. Again in 1928 some amendments were brought to change the provisions of key sections regarding the appointment of executive officers in board and powers to construct new buildings in the city[2]. After the merger of the Bikaner state with Union of Rajasthan, a separate new Rajasthan Municipal Corporation Act was passed in 1959. The present BMC building was also constructed very early in 1931 and has been continuing since then. According to many respondents, BMC is the central political and administrative body of the Bikaner city. Its members have been appointed via nomination during 1960s. But after 1980s and with the introduction of some amendments its structure was changed and the selection of Mayor, Deputy Mayor and councilors election is done through election. With the introduction of elective principle many interests groups began to compete for the positions in the city's government. For its functional aspects, the municipal corporation always struggles for financial resources. There have been cases of financial irregularities of the corporation and regarding the recruitment of employees. One of the major shortcomings of the corporation is to establish an adequate financial base especially via tax collection.

In terms of the social composition elites in the city politics, Municipal Corporation exhibits a much more localized version of lobbying and elite competition. Traditionally dominant businessmen have often backed political elites from Brahmin caste in Municipal politics, even though with the rising educational mobility and employment in government and private jobs many candidates from backward castes have also entered in this competition. As it has been a major trajectory of elites in Bikaner, starting as a local councilor then moving upto Mayor, and then aspiring for MLA and MP positions. During my fieldwork, I could contact four ex-Mayors and one current Mayor of the city.

ii) *Legislative Assembly politics* is second sub-level of the political field of Bikaner. It relates this second layer of political fields. As the city has evolved from a trading town to a thriving business hub in post 1990's (with the rise of private investment in service sector primarily). It has generated fierce competition among political elites coming from various professions and communities.

Gopal Joshi one of the MLAs of Bikaner (west) city had his own hotel and restaurant business in the old city, played on his clean image and kind behavior. His three (right from his son, to his grandchildren and their kins) generations have been active in local BJP unit. Bikaner has been the capital of

[1] The act laid down the rules and regulations of the Municipal board and also provided brief account of the functions of various officers occupying key positions in the board. For more details on the organization structure of the Municipal Board of Bikaner, see *Bikaner Municipal Act Raj Shree Bikaner 1923, Act No. 6*. Bikaner Government Press: Bikaner.
[2] *The Bikaner Municipal (amendment) Act, 1928. File No. 402*. Bikaner Government Press: Bikaner.

Rathore Rajput princely family for generations. For instance, another very prominent elite, Siddhi Kumari, an MLA from Bikaner East during her public campaigns always on her royal family history. The newly formed political constituency Bikaner east has become the *key realm of competitive politics between royal and non-royal political elites*. With the two-time victory of Siddhi Kumari from this part of the city, the new city has also been space of urban contestation among business elites who aim to expand their manufacturing units beyond the western side of the city. A major contribution to the construction of royal heritage goes to the princely architecture built in different portions of the city. For instance, the Bikaner Fort just outside the old city, Bikaner district Court building which was the administrative building during the princely rule, Ganga Theatre, the primary and secondary education Department building was part of Maharaja Sadul's Palace. Therefore, even after the social and legal separation of princely properties from the public department of Bikaner, the cultural image of belonging continues. A section of educated Muslims and those who have some stakes in local business have connections with the Congress party in the city and have occupied low level cadre positions in urban/rural units. It is yet to be seen that any Muslim candidate wins MLA elections in the city in the coming years.

iii) *Parliamentary politics* that is the *third* layer of the structure of the political field. It connects the regional elites to the state and national level. Critical examination of these subfields tells us about the distribution of castes and occupational/professional groups in the political field. The accumulation of certain resources and capital from one sub-field helps to scale up the contestation in other fields. There two major levels at which this happens. First, at the level of political party and community networks, where different factions based on caste or other affiliation (or as locally called 'gut') compete and mobilize resources to achieve the positions of control and material benefits the level of organization. Secondly, at the institutional level, where networks are exploited to gain access to top elites at the state level and bargaining for ticket distribution takes place. In Bikaner's parliamentary politics, district level dynamics of power matter more than city's internal equations. During the course of field work, it was reminded to me several times by political leaders from both Congress and BJP that princely family has been replaced by common people in the realm of politics. Expressing his unease with their 'elitist' nature, B. D. Kalla describes: "'queen' is limited to her palace and they have hardly any role to play in city's politics. Earlier king used to come directly from kinship and lineage line but now democracy has challenged it and those who have more votes can become political leader. It is not conceivable without democracy."

While some political leaders like business elites believe that after the Maharaja Ganga Singh, Bikaner's strength has declined in the overall politics. It has been told that during the princely times, due to the bargaining power of Ganga Singh, many policies became possible i.e. construction of canal for irrigation, establishment of Education Directorate in Bikaner etc. On the other hand, some political elites would argue that princely elites are still dominant

and in spite of democratization of politics these traditional elites capitalize on their symbolic identities and royal status. For example, during elections, this symbolic capital of 'royalty' and 'founder of the Bikaner state' remains unmatched by any other political leader of the city. One respondent, who is critical of new elites and looks at the city politics in terms of princely nostalgia said, "after the Maharaja Ganga Singh's rule very, few big works have been done here. What you see today as new colonies like Ganga Shahar, Chopra Katla, Rani Bazar were already established and land was allotted during his reign only. Later Maharaja Sardul Singh also established Sardul Colony and Sadul Ganj as residential colonies in new city area and near government administration (*mehkama*). Then Karni Singh remained MP for 25 years and he renovated his ancestral properties and maintained the prestige of the family. After him whoever came never worked for the development of the city. MPs like Manphool Singh, Balram Jakhar, Dharmendra were outsiders and they were imposed on the people of Bikaner". Not extacly in these terms, but over the period of years in the post-independence period, Bikaner's political elites could not sustain the power the princely elites before democracy. One major explanation for this is that with the shifting of state capital to Jaipur and the political marginalization of Bikaner region in Rajasthan state politics have its impact on the bargaining capcity of Bikaner's political elites.

Parliamentary politics as a sub-field of large politics of Bikaner is marked by stark contradictions. On the one hand, Dalits who are numerically strong with 20.9 percent of the total population, similarly the Jats have also large concentration in areas like Khajuwala, Lunkaransar, Nokha and are politically dominant in these regions. While the Jats have huge amount of land and with the success of Indira Gandhi Canal there has emerged a rich class of farmer capitalists in the agro-business and land, the Scheduled Castes lack land as major source of their political strength. Instead, Scheduled Castes and primarily Meghwals have turned towards government jobs of all kinds, from teaching to government employees to doctor and civil services. It is one the major reason that BJP could field Arjun Ram Meghwal as MP candidate in 2009 and Dr. Vishwanath for MLA seat in 2008. Many of my respondents from old city told me how it is difficult to get their files passed or forwarded in Municipal Corporation even after the repeated calls were made by Arjun Meghwal. In this sense these Low-caste Elites, having being part of elite sphere feel alienated from the mainstream core circle that dominates the institutional space of Bikaner.

Social Differentiation and Social Closure in Political Field in Bikaner

Princely Legacy and Democratic Contestation

The empirical analysis of the political field reveals two intersecting dimensions of elite relaitons. First is about the contesting claim of elites who come from non-princely background and they mobilize the symbolic distance between princely family and the masses of the city to construct their image of

'public and people's leader' as against the 'elitist leadership'. They construct a counter hegemonic identity as 'people's representatives'. Second is the regional and peripheral location of Bikaner in Rajasthan's political economy and the lack of bargaining capacity of Bikaner's post-independence elites in Jaipur circles. Paradoxically, this strucytural incapacity of these new elites reinforces and strenghthens the cultural capital of royal princely elites.

On the other hand, not just the royal status has implications for the democratic competition among various elites but also the institutional dominance of erstwhile *jagirdars* in the several parts of district. It can also be noted that Rajput caste solidarity was strengthened by decline in their traditional authority after the independence, we can call it as *defensive consolidation*. In other words, these political leaders belonging to *jagirdar* families, and who entered into *jila parishad* and panchayat politics create political associations and erect conscious mechanisms of social closures for other caste leaders. This has been one of the primary reasons for Rajput-Jat conflicts among elites that characterize Rajasthani politics. This is an example of conflicts structured not merely by resource competition but by competing claims to legitimate authority. Sometimes these leaders achieve such a high stature in the region that they benefit from the weak internal structure of the political party and manipulate other civil institutions such as law and administration. Such absolute is their power in regions such as Kolayat that the thin margin between democratic bargaining and authoritarianism disappears. Even the government institutions and bureaucratic elites give in to these particularistic pressures of personalised power networks. These configurations generate a form of vicious parochial loyalties are formed between state institutions and these political leaders.

Accommodative versus Exclusionary Political Strategies

Crtiically, these strategies of control and coercion predominate in rural areas, while in urban areas, the political field exhibits different mechanisms. The fieldwork shows that urban political bargaining operates through accommodative rather than purely exclusionary mechanisms. These diverse methods of political mobilization and resource building provide a broad idea about the nature of political field in cities like Bikaner. Instead of political parties' absorption of different dominant social groups into their fold, Bikaner's experience also shed light on the individual strength to navigate through different political parties speaks volumes about the social capital these leaders possess. It also works on adopting a method of coalition building with rival factions to weaken the opposing elites. The interviews with political elites show that individual social capital of elites enables elite navigation across party lines. In this sense, a political party affiliation is not fixed and permanent rather its always contingent on certain calculations. Hence it works as space for resoure deployment in a given time. The networks of kinship, caste and economic interpdependence structure political competition beneath the formal/party surface divide.

Caste Configurations and Political Elites

As has been observed during the field work among various sections of political elites of Bikaner, behind these diverse set of opinions and perception about the state and politics are complex dynamics of caste and community interests. It is no surprise for any laymen in Bikaner city to highlight that both Kalla and Joshi belong to Pushkarna Brahmin caste and relatives. Both of them have controlled both Congress and BJP in old Bikaner city. Their third-generation family members have been actively participating in the party politics of Bikaner. While Kalla has strong wool business background, Joshi has controlled local sweet business and has strong reach in many nearby villages. In the case of Bikaner, Rajputs and Brahmins have been numerically strong as well. Much of the leaders of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes were not involved in the party politics in pre-independence period. It is only after seats were reserved for members of these castes in State Legislative Assembly and Parliament (after 2019) that these groups have started getting some representation. Dalit political leadership is even today not that strong in Bikaner. Despite of the emergence of new generation of Dalit political elites, like Arjun Ram Meghwal (two times MP from Bikaner), Dr. Vishwanath Meghwal (MLA from Khajuwala), Govind Ram Meghwal (Parliamentary Secretary and political leader) there is very weak Dalit political mobilizations in the region.

It is crucial to understand that modern professional sphere also gives them access to middle class lifestyles and mostly importantly, as reflected in Veer Bahadur Singh's response, a professional (non-caste) identity. They feel more commitment towards their own community for the spread of education and government jobs. This sense of marginality from the field of power is experienced not just by Scheduled Castes but also lower OBCs. During the fieldwork it was found that many such political entrepreneurs who work on the field but do not get or reach at any higher position in their respective organization or institution. This shows in the weak political constituency of parties like BSP and others. Ambedkar's approach to caste power based on graded inequality resonates with Bikaner's elite structure where Meghwals despite the political representation remain excluded from core elite cricles (Ambedkar, 1979)

Interestingly, Dalit elites have managed to enter into the patronage of these upper caste & class elites to gain political benefits instead of openly challenging their mechanisms of closure and forming their own base. By establishing strong contacts with these elites, these Dalit elites have been able to achieve some political ascendency as well as formed their own clientelistic relations within their other lower caste leaders and people in general. In a similar study of low caste elites in Bikaner's Mudhramasar village, Jordan Mullard discusses the way Dalits view their mobility and marginalization in the struggle for power, wealth, and resources (Mullard, 2014). His analysis also highlights the emerging fracture in the shared Dalit identity due to competition between the two lower caste sub-groups in the village. Entanglement between the two low caste dominant groups namely, Meghwals and Kumbhars is primarily over the monopolization of the economic resources

of the village by Meghwals (Mullard, 2014, p. 190). At the normative level these sub-caste groups end up 'reproducing the dominant caste's hierarchical relations among themselves' (Mullard, 2014, p. 200). Hence, the field of politics in Bikaner has experienced diversification in terms of caste and class. The affirmative action policy has led to the entry of Dalits into local politics, as Ganganagar and Bikaner are few constituencies where the demographic share of Dalits is highest in whole state. However, within Dalits numerically strong Meghwals have gained political power over others like Naik, Panwar etc.

Conclusion: Differentiation, Closure and Arrested democratization of the Field of Power

This paper shows that political elites from different social background engage in constant struggle to occupy political field of power. The political field comprises multiple sub-fields, with each having its own kind of distinctive logics, mechanisms and configurations yet interconnected through systemic interdependencies. The political field consists of larger social demography, the political institutions, and most importantly the political leadership. Superficially, Bikaner's polity shows the differentiation of political field; substantively, however, it contains entangled structures of closure.

The political field comprises of various layers within which the contestation happens not just for material gains but also for symbolic capital resulting in arresting of the democratization of elite sphere. Political field does not express itself as a monolith entity and the modus operandi of these substructures of polity remains embedded in regional histories, caste relations and political economies. This study engages with the concept of 'field of power' through the field experience of Bikaner's power politics revealing gradual process of social differentiation that nonetheless operate through persistent and reconstituted social closures.

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Article: Laxmipeta Massacre: A Notable Case of Growing Dalit Assertion Antagonising Dominant Castes in Andhra Pradesh

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Laxmipeta Massacre: A Notable Case of Growing Dalit Assertion Antagonising Dominant Castes in Andhra Pradesh

--Suman Damera

Abstract

Dalits (Ex-Untouchables) continue to face systemic social exclusion, discrimination, and gruesome assaults. Despite seventy-five years of independence, the practice of untouchability persists in various forms, including restrictions on access to public resources and social boycotts. These entrenched practices sustain hierarchical caste structures that continue to shape the socio-economic, political, and cultural spheres of Dalit life. This paper examines the Laxmipeta massacre in the Srikakulam district of Andhra Pradesh, locating it within the broader discourse on caste violence and Dalit assertion. It argues that the efforts of Dalits to claim self-respect, equality, and dignity have often provoked violent reactions from dominant castes. The incident highlights the deep contradictions between the constitutional ideals of equality and the persistent realities of caste-based oppression in rural India.

***Keywords**: Caste, Discrimination, Assertion, Atrocities, Laxmipeta, Andhra Pradesh.*

Introduction

Caste remains a defining feature of Indian society, historically determining access to power, privilege, and social status (Gundimeda, 2020). It operates as a dynamic yet firmly established system that constantly adapts to changing socio-economic conditions while preserving hierarchical caste relations (Srinivasulu, 2016). As a social institution, caste shape's individual identity, social roles, and everyday interactions, influencing areas such as occupation, marriage, and habitation. Its persistence is maintained through different forms of humiliation, exclusion, economic dependency, and intimidation, resulting in the reproduction of inequalities across generations (Human et al., 2001).

Caste has undergone significant transformations over time, caste remains integral to India's social structure from ancient, medieval, and modern India (Gundimeda, 2020). Caste system remains a major source of social discrimination and all sorts of inequalities in India, with Dalits being among the most affected category. Their caste identity every so often results in deprivation, marginalization, social exclusion, and assaults (Subramanyam, 2015).

Therefore, Caste is a driving force behind many heinous crimes, such as social boycotts, killings, rapes, and the burning of houses, which occur commonly on a daily basis across the nation. Sociologist Gundemeda Nagaraju rightly observed

Caste is one of the critical sources of conflict in Indian society. Conflict is of two types: group and individual type. The source of conflict is a sense of superiority shared by the dominant castes over the marginal castes—villages across the states in India witness diverse forms of violence. Though the everyday form of humiliation is a common phenomenon, physical violence happens whenever the people who belong to the lower caste resist domination and try to assert their self-respect (Gundimeda, 2020:100).

To undo this centuries oppressive social order, the reservation system was introduced as a means to rectify historical injustices by ensuring equitable access to education, employment, and political representation (Pai 2011). In addition, to combat caste discrimination and untouchability, the Untouchability (Offences) Act, 1955 later renamed the Protection of Civil Rights (PCR) Act, 1955 was enacted as the first law enforcing Article 17's constitutional abolition of untouchability.

Despite various state's protective provisions like the Protection of Civil Rights (PCR) Act 1955, The Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989 aimed at preventing atrocities against marginalised sections. Caste-based atrocities persist across India in various forms, with Dalits (Ex-Untouchables) continue to face physical violence and social exclusion from mainstream society. They continue to be subjected to a cycle of victimization, discrimination, social exclusion, and gruesome acts of violence (Vengateshwaran & Velusamy,2017). The Violence attacks against Dalits is a common phenomenon in rural India (Zelliot, 2010). However, the incidents on caste-based continue to persist in India even today, with the magnitude of such atrocities increasing every day. From 1990 to 2000, official records show that 2,85,871atrocities committed against Dalits were documented under either the Anti-Untouchability Act or the Prevention of Atrocities Act (Zelliot,2010). Historian Susan Bayly (2021) termed such caste atrocities as caste wars. Further, he argued

Nevertheless, the so-called caste war is no mere orientalist fantasy. According to government figures, there were 40,000 anti-Harijan `atrocities between 1966 and 1976, this being the period of Indira Gandhi's so-called `decade of development'. Another 17,000 such incidents were officially recorded for the nineteen months of Janata rule (March 1977-January 1980) (Baily, 2001:345).

Such incidents of atrocities against Dalits are increasing across various states in India every year. Example, Dalits are subjected to violence for riding a horse, wearing footwear in public streets of upper castes or even for growing mustache. Such actions reflect the violent means through which the upper castes seek to maintain their social superiority and dominance.

The paper is divided into two parts to provide a comprehensive analysis. The first part discusses an overview of the political economy of Andhra Pradesh, analysing changing dynamics and patterns of caste-based atrocities against Dalits in AP. Further, it provides the basis by exploring the systemic

inequalities and power structures that perpetuate violence against Dalits in the state. The second part of this paper focuses on Laxmipeta, the study village, examining its social, economic, and political contexts. Based on primary data collected from the village, the study documents the systemic nature of violence experienced by the Mala community, which manifests as humiliation, exploitation, and discrimination across various aspects of daily life.

Methodological Framework

This study is based on primary research conducted in Laxmipeta village, incorporating data from a total of 170 respondents. The principal focus was on the Scheduled Castes (SC), the primary victims of the Laxmipeta massacre. Among the 99 participants from Laxmipeta, 78.8% identified as SC, while 21.2% belonged to the Turpu Kapu community. To provide a comparative perspective, 25 respondents from the neighboring village of Kottisa were included, comprising 68.0% SC and 32% from Other Backward Classes (OBC). Additionally, the study surveyed 46 participants from civil society organizations, representing diverse social groups: 12.0% Scheduled Tribes (ST), 26.1% SC, 28.3% OBC, and 19.6% from the General category. Overall, the sample consisted of 63.5% SC, 7.1% ST, 22.4% OBC, and 7.1% General category respondents. This heterogeneous sample provided a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the social dynamics and patterns of violence associated with the Laxmipeta massacre.

Part-1

Political Economy of Andra Pradesh

During colonial times, Brahmins held a prominent political position and enjoyed elite status. However, a significant change in land ownership began in the late 1940s when Brahmins sold their land to non-Brahmin castes, such as the Kamma and Kapu. This shift led to a new dominant peasantry in coastal Andhra and Rayalaseema, composed of agricultural castes who strongly desired to cultivate their land (Berg,2014). Srinivasulu says

A significant aspect of rural transformation since the late 19th Century is the differentiation of peasant society and the emergence of an enterprising agrarian stratagem belonging predominantly to the Kamma, followed by the Reddy and, to a lesser extent, the Kapu communities. The educated élites of these peasant castes were catalytic in the emergence of caste-specific assertion movements against Brahmin domination. They also led the Kisan and anti-zamindari struggles by rallying the lower agrarian strata. Because of these struggles, which led to the abolition of the zamindari system and the tenancy reforms enacted in the early years of the post-colonial State, the ryots and tenants of these peasant castes gained access to most of the fertile lands. (Srinivasulu,2002:5).

The Green Revolution led to the rise of a wealthy peasant class, especially Kamma and Reddy castes, who became economically strong by adopting

technologies like high-yield crops, irrigation, and mechanization (Srinivasulu, 2002; Purendra, 2015). This class accumulated wealth and invested it in diverse urban sectors such as film, industry, education, hospitals, and agro-businesses, contracts and other businesses thus taking a shift toward capitalist trajectories in the state (Srinivasulu, 2002). Their growing economic strength translated into significant political influence, reshaping inter-caste relations and playing a dominant role in coastal Andhra politics (Purendra, 2015). The economic and political developments in Andhra Pradesh radically altered the relationship between the traditional twice-born castes at the top and the Shudra peasant castes (Griffin, 1979). The maneuverability of the caste system depends on the economic and political power of castes both supporting and opposing it; the more the economic and political power of a particular caste, the more it tries to defend the caste system as the caste legitimizes the economic and political power because it helps sustain its privileges (Balagopal K., 1991).

Newly emerged peasantry castes benefitted by the Green Revolution started controlling resources such as lands, political power, and social privileges, which allows them to uphold hierarchical relations and exclude or marginalize lower castes. This rise reinforced the caste system's inherent hierarchy, as these groups continued to oppress lower castes, extending the legacy of Brahminical dominance. To maintain control, they often used violence against Dalits.

Caste Consciousness and Violence against Dalits

The discussion thus far clearly indicates that caste remains a central factor in violence against Dalits. The caste system perpetuates dominance and hegemony among upper castes, which serves as a fundamental reason of such violence. Atrocities targeting Dalits are not new in Andhra Pradesh; the state has garnered national attention since the 1980s for severe incidents such as those in Karamchedu, Chunduru, Neerukonda, Padirikuppam, and Vempenta, among others. These cases represent only a fraction of the widespread and systemic nature of caste violence. Data from the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) consistently shows Andhra Pradesh ranking among the top five states in India for crimes committed against Dalits.

In response to longstanding social exclusion, marginalization, and discrimination, the Indian Constitution has instituted affirmative action policies, including reservations in education, employment, and political representation for Dalits. These provisions have been instrumental in expanding opportunities for Dalits, enabling them to challenge caste-based prejudices while pursuing equality and dignity. Access to education and employment has become critical for social mobility and the enhancement of self-respect within Dalits.

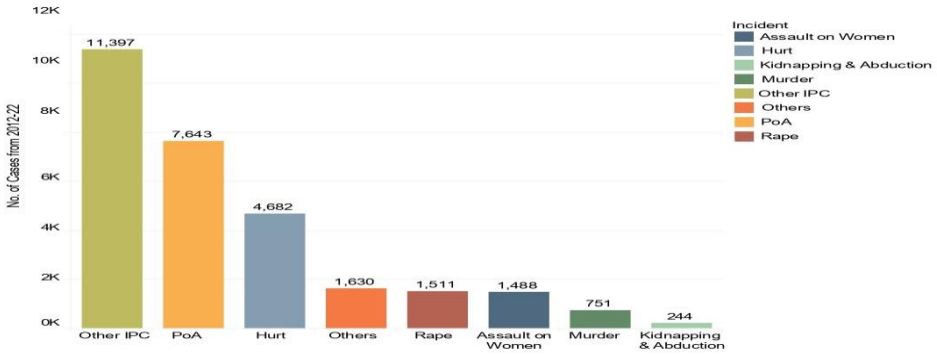
Building on the ideals of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar particularly those emphasizing equality, liberty, and justice educated Dalits in Andhra Pradesh began organizing through Ambedkar Youth Associations from the late 1970s. These

groups actively commemorated Ambedkar's birth and death anniversaries, erected statues in his honour across the state, and promoted a process of Ambedkarisation that reinforced Dalit identity (Ratnam, 2008; Berg, 2020). Since the mid-1980s, the coastal Andhra region has become a focal point for growing caste mobilization, especially among the Madiga and Mala communities. This movement expanded beyond traditional electoral participation to encompass ideological development, organizational strengthening, and broader socio-political assertion (Srinivasulu, 2002). However, this growing assertion also led to increased violent assaults on Dalits. Dalits gained greater political representation by early 1990s, which facilitated to bring their issues into democratic spaces and strengthen their collective voice (Purendra & Satish, 2016).

Various scholars have discussed the manifest and latent functions and dysfunctions of caste violence. Violence takes various forms and must be understood within social contexts and power relations. It is an expression of dominance and hegemony over weaker groups. Socio-economic and political changes often trigger violence as a means to control these changes in society (Damera, 2021). A few sociological studies have indicated that the assertion and public visibility of Dalits are predominant reasons for caste-based violence. This experience has been continuing across the states, regional, public, and private spheres (Satish, 2014). The social consciousness economic and political empowerment of Dalits contributed to the fight against the hegemony and dominance of upper castes. The growing phenomenon of Dalit consolidation and assertion against the dominant castes could not go down well with so-called upper castes perpetrating violence against Dalits (K. Balagopal, 1991). B.R. Ambedkar said:

It is your claim to equality, which hurts them. They want to maintain the status quo. If you continue to accept your lowly status ungrudgingly and continue to remain dirty, filthy, backward, ignorant, poor, and disunited, they will allow you to live in peace. The moment you start to raise your level, the conflict starts (Ranjan & Singh, 2021:140).

Figure 1. Distribution of crimes against SCs in Andhra Pradesh from 2012-2022



Source: Reports of National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB)

Therefore, the modern education through reservation system became key avenues of mobility among Dalits and created caste consciousness and a collective assertion for self-respect, dignity against untouchability and caste oppression (Rao,2015). As a result, the caste atrocities increased in the state. Dalits have faced violent attacks because they dared to claim their basic rights and equality. Incidents like those in Padirikuppam (1983), Karamchedu (1985), Neerukonda (1987), Chunduru (1981), Vempenta (1998), Laxmipeta (2012), Garagaparru (2017), and Pedagottupadu (2018) share a common cause, challenging the domination of upper castes in daily life. Dalits fought for dignity, resisted oppression, challenged political and feudal power structures, and access to public spaces like temples, wells, and religious events that were long denied to them. Each incident had unique causes, but all were expressions of Dalits resisting caste-based oppression and asserting their rights to equality and self-respect.

Caste also evolved alongside social changes over time. In recent decades, the nature and dynamics of caste violence also shifted. Along with upper-caste landlords, newly emerged Other Backward Class (OBC) groups have increasingly involved in violence against Dalits. Castes such as Kapus, Yadavs, Gouds, Munnur Kapus, and Mudiraj have gained wealth and emerged as dominant peasant and political groups. Similarly, Turpu Kapus emerged as a dominant peasantry caste in Srikakulam district by leveraging economic resources and political power, thereby rising in economic and social status.

Part-II

Socio-Economic Profile of North Coastal Andhra Region

North coastal Andhra region, located close to Bay of Bengal, districts viz. Srikakulam, Vizianagaram, and Visakhapatnam. This region is known for its cultural diversity, like other regions caste plays a dominant role in determining its economy and political spheres. Agriculture is the main occupation, with most small and marginal farmers belonging to lower castes. Land ownership and political power, however, are largely controlled by the Turpu Kapus, while other influential castes in the region include the Koppula Velamas, Polinati Velamas, and Kalingas.

The socio-economic and political arrangement in North Coastal Andhra differs from other regions in the state. Historically, it was under Zamindari land tenure system, where land ownership was concentrated in the hands of Brahmins, Velamadoras, Rajus, and Kondadoras in the hill areas. This system continued until the Zamindars and Inamdars system was abolished in 1948 and 1956 respectively. Following the abolition, land ownership gradually shifted to four peasant castes: Turpu Kapus, Koppula Velama, Polinati Velama, and Kaalinga. These castes, categorised under Other Backward Classes (OBC) due to the region's socio-economic underdevelopment, ever since these castes became the dominant agrarian castes in the region. Unlike other parts of Andhra Pradesh, the politically and economically dominant Kammas and Reddys are absent in this region. The growing numbers of these four peasant

castes have translated into considerable soci0-economic and political influence in post-independence North Andhra, shaping its political landscape (Raviteja, 2024).

Profile of Laxmipeta Village

Laxmipeta is a village in Vangara Mandal of Srikakulam district. It is located 58 kilometers north of Srikakulam town and 6 kilometers from Vangara. The village located near the border of Srikakulam and Vizianagaram districts, it is surrounded by villages such as Kottisa, Devakivada, Seetrampuram, Kopparavalasa, and Vangara. Similar to other parts of North Coastal Andhra, caste and power relations continue to shape the social and economic life of Laxmipeta that have existed for a long time.

Table 1. Laxmipeta village (Caste wise Households)

Caste	Before submergence	After submergence
Dalit	60	60
Turpu Kapu	180	124
Mangali (Barber)	5	2
Chakali (Washermen)	10	4
Brahmin	10	2
Goolla (basket and mat weavers)	5	3
Sali (Weaver)	20	5
Total	**270**	**200**

Source: Field study

After the completion of the Madduvalasa reservoir, the number of families in Laxmipeta reduced from 270 to 200. Many families moved to nearby towns after receiving compensation from the government for their land and started small businesses or found new jobs. Dalits, who formed about 25% of the population (around 60 families), mostly stayed back as they did not own land and therefore did not receive compensation or employment support. After repeated requests, the government allotted them small pieces of land near the project area.

In contrast, the Turpu Kapus, who owned most of the land (around 65% of families), had nearly 56 families migrated to urban cities, where they invested in businesses or purchased agricultural lands elsewhere. The government also helped their educated children secure jobs as part of rehabilitation mechanism. Other communities such as the Mangali, Chakali, Brahmin, Golla, and Sali also declined in population. While compensation helped these groups manage displacement, the project affected them unequally, with Dalits facing greater challenges in rebuilding their livelihoods compared to landowning castes.

Background of the Laxmipeta Massacre

In 1977, Government of Andhra Pradesh planned to construct a medium irrigation reservoir project across the Vegavathi and Suvarnamukhi rivers, the tributaries of the Nagavali River at Madduvalasa village. The project led to the acquisition of nearly 7,852 acres of land from 21 villages in Vangara Mandal, including Laxmipeta, aiming to irrigate about 24,700 acres of cultivable land across 104 villages in six mandals viz Vangara, Regidi Amadalavalasa, Santhakaviti, Ganguvari Sigadam, Rajam, and Ponduru. In Vangara Mandal alone, seven villages Laxmipeta, Kottisa, Koppara, Devakivada, Narendrapuram, Gudivada, and Mugguru were submerged. This large-scale land acquisition and displacement not only altered the region's agrarian landscape but also disrupted long-established social relations, livelihoods, and caste hierarchies that structured rural life.

Before displacement, Laxmipeta village comprised around 350 acres of wetland and 150 acres of dry land. Agricultural land was predominantly controlled by the Turpu Kapus, thus their strong socio-economic dominance within the village. Dalits, primarily landless agricultural labourers, remained dependent on Turpu Kapu landowners for livelihood, while a few washermen (Rajaka) and barber (Mangali) families owned small piece of land. A few Brahmin families owned roughly few acres of land. The wetlands were irrigated through the Thotapalli right canal and the Chakarapalli open head canal, supporting agricultural productivity and strengthening caste control over resources.

Turpu Kapus holds predominant land ownership in the village, with families' own lands ranging from 2 to 40 acres. During the land acquisition for the reservoir project, they received compensation of ₹ 2.5 lakh per acre. In addition, 44 Turpu Kapu families who lost more than ten acres of land were provided government jobs as part of the compensation. In contrast, Dalits are largely landless, socially and economically marginalised. Only six Dalit families owned small plots of 30–40 cents, for which they received a nominal compensation of ₹ 25,000–₹ 30,000. When the village was vacated, Turpu Kapu houses were valued in lakhs, while Dalit houses were assessed at merely ₹ 7,000–₹ 8,000.

Findings and Discussion

The Madduvalasa Reservoir Project was completed in 2002, after which all displaced families were relocated and resettled in a nearby place. During this resettlement process, tensions between the Turpu Kapus and the Malas began to surface. Laxmipeta massacre can be understood through the intersection of three interrelated factors social, economic, and political. Social factor, the process of displacement disrupted traditional caste hierarchies and challenged deep-rooted social inequalities. Economic factor, Malas, who traditionally considered as agricultural labour, began asserting their right to access and cultivate land. Political factor, their growing assertion challenged the long-standing political dominance of the Turpu Kapus in village. The blend of these

three factors caused tensions in village that in due course culminated in Laxmipeta massacre.

Caste Realignment in Laxmipeta Village

In the earlier settlement, the village was distinctly divided along caste lines. Turpu Kapus and other dominant castes resided in the main habitation area, whereas the Mala community was located on the periphery, consistent with the traditional practice of untouchability. Following the process of resettlement, significant changes occurred in the village's social and spatial organization, particularly concerning caste-based residential patterns. In the new layout, households belonging to Turpu Kapu and Mala communities were situated in close proximity, separated only by a concrete road. This revised settlement pattern altered the conventional social arrangement and was perceived by the dominant castes as a challenge to the prevailing caste hierarchy. In response, Turpu Kapu community reinforced social boundaries by imposing informal restrictions on the movement of Dalit residents, limiting their access to common resources and public spaces, and curtailing their participation in village-level community activities.

Table 2. Does caste discrimination exist in the village?

Category	**Strongly Disagree**	**Disagree**	**Neutral**	**Agree**	**Strongly agree**	**Total**
SC	0	1	6	35	53	95
OBC	9	7	11	2	0	29
Total	9	8	17	37	53	124
%	7.26	6.45	13.71	29.84	42.74	100

Source: Field Study

Therefore, the new Laxmipeta altered village dynamics, unveiled new forms of caste domination, oppression in the village. Interviews with respondents from Laxmipeta and Kottisa stated that caste discrimination and untouchability continue to shape everyday life in the villages. Many participants stated that the Turpu Kapus still practice untouchability, refusing to visit Dalit localities or invite them to social gatherings, thereby reinforcing caste boundaries and social marginalisation. This social exclusion in all walks of life and the subsequent assertion of the Malas led to a structural conflict in the village. Though, Turpu Kapus on the record considered under Backward Castes (BC), but historically they hold a dominant position in the region. Their dominance, rooted in caste supremacy, control over land, political power in the villages, has been sustained through a blend of economic power and symbolic wealth, positioning caste as the primary organizing principle of social relations and local governance.

Malas have historically been confined to agrarian servitude within a rigid caste hierarchy, which has perpetuated their economic dependence and social marginalization. The caste system systematically restricted them to roles as landless laborers, thereby reinforcing their subordinate position across successive generations.

However, there has been a prominent shift in Dali movement in Andhra Pradesh with Dalits increasingly challenging these structural inequalities. The rise of an educated Dalit youth, informed about their constitutional rights, has begun to challenge age old caste dominance. Dalit assertion of self-respect and resistance contributed a significant alteration in social and political structures in rural AP. Laxmipeta stands within the continuing trajectory of Dalit struggles for self-respect and dignity across AP. Inspired by wider struggles for equality, dignity and self-respect, Malas confronted the dominance and caste arrogance of Turpu Kapus, challenging long-standing hierarchies through their everyday struggle. The persistent assertion and defiance by Malas caused hatred among Turpu Kapus, leading to a series of conflicts in the village.

Dalit Land Reclamation in Laxmipeta

Land was the second contributing factor for Laxmipeta massacre. The design of the reservoir was changed, and the height of the dam was reduced. Because of this change, around 250 acres of land that had been acquired for the project was not covered under project. This leftover land became the centre of conflict among two caste groups. The government had already taken possession of this land and compensated the original owners with money and jobs. Many of them had moved to other places to rebuild their lives through business, employment, and agriculture.

Since the Dalits had not received any compensation from the government, they approached the concerned revenue officer seeking permission to cultivate the land as landless poor for survival. The revenue officer verbally granted permission for cultivation. This informal arrangement allowed the Dalits to begin cultivate and rebuild their livelihoods on the allotted land. Following this, the Turpu Kapus, using their political influence, also managed to obtain permission to cultivate the land.

Turpu Kapus began cultivating about 190 acres out of 250 total, leaving roughly 60 acres for Malas, each family getting around one acre. This land use by Dalits unleashed antagonism among the Kapus, who claimed that the 60 acres originally belonged to their caste people and only they have the right to cultivate it. Malas contested that since the state government paid compensation to previous landowners, the land was officially transferred to state ownership. This land dispute increased tensions between two groups. Turpu Kapus understood Dalits assertion for land as a threat to their traditional economic dominance.

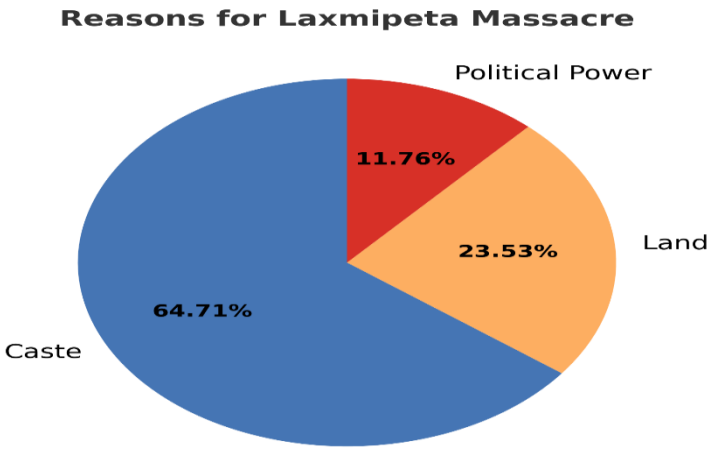
Dalit Women's Political Leadership

Malas challenge to Turpu Kapus political dominance was the third factor in the Laxmipeta massacre. In 2005, the position of Village Sarpanch was reserved for Scheduled Castes women. State government introduced Unanimously Elected Village Panchayat (UEVP) scheme to boost marginalised communities' representation in local governance. Under this scheme the government provides a financial grant of five lakh rupees to village, elected unanimously as Village Sarpanch to support development plans in the village.

Chittiri Simhalamma, a woman from the Mala caste, was unanimously elected as the sarpanch of her village. The Turpu Kapus initially believed they could control her leadership; however, Simhalamma asserted her independent authority. Utilizing the funds allocated to her, she undertook initiatives to improve essential village amenities such as drinking water, roads, and drainage systems.

Despite her elected position, Simhalamma faced significant opposition from the Turpu Kapus who aimed to maintain their control over local contracts and decision-making processes. They blocked her access to the gram panchayat office, coerced her into signing cheques without engaging in decision-making, and publicly questioned her legitimacy. Many argued that a Mala woman was unsuitable to preside over Panchayat meetings, notwithstanding her legal rights to do so. Beyond institutional barriers, Simhalamma also endured personal harassment, including physical assault. Her assertive and autonomous leadership directly challenged established patriarchal structures, caste hierarchies, and the political dominance of the Turpu Kapus, thereby intensifying existing tensions within the village.

Figure 2. Reasons for Laxmipeta Massacre



Source: Field study

New Laxmipeta village has been a site of intense caste, land, and political tensions. The assertion of rights by Dalits, who have sought to claim spaces previously denied to them for generations, has elicited increasing hostility from the Turpu Kapu community. This community perceives such changes as a challenge to their entrenched dominance, leading to ongoing and fragile conflicts on a daily basis. In response to these persistent tensions, the state government established a police picket in the village to uphold law and order and prevent further violence.

During the Narasannapeta Assembly bye-election, the police personnel posted in Laxmipeta were deployed for election duty, leaving the village unguarded. Taking advantage of this situation, on June 12, 2012, Turpu Kapus armed with deadly weapons, country made bombs and assisted by women using chilli powder launched a premeditated brutal attack on malas. This violence resulted in five deaths- Burada Sundararao (40), Nivarthy Venkati (60), Chitri Appadu (35), Nivarthy Sangamesu (40), and Bodduri Papayya (70), and grievous injuries to over forty people, causing severe physical damage and trauma.

Post-Massacre Situation

In the wake of the brutal violence, survivors sought medical treatment at Rajam Regional Hospital, located approximately 30 kilometers from Laxmipeta village. Manda Krishna Madiga, along with local activists from the Madiga Reservation Porata Samithi (MRPS), visited the hospital to condemn the massacre and express solidarity with the victims. The incident provoked widespread outrage and protests across the state, drawing significant media coverage.

In response, the Chief Minister and several cabinet ministers visited the affected families and announced compensation and ex gratia payments. However, the victims' families collectively rejected these financial offers, emphasizing that their struggle was fundamentally for justice, dignity, and the protection of life, rather than monetary assistance or employment.

One of the central demands of the Laxmipeta Malas was the establishment of a special court to ensure a fair and expedited trial. In response to public pressure, the state government announced the creation of a fast-track court in the village to facilitate prompt investigations and accelerate judicial proceedings. Despite this initiative, the fast-track court has largely remained symbolic. More than thirteen years after the massacre, the judicial process remains stalled, with trials proceeding slowly and no substantial action taken against the accused. This prolonged delay has deepened the victims' families' despair and eroded their faith in the promise of justice.

Table 3. Perceptions on Justice Delivery in the Laxmipeta Massacre

Category	Agree (%)	Disagree (%)	Neutral (%)	Category Share of Sample (%)
SC	14.0	78.0	8.0	63.5
ST	25.0	67.0	8.0	7.1
OBC	30.0	60.0	10.0	22.4
Others (OC)	20.0	70.0	10.0	7.1
Total	17.0	74.0	9.0	100.0

Source: Field Study

The narratives surrounding justice in the aftermath of the Laxmipeta massacre reveal profound disappointment and mistrust toward the state's judicial and institutional mechanisms. Field interviews with victims' families and community members highlight a shared sense of disillusionment, particularly regarding the fast-track court, which failed to deliver timely justice. The trial has been marred by numerous adjournments, extending over more than a decade and leaving the families emotionally and financially exhausted. Many expressed anger and frustration that the accused perpetrators continue to live freely, while allegations of defense lawyers accepting bribes from dominant Turpu Kapus have further undermined public confidence in the legal system.

Several respondents noted that the public prosecutor seemed more aligned with state interests than with advocating for victims' rights. This perceived bias allowed defense counsels to dominate court proceedings. Judges and lawyers were widely viewed as indifferent to the suffering and humiliation experienced by Dalit families. The prolonged legal process has effectively benefited the dominant caste, depleting the morale and resources of survivors. Respondents reflected that the judiciary no longer represents fairness but operates as an institution favoring the powerful.

Years after the massacre, some affected families have been compelled to leave the village out of fear and despair. Within this context, the fast-track court is frequently seen as a symbolic gesture aimed at appeasing public outrage, rather than as a mechanism to deliver substantive justice. The state's commitment to swift and impartial redress remains unfulfilled, hampered by procedural delays, institutional neglect, and persistent caste biases. These challenges mirror broader critiques of the fast-track court system across India, where entrenched caste and class hierarchies continue to obstruct justice for Dalits in cases of caste-based violence.

Conclusion

Caste violence in India remains deeply entrenched within the social structure, functioning as a mechanism for dominant castes to preserve their control and authority. Such violence manifesting physically, psychologically, and symbolically continues to uphold caste hierarchies. In Andhra Pradesh, Dalit assertion, bolstered by access to education, affirmative action policies, and Ambedkarite ideals of liberty, equality, and justice, has increasingly

challenged these established orders. Such assertions draw potent reactions from the latter who ill-treat and disintegrate Dalit resistance through humiliation, social boycotts, murders, and rapes, and burning and demolition of Dalit hamlets, as evident in incidents like Karamchedu, Chundur, Neerukonda, and Garagaparru etc., emphasizing the vulnerability of Dalits in their pursuit of dignity, equality, and constitutional rights.

Laxmipeta massacre embodies the complex interplay of caste, land, and political power. The village's reorganization following the Madduvalasa Reservoir project disrupted traditional segregation by bringing Dalit and Turpu Kapu households into close proximity, thereby unsettling caste norms rooted in concepts of purity and pollution. Land ownership became a key site of conflict, as Dalits, historically denied land and relegated to agricultural labour, began cultivating government land acquired under the project. This economic assertion was perceived by the Turpu Kapus as a direct threat to their dominance. Further challenging caste and patriarchal structures was the election of a Dalit woman sarpanch who exercised independent authority.

Historically, Dalit assertions of basic dignity and self-respect have frequently been met with violent reprisals, as observed in incidents such as the Karamchedu and Chundur massacres. In the case of Laxmipeta, the Mala community moved beyond symbolic demands for dignity, actively seeking social, economic, and political recognition within the village. This growing assertion was perceived by the dominant Turpu Kapus as a direct challenge to their authority and long-standing dominance. The increased participation of Dalits in local affairs threatened established caste hierarchies, provoking a severe and brutal backlash. The Laxmipeta massacre thus represents an attempt to reassert caste control through violence.

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Article: Beyond the Ledger: Lived Experiences of *Kanyashree* and the Contours of Girls' Inclusion in Malda

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Beyond the Ledger: Lived Experiences of *Kanyashree* and the Contours of Girls' Inclusion in Malda

--Srabanti Choudhuri

Abstract

This article explores the impact of state-led policy interventions on adolescent girls' empowerment in rural Malda, West Bengal. Drawing on a robust empirical base, the study employs mixed-methods research—surveying 530 adolescent girls and conducting in-depth qualitative interviews—to capture both the advances and persistent challenges in educational inclusion under the *Kanyashree Prakalpa* scheme. While statistical data reflect impressive gains in retention, delayed marriage, and aspirational mobility, qualitative accounts reveal the complex realities of "silent dropout," nominal participation, and the subtle negotiation of gendered and socio-economic barriers. The analysis foregrounds the importance of intersectionality—caste, religion, poverty, and family structure—in shaping the lived experience of empowerment. The article concludes by calling for a recalibrated approach to girls' education policy that combines robust monitoring with localised, context-sensitive support for the most vulnerable.

Keywords:*Empowerment, Rural Bengal, Kanyashree Prakalpa, Educational Inclusion, Empirical Study, girls.*

Introduction

This paper grows out of extensive field research work conducted in Malda district between 2019 and 2021, as part of a larger ICSSR–funded research project on the empowerment of women. Over the course of two years, I, along with my research team, made ten intensive field trips to the district, traversing its schools, villages, and blocks to engage with the lives of adolescent girls. These journeys were not episodic incursions but sustained encounters: hours spent in classroom corridors, village courtyards, and the modest homes of first-generation learners, listening to their stories, observing their routines, and tracing how state policy filtered into everyday life. Malda's distinctiveness as a socially and economically vulnerable region at once peripheral to Bengal's developmental imagination and deeply enmeshed in agrarian precarity, migration, and gendered hierarchies made it a compelling site for this inquiry.

The research design deliberately sought out diverse voices across caste, religion, and household configurations, reflecting the heterogeneity of the district. Each visit deepened the sense that the story of girls' empowerment in Malda could not be read through statistics alone, but had to be understood in the affective texture of lived experiences: the anxieties of mothers delaying their daughters' marriages, the silent endurance of girls present on school rolls but absent in classrooms, and the small but significant acts of defiance that opened pathways of aspiration. It is within this ethnographic fabric stitched together across repeated returns, conversations, and observations that the

present analysis situates itself, moving between aggregate data and intimate testimony, between state discourse and village reality.

The pursuit of girls' empowerment has become a defining axis of contemporary development policy and social reform in India. Over the last decade, the question of how to effectively disrupt cycles of gendered disadvantage early marriage, school dropout, domestic labour, and constrained mobility has animated the design of large-scale interventions, with the state's role at the centre of this transformation. Bengal's *Kanyashree Prakalpa*, lauded as a flagship conditional cash transfer programme, exemplifies this policy turn. It was introduced to provide not only material incentives for continued schooling but to symbolically mark adolescent girls as deserving of investment, dignity, and aspiration. Yet, even as state-led interventions have expanded the vocabulary and reach of empowerment, a growing body of scholarship urges that we move beyond celebratory narratives to examine the granular, lived realities these schemes produce. What does empowerment mean in the context of everyday negotiation within families, communities, and the shifting terrain of rural life? Can policy metrics capture the subtle dialectic of inclusion and exclusion, achievement and precarity that shape girls' destinies on the ground? This article seeks to interrogate these questions by foregrounding both the progress and the persistent ambiguities of girls' educational journeys in one of Bengal's most dynamic yet vulnerable regions.

National Policy Backdrop: Women's Empowerment in India

The story of state intervention for girls' education and empowerment in India is neither recent nor linear; it unfolds across decades of shifting developmental priorities, political agendas, and global influences. In the early post-independence period (1950s–70s), the Indian state largely approached girls' welfare through the lens of social reform and national development. Programmes such as the Community Development Programme (1952) and the Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS, 1975) sought to extend nutrition, early childhood education, and basic health, reflecting a welfare orientation where girls' needs were subsumed under maternal and child welfare.

By the 1980s and 1990s, with the rise of gender as a development category, policy emphasis shifted toward retention in schools and postponement of early marriage. Initiatives like the National Policy on Education (1986), followed by the Programme of Action (1992), explicitly identified girls' education as a cornerstone of empowerment. At the state level, a series of girl-child–centric schemes proliferated, including *Balika Samriddhi Yojana* (1997), which offered small savings incentives to encourage school continuation, and *Apni Beti Apna Dhan* (1994, Haryana), one of the earliest conditional transfer schemes tied to delayed marriage.

The 2000s marked a decisive turn toward large-scale incentive-based programmes, coinciding with global discourses of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Schemes such as *Dhanlakshmi* (2008, pilot,

Government of India) provided conditional cash transfers to families for birth registration, immunisation, and schooling of girls. State-level innovations included *Ladli* (Delhi, 2008), *Bhagyalakshmi* (Karnataka, 2006), and *Mukhya Mantri Kanyadan* Yojana (Madhya Pradesh, 2006), each experimenting with financial incentives to challenge entrenched patriarchal practices. These policies signalled a shift: empowerment was no longer cast solely as a moral reform project but as a measurable development outcome, often tracked through enrolment and marriage age.

The launch of *Beti Bachao Beti Padhao* (2015) at the national level marked the culmination of this trajectory, aligning with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG 4 and 5) on education and gender equality. Its emphasis on mass campaigns, awareness generation, and multi-sectoral convergence echoed international frameworks while continuing India's domestic reliance on targeted schemes. Thus, by the time *Kanyashree Prakalpa* was introduced in West Bengal in 2013, the terrain was already marked by two intertwined logics: the welfare populism of state governments, and the globalised language of empowerment and inclusion. *Kanyashree* distinguished itself by scaling up these experiments to reach millions, embedding itself in both statecraft and everyday discourse.

West Bengal has historically presented itself as a progressive state in terms of gender policy, with a long lineage of social reform movements that addressed women's education and rights since the colonial period. From the legacies of Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar's campaigns for widow remarriage and female literacy, to post-independence welfare initiatives, the state has consistently framed women's advancement as both a social justice imperative and a developmental strategy. West Bengal has rolled out several initiatives that complement its reputation as a progressive state in matters of gender and education. The *Sabuj Sathi Scheme* (2015)**,** for instance, provided bicycles to school-going students, with a particular emphasis on girls, to reduce dropout linked to mobility constraints and safety concerns. The *Rupashree Prakalpa* (2018) introduced a one-time financial grant for the marriage of adult women from economically weaker families, signalling the state's attempt to address the economic burdens associated with daughters while also reinforcing the legal minimum age of marriage.

Earlier interventions included the *Sikshashree* Scheme for Scheduled Caste girls and targeted hostel facilities for minority girls under the Minority Affairs and Madrasah Education Department, which collectively sought to bridge educational access gaps for historically disadvantaged communities. The state has also expanded self-help group and microcredit programmes for women under schemes such as *Anandadhara*, indirectly shaping the economic conditions within which adolescent girls' education is negotiated. Taken together, these programmes illustrate that Kanyashree did not emerge in isolation but as part of a broader policy imagination in Bengal, where welfare populism intersects with gendered social justice commitments. What makes Kanyashree distinctive, however, is its scale, its focus on adolescent girls as a

category of policy action, and the symbolic capital it has acquired both domestically and internationally. The *Kanyashree Prakalpa* (2013) emerges from this trajectory, combining welfare populism with an explicit gender focus, and has been celebrated nationally and internationally, including recognition by the United Nations Public Service Award in 2017.

Kanyashree Prakalpa: Objectives, Trajectory, and Comparative Perspectives

Introduced in 2013 by the Government of West Bengal under Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee, the *Kanyashree Prakalpa* was designed as a conditional cash transfer scheme with a sharp focus on adolescent girls. Its explicit objectives were threefold: to reduce school dropout among girls aged 13 to 18, to discourage child marriage by providing incentives for delayed marriage, and to create a wider social recognition of girls' education as both a right and a social good. The scheme's architecture rests on two key components: an annual scholarship (K1) of ₹1,000 awarded to girls enrolled in classes VIII–XII and unmarried, and a one-time grant (K2) of ₹25,000 to girls who remain unmarried and continue education up to the age of 18. Over the years, the scheme has grown to encompass more than seven million beneficiaries across the state, becoming one of the largest girl-focused social protection programmes in India.

Kanyashree did not emerge in a vacuum but represents the culmination of India's gradual movement toward girl-centric financial incentive schemes. Its logic resonates with earlier programmes such as Ladli in Delhi (2008), which combined birth registration with school enrolment incentives, and Bhagyalakshmi in Karnataka (2006), which provided long-term deposits to families of girls contingent on delayed marriage. Yet, unlike these schemes, *Kanyashree* embedded itself in everyday discourse in Bengal through its wide coverage, direct beneficiary model, and integration with schools and local administration. Its symbolic success was internationally recognised when it received the United Nations Public Service Award in 2017.

Despite its achievements, the scheme's effectiveness varies across districts, shaped by local socio-economic and cultural conditions. Malda, with its high proportion of Muslims, substantial Scheduled Caste and OBC populations, entrenched rural poverty, and recurrent ecological disruptions, represents one of the most challenging testing grounds for *Kanyashree's* promise. Official reports celebrate improved enrolment and reduced early marriage in the district, yet field realities suggest a more uneven picture: one where presence on a school roll does not always equate with sustained learning, and where incentives alone struggle against the combined pressures of migration, household precarity, and patriarchal norms. It is this disjuncture between policy optimism and lived experience that makes Malda an especially

If *Kanyashree* represents the culmination of a long trajectory of gender-focused welfare policies in India, its lived meaning can only be understood in the particular spaces where it is enacted. The scheme, while celebrated globally as a model of inclusive social protection, is mediated in practice by

the everyday conditions of locality, demography, and economy. Nowhere is this more evident than in Malda district—a region.

Empirical Background: Malda District and the Landscape of Girls' Education

Situated at the confluence of northern Bengal's riverine tracts and its historically marginalised hinterlands, Malda district stands as a microcosm of the broader tensions shaping girls' empowerment in rural India. With a population marked by pronounced religious and caste diversity over half Muslim, a substantial SC and OBC presence, and a patchwork of agrarian and migrant livelihoods Malda is both a site of targeted policy attention and a zone of enduring socio-economic risk. Official statistics suggest notable improvements: enrolment and retention rates for girls have risen steadily since the implementation of *Kanyashree*, and early marriage has reportedly declined. However, these aggregate trends often conceal the micro-realities of educational persistence and attrition. Seasonal migration, the ecological threat of recurring floods, infrastructural deficits, and the intersection of poverty with entrenched patriarchal norms all conspire to shape girls' access to school and capacity to benefit from state schemes.

The district's educational landscape is further complicated by the presence of first-generation learners, disabled students, and a significant number of female-headed households each negotiating a distinctive set of vulnerabilities. Government sources (U-DISE, 2022; Census of India, 2011) indicate that while policy coverage is wide, the quality and depth of participation are variegated. Notably, Malda's local narratives point to the phenomenon of "silent dropout," wherein girls remain on school rolls but are absent from the classroom, often due to household labour demands or impending marriage negotiations. Against this backdrop, the present study deploys a mixed-methods empirical approach anchored in large-sample surveys and qualitative interviews to uncover how the promise of empowerment is mediated, contested, and sometimes undermined in the lived experiences of Malda's adolescent girls. This is an empirical study using both primary and secondary sources, with all data from original fieldwork conducted in 2021."

Literature Review and the Theoretical Framework

The question of girls' empowerment through education in India has generated a substantial body of scholarship, traversing feminist theory, policy analysis, and the sociology of development. Foundational interventions—such as Amartya Sen's capabilities approach (Sen, 1999; Nussbaum, 2011)—recast empowerment as the substantive freedom to choose and act, but critics warn that policy models often translate these freedoms into narrow, measurable outcomes such as enrolment or delayed marriage. The emergence of conditional cash transfer (CCT) schemes like *Kanyashree Prakalpa* represents a new generation of incentive-driven interventions, built on the premise that economic support can tip the balance of family decisions in favour of girls' continued education (Kabeer, 2018; Chakraborty & Majumdar, 2023).

Intersectionality has become indispensable for understanding why universalist policy instruments generate such uneven outcomes. Crenshaw's (1989, 1991) original concept, now reinterpreted for South Asia by Rao (2020), Madhok (2022), and Chakravarti (2018), insists that gender is never a singular axis—empowerment and exclusion are co-constituted by caste, class, religion, and region. Recent ethnographic research in eastern India (Rao, 2020; Roy, 2022) reveals that access to state entitlements is shaped by local kinship, migration, ecological risk, and social hierarchy. The work of Bourdieu (1986, 1990) and Appadurai (2013) is instructive for theorising how "aspiration" and "capital" are differentially distributed some girls can leverage grants to transform their trajectories, while others remain circumscribed by the habitual constraints of everyday life.

Feminist scholars have also warned of the risks of instrumentalising empowerment for policy gain (Batliwala, 2007; Cornwall & Brock, 2005). Roy (2022), Desai (2019), and Parmanand (2023) remind us that bureaucratic focus on numbers can conceal realities of silent dropout, nominal enrolment, or ritual compliance what Merry (2020) calls "the seductions of quantification." International research by UNESCO (2021–2024) and UNICEF (2023) now recognises that intersectional vulnerabilities must be acknowledged if progress is to be meaningful.

In the context of Malda, the empirical literature underscores persistent disparities masked by state averages. Studies report that girls from Muslim, SC, and first-generation learner households remain at higher risk of dropout or early marriage, despite policy efforts (U-DISE, 2022; NFHS-5, 2021; Rao, 2018). The intersection of poverty, migration, disability, and female-headed households intensifies vulnerability. As such, the present analysis situates itself at the nexus of these debates, aiming to re-ground the discourse in empirical realities while advancing a more nuanced, intersectional critique.

Methodology and Sample Characteristics

This study adopts a mixed-methods approach to explore the pathways and paradoxes of girls' empowerment in Malda district under the *Kanyashree Prakalpa* scheme. Quantitative data were gathered through a structured survey administered to a purposive sample of 530 adolescent girls, aged between thirteen and nineteen, drawn from both Muslim and Hindu households, with representation from Scheduled Castes (SC), Other Backward Classes (OBC), and General categories. The survey instrument captured data on school enrolment, retention, reasons for dropout, marriage status, household structure, and perceptions of empowerment, enabling a fine-grained, intersectional analysis of educational trajectories.

The study adopted **a** purposive sampling strategy to ensure representation of adolescent girls across the district's heterogeneous social landscape. Rather than relying on random selection, respondents were chosen to reflect variation by caste, religion, household type, and economic status**,** capturing the intersectional realities of Malda's population. This approach allowed the

sample (n = 530) to foreground voices from especially vulnerable groups first-generation learners, girls from BPL and female-headed households, and those negotiating pressures of early marriage whose experiences might otherwise remain obscured

To supplement and deepen the statistical insights, qualitative fieldwork was conducted across a diverse set of blocks in Malda, encompassing flood-prone villages, peri-urban slums, and market-adjacent communities. In-depth interviews and focus group discussions were undertaken with a sub-sample of surveyed girls, as well as with parents, educators, and community leaders. These interactions were designed to elicit the lived experience of empowerment and exclusion the ways in which girls navigated policy incentives, familial expectations, and structural obstacles. Special attention was paid to voices from the most vulnerable groups: first-generation learners, girls with disabilities, and those from female-headed households, whose narratives are often marginalised in mainstream accounts.

The sample's composition mirrored the district's social heterogeneity: approximately 50 per cent were from Muslim backgrounds (with a majority classified as OBC), while among Hindus, both SC and General categories were represented, with a minority of Christian and tribal girls. Over one-third of respondents were from below-poverty-line households; a significant portion were daughters of migrant workers or single mothers. Educational attainment among parents was generally low, and a substantial fraction of girls reported being first in their family to attend secondary school.

All research procedures followed the ethical standards of social research. Informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to their inclusion in the study. For participants under the age of eighteen, consent was sought from both the adolescent girls and their parent or guardian. All interviews were conducted with due attention to privacy and confidentiality, and pseudonyms have been used throughout to ensure anonymity. Participation was entirely voluntary, and respondents were free to withdraw at any point. The study received ethics approval from all and all fieldwork conformed to the principles outlined in the Declaration of Helsinki (2013).

The empirical data presented in Table 1 foreground the pronounced stratification of educational opportunity among adolescent girls in rural Malda, despite the state's claims of universal empowerment. Receipt of the Kanyashree grant is nearly ubiquitous across all communities, with approximately 93% of the total sample benefiting from the scheme—testament to its extensive administrative reach. However, the translation of this benefit into sustained educational continuity remains sharply uneven.

Hindu General and OBC girls exhibit the highest persistence rates to Class XII (82% and 75%, respectively), while their Muslim counterparts and Hindu SC girls lag with significantly lower continuation rates, ranging from 60% to 69%. This divergence suggests that, even with nearly universal policy access,

historical and social cleavages rooted in caste, religion, and community continue to mediate the effectiveness of empowerment initiatives.

Moreover, the prevalence of early marriage remains notably high among Muslim (General/OBC) and Hindu SC girls, exceeding 20% within these groups. This pattern coincides with disproportionately high rates of first-generation learners, signaling that the "newness" of educational aspiration itself marks vulnerability. Thus, while progress is evident in aggregate terms, it remains fissured and conditional shaped critically by the intersections of identity, social capital, and entrenched gendered norms.

Table 1. Educational Continuity and *Kanyashree* Receipt by Caste and Religion (n = 530)

Group	Received Kanyashree (%)	Continued to Class XII (%)	Married Before 18 (%)	First-Generation Learner (%)	Sample Size (n)
Muslim (OBC)	93%	69%	20%	74%	170
Muslim (General)	90%	63%	21%	67%	95
Hindu (SC)	88%	60%	27%	82%	90
Hindu (OBC)	95%	75%	14%	71%	85
Hindu (General)	97%	82%	8%	49%	72
Christian (General)	90%	70%	17%	78%	18
Total (Weighted Average)	92%	69%	19%	70%	530

Source: Primary field data collected in 2021.

Table 2. Predictors of School Discontinuation and Reported Barriers (n = 530)

Predictor Variable	Discontinued Before Class XII (%)	Continued to Class XII (%)	Cited Early Marriage % (Count)	Cited Financial Constraint % (Count)	Cited Gendered Norms % (Count)	Cited Poor Infrastructure % (Count)	Sample Size (n)	% of Total Sample
Muslim (OBC) Girls	15%	85%	12% (20)	18% (31)	10% (17)	15% (26)	170	32.1 %
Muslim (General) Girls	17%	83%	13% (12)	21% (20)	12% (11)	14% (13)	95	17.9 %
Hindu (SC) Girls	18%	82%	15% (14)	22% (20)	13% (12)	17% (15)	90	17.0 %
Hindu (OBC) Girls	10%	%90	7% (6)	11% (9)	6% (5)	8% (7)	85	16.0 %
Hindu (General) Girls	8%	92%	6% (4)	9% (6)	5% (4)	7% (5)	72	13.6 %
Christian/Tribal Girls	16%	84%	11% (2)	19% (3)	10% (2)	14% (3)	18	3.4%
Disabled Girls (all groups)	23%	77%	14% (3)	23% (5)	16% (3)	20% (4)	20	3.8%
Female-Headed Household	16%	84%	11% (5)	18% (8)	11% (5)	13% (6)	46	8.7%
Total Sample Size							530	100%
Weighted Average %	14.59%	85.41%	12.28%	18.57%	9.91%	12.97%		

Source: Primary field data collected in 2021.

Note: Some respondents belong to multiple categories (e.g., both disabled and SC); group n reflects principal category.

Table 2 illuminates the intersectional barriers that persistently undermine educational retention among Malda's adolescent girls. The overall weighted dropout rate stands at 14.59%, indicating notable progress with discontinuation before Class XII falling below 20% for most subgroups. However, this achievement is unevenly distributed across social and demographic categories.

Muslim General, Muslim OBC, and Hindu SC girls remain especially vulnerable, with dropout rates ranging from 15% to 18%, reflecting deep-rooted patterns of economic deprivation and gendered constraints. Financial constraint emerges as the leading self-reported reason for discontinuation, with a weighted average of 18.57% and peaking at 23% for Hindu SC girls and 21% for Muslim General girls. Poor infrastructure (weighted average 12.97%) and entrenched gender norms (weighted average 9.91%) follow as significant barriers.

Disabled girls and those from female-headed households face heightened risks: nearly a quarter (23%) of disabled girls discontinued before Class XII, with both infrastructural and financial barriers cited at alarming rates above 20%. This underscores compounded marginalization at the intersections of gender, disability, and household structure—groups that remain at the edges of policy reach.

Notably, even within the "better performing" Hindu General and OBC categories where dropout rates are lower at 8–10% early marriage (cited by 6-7%) and financial fragility (9-11%) persist as non-negligible vulnerabilities. These findings portray a landscape of partial but uneven progress: the formal inclusion framework has driven meaningful change, yet empowerment pathways remain deeply shaped by caste, religion, gender, disability, and economic status.

Thus, the data offer both evidence of cautious optimism and a clear challenge to complacency, urging ongoing policy innovation and vigilant support to address persistent and intersecting vulnerabilities.

Case Study 1: Mariam Silent Retention, Hidden Exclusion

Mariam's story unfolds in the shadow of the Ganga, where seasonal floods frequently disrupt village life and intensify the uncertainty that shapes every decision for her Muslim OBC household. At sixteen, she is both a statistical "success" and a subtle casualty of the system.

"My name is on the school register, and the headmaster always says we are doing well. But in truth, I haven't attended classes regularly for many months.

Some days, when the inspection comes, my mother sends me to school otherwise, I stay home, mind the goats, fetch water, or help in the field. It is not that I don't want to study, but there is always work to be done. If I am absent too much, the teacher warns my mother, 'They will stop the government money.' But nobody ever asks how we are managing."

For Mariam, *Kanyashree* is at once a source of pride and a slender thread holding her to the hope of education. "My elder brother left for Kolkata for work after the floods. Now, my mother depends on me. When the *Kanyashree* money comes, we use it for my books, sometimes for food. My uncle keeps saying it is time to arrange my marriage, but my mother says, 'Let her finish school at least, there is still money to come.' I have seen girls in my village who protested marriage because they wanted the grant sometimes it works, sometimes not."

Her daily life is a careful dance between compliance and survival. "We know what the government wants to see names on the roll, girls in uniform, photos on the inspection day. But the real story is at home. We do what is needed so we are not left out, but it doesn't always mean we are learning. Sometimes, I wonder if the officials know what our lives are really like." Mariam's account exposes the bureaucracy's distance from reality and the complex, negotiated status of girls' "empowerment," where official inclusion can conceal profound vulnerability.

Case Study 2: Rekha—Invisible Dropout in the Margins

Seventeen-year-old Rekha lives on the edge of a neglected Dalit hamlet, surrounded by brick kilns and the faded fields of Kaliachak. Her father's disabling accident and her mother's migration to Delhi as a domestic worker thrust Rekha into the role of caregiver for two younger siblings. On paper, she is still an "enrolled" student and a *Kanyashree* recipient, but the materiality of her days tells a very different story.

"I wake before dawn to cook and clean for my brother and sister. If there is no work, I sometimes go to the school just to sign the register. But for over a year now, I have not sat in a classroom, not listened to a teacher. The headmaster says, 'Keep her name, or our school will lose the grant.' I know why they do this—there is pressure from the block office to show we have not lost any girls. But nobody ever visits our house, nobody asks if I am studying or working."

The promise of *Kanyashree*, Rekha recalls, was once intoxicating. "I felt so proud when I got my card and the first money. I wanted to show my mother that I could finish school, maybe become a teacher one day. But when my mother left for work and the last instalment was delayed, I started missing classes, then stopped altogether. My mother calls from Delhi and asks if I am still in school I say yes, because my name is still there. It is safer not to explain too much."

Her story captures a painful contradiction: "The government says girls like me are proof that things are changing in Malda. But if they came to our village, they would see how many of us have dropped out, but only on the inside. Sometimes I wish someone would ask about our lives, not just count our names in their books." Rekha's narrative lays bare the invisible attrition at the heart of official success stories and the ways in which the "retained" can be, in practice, profoundly left behind.

Case Study 3: Ayesha-Transformative Potential through Policy and Support

Ayesha's home, in a busy by-lane of Englishbazar, buzzes with activity: shopfronts, small eateries, the shrill ring of mobile phones. Her family, Muslim OBC by census but fiercely aspirational by inclination, initially resisted her desire to continue beyond class ten.
"My father always said, 'What is the use of more education for a girl?' My mother worried about gossip 'If you stay unmarried too long, people will talk.' But when the school called us for the *Kanyashree* application, the teachers explained, 'If Ayesha stays in school, she will get money and you can use it for her dowry or fees.' My father finally agreed. The first time I brought home the money, it felt like proof that I could do something valuable, even if only for a while."

For Ayesha, the grant catalysed more than mere retention: it shifted the family's perceptions. "My younger cousins saw that I was allowed to go to school in my uniform, walk to tuition, even stay late for exam prep. It became normal for them, too. Now, two of them are preparing for their board exams, and their families are less anxious about delay in marriage."

Her journey, however, was not without struggle. "Sometimes my father would still say, 'Enough, now let's arrange your marriage,' but my mother would remind him, 'There's another year of *Kanyashree* left.' Even after my last exam, I convinced them to let me try for college. I know it is rare for girls from our neighbourhood, but now my family is proud. They tell others, 'She is getting the government scholarship, let her study more.'"

Ayesha's experience is testament to how state schemes, when combined with school advocacy and some measure of kin support, can create ripples of change in communities otherwise resistant to new aspirations.

Case Study 4: Sultana-Delayed Marriage and Emerging New Norms

Sultana, at fifteen, lives in a Muslim OBC family in a riverbank settlement where every monsoon redraws the lines of property, livelihood, and hope. "My uncle started talking about my marriage soon after I passed class eight. He said, 'Now is the time, before another flood.' But my mother stood her ground. She said, 'If Sultana leaves school now, we lose the *Kanyashree* grant. Let her finish class twelve, then you can talk.' It was the first time anyone in

my family argued about keeping a girl in school for money and the first time I saw my uncle hesitate."

For Sultana, *Kanyashree's* value is as much symbolic as financial. "We don't use the money for anything special mostly it is kept aside for when I really need something, like a new uniform or exam fees. But it gives us a reason to say 'not now' when relatives talk about marriage. My little sister, who is just ten, already talks about 'getting *Kanyashree'* as if it is her right, like schoolbooks or Eid clothes."

The scheme's influence, Sultana feels, is quietly remaking the language of possibility in her neighbourhood. "There are still girls who drop out, especially when things get bad at home, or when the floods take away too much. But more and more, families wait until after class twelve. Even our neighbours now talk about who will be next for the *Kanyashree* money. It has changed the way people think about what girls can do."

Sultana's account underscores the subtle but genuine power of conditional cash transfers to nudge norms and create new scripts of aspiration even where the road to full empowerment remains long and uncertain.

Discussion and Interpretation

The empirical findings of this study both affirm and complicate the prevailing narratives around girls' empowerment and educational inclusion in rural Bengal. At first glance, the numbers point to remarkable progress: the near-universal receipt of *Kanyashree* among adolescent girls, significant advances in educational retention, and a tangible postponement of early marriage in many segments. Yet, the deeper analysis statistical and ethnographic reveals that the path to empowerment is neither linear nor uniform. Rather, it is marked by the persistence of intersectional disadvantage, the partiality of policy effects, and the creative, sometimes ambivalent, ways in which girls and their families negotiate the boundaries of inclusion.

One of the study's central contributions lies in unsettling the conflation of enrolment with genuine participation and of policy coverage with lived transformation. The tables and narratives together show that, while Muslim and Hindu SC girls report access to the scheme at levels comparable to their General and OBC peers, they remain overrepresented among those who discontinue before Class XII. The reasons financial constraint, the burden of care, the spectral presence of early marriage are rarely the result of a single axis of disadvantage. Rather, they are woven from the threads of caste, religion, household structure, disability, and local economy, confirming the insight of intersectional theory (Crenshaw, 1991; Chakravarti, 2018; Rao, 2020).

Moreover, the phenomenon of "silent dropout," as captured in the stories of Mariam and Rekha, destabilises any easy celebration of rising retention rates. These girls, counted as "retained" in official registers, are in fact adrift

excluded not only from the classroom but from the broader promise of empowerment that *Kanyashree* was meant to deliver. Their experiences lay bare the limitations of policy metrics that privilege visibility over substance, and expose the bureaucratic pressures on schools to maintain enrolment numbers even at the expense of educational engagement.

Conversely, the narratives of Ayesha and Sultana demonstrate the catalytic role that targeted interventions can play under the right circumstances. Where policy conditionality converges with school advocacy, familial support, and the subtle accretion of new norms, it can open real, if fragile, pathways to aspiration and achievement. In such instances, *Kanyashree* is more than a transfer payment: it is a lever for renegotiating generational bargains and embedding the possibility of girls' education as a new family value.

Yet, even these "success stories" are marked by ambivalence. The gains of the grant remain precarious subject to reversal in the face of economic or ecological shock, or in the event of withdrawal of official attention. And in many cases, as the qualitative evidence makes clear, girls' agency is exercised within narrow constraints, often tactical and provisional rather than transformative. The study therefore echoes feminist critiques of the instrumentalisation of empowerment (Batliwala, 2007; Roy, 2022), warning that the logic of numbers, however impressive, can obscure the more elusive work of securing dignity, autonomy, and recognition in everyday life.

Ultimately, the findings point to a central paradox: empowerment as measured by policy is not always empowerment as lived or experienced. To move closer to the latter requires a double movement both refining the tools of measurement and deepening the engagement with local realities. It means foregrounding the contradictory, the incomplete, and the quietly resistant as essential components of any honest account of social change.

Bourdieu in the Field: Habitus, Capital, and the Dialectic of Empowerment

The paper frames girls' educational trajectories in rural Malda through Bourdieu's relational sociology, centring four interlocking ideas *habitus*, *forms of capital*, *field*, and *illusion* to explain both the patterned reproduction of inequality and the uneven openings for change introduced by welfare schemes such as Kanyashree Prakalpa. For Bourdieu, social life unfolds as a set of fields structured arenas of struggle within which agents endowed with unequal volumes and compositions of capital pursue valued stakes (Bourdieu, 1990). Dispositions sedimented as habitus orient perception and action, making some futures appear self-evident and others implausible. Schooling, far from a neutral ladder, is one such field; it converts inherited advantage into credentialled merit and, at the same time, can become a hinge for transformation when distributions of capital or the rules of the game shift.

Habitus names the durable, embodied schemata through which girls and their families interpret what schooling is "for," what a "proper" age of marriage

might be, and how much risk is tolerable when resources are thin (Bourdieu, 1977, 1990). In Malda's villages, habitus has been formed historically through agrarian precarity, seasonal migration, caste-religious prescriptions around femininity and mobility, and prior, often ambivalent encounters with state institutions. This is not merely "attitude"; it is practical sense. When discontinuation before Class XII appears prudent rather than tragic, that judgement flows from embodied histories that code paid work, domestic labour, and reputational caution as safer investments than prolonged schooling. This helps explain why barriers such as *financial constraint* or *gendered norms* do not operate as discrete external variables; they are internalised as *doxa* the taken-for-granted commonsense of everyday life which renders early marriage or withdrawal thinkable and, at times, honourable.

Capital, in Bourdieu's sense, is multidimensional and convertible (Bourdieu, 1986). *Economic capital* is obvious cash, assets, steady income yet in low-resource settings its volatility matters as much as its level. *Cultural capital* appears as school-aligned capacities (language proficiency, study routines), but also as institutionalised cultural capital (certificates and grades), the currency that the school recognises. *Social capital* denotes the network ties that open or close pathways: the self-help group that explains documentation, the teacher who calls a parent after an absence, the neighbour who escorts girls to the bus stop. *Symbolic capital* recognised honour and credibility threads through decisions about girls' mobility: a family's reputation can constrain movement, yet if publicly tied to "educating daughters," it can also protect persistence against gossip. Crucially, capitals convert. A small stipend may convert into continued enrolment if it stabilises transport costs and the family expects a credential to carry symbolic weight; conversely, a teacher's advocacy (social capital) may convert into symbolic recognition that sustains attendance even when money is tight.

Field names the structured context where these capitals gain force and are assigned value. The *school field* is not only classrooms and examinations; it includes the mundane bureaucracies of admission, attendance, toilets, uniforms, and the unspoken rules about who is welcomed and who is watched. The *household field* is another arena with different stakes: respectability, safety, and subsistence trump distant returns. The *state/welfare field* intersects both, offering resources cash transfers, cycles, uniforms yet doing so through documentation demands, eligibility norms, and discretionary gatekeeping. Girls' trajectories emerge at these intersections: a stipend may arrive late; a toilet may be locked; a teacher may be transferred; an uncle may be willing to accompany her only during the harvest lull. None of these are "micro" exceptions; they constitute the everyday structure of the field.

The concept of *illusion* investment in the game's stakes sharpens this analysis (Bourdieu, 1998). For school to retain girls to Class XII, participants must believe the school game is worth playing *and* that they can plausibly accumulate the right capital to remain competitive. Illusio is neither naïve

enthusiasm nor abstract rationality; it is a historically produced conviction that energises perseverance. Kanyashree works in part because it raises the *perceived* and *recognised* stakes of the school field for girls, parents, and neighbours alike. The transfer signals that the state values girls' schooling and delayed marriage; the public identity of "Kanyashree recipient" can be displayed in school ceremonies or invoked in matrimonial negotiations. That visibility shifts the local economy of esteem, nudging families to re-evaluate what is thinkable. Where head teachers and panchayats align with the programme ensuring timely paperwork, announcing recipients, celebrating results the symbolic yield is magnified; where they are indifferent, the same rupees fail to convert.

Bourdieu's idea of *hysteresis* helps explain why policy effects are uneven over time and across communities (Bourdieu, 2000). When fields change faster than dispositions, habitus calibrated to scarcity and vigilant gender policing may continue to code the route to Class XII as risky or wasteful, even when a cycle or a stipend is available. This is consistent with our pattern where *financial constraint* and *gendered norms* remain widely reported even among continuers: barriers are not eliminated by persistence; they are actively managed. The school field itself exhibits hysteresis: curricular language and evaluative styles (essay genres, time-pressured exams, disciplinary expectations) may continue to privilege middle-class linguistic capital, turning first-generation learners into "deficit bearers," unless requirements are translated pedagogically and bureaucracies are softened.

This perspective reframes common dichotomies. Rather than asking whether dropout is due to "economics" or "culture," a Bourdieusian lens shows how shortages of *economic* capital become *symbolic* vulnerabilities (fear that daily travel will stain reputations), and how gaps in *cultural* capital (exam literacy, bureaucratic know-how) escalate *economic* risk (fees wasted after repeated failure), pushing households toward earlier marriage. It also clarifies why multiple-response reporting of barriers is theoretically appropriate: girls and guardians experience constraints as a *bundle*. A single late bus, a rumour, and an unexpected medical bill can combine to dissolve illusio in a week. The *conversion* bottleneck thus becomes central: identical stipends yield different retention effects depending on a school's bureaucratic culture, a household's stock of cultural/bureaucratic literacy, and a community's symbolic payoffs for "educated daughters."

The Malda evidence aligns with this framework. Discontinuation before Class XII in the combined sample is modest in aggregate yet *clustered* higher among Muslim (OBC/General) and Hindu SC girls, lower among Hindu OBC/General mapping, in part, the unequal distribution of capitals across communities. Financial constraint is the dominant self-reported barrier, followed by infrastructure and gender norms; cross-cutting vulnerabilities (disability; female-headed households) register elevated risk but overlap analytically with religion/caste groups. Read through Bourdieu, these patterns indicate not only "poverty effects" but also the differentiated *convertibility* of

capitals: where transport, toilets, and teacher advocacy are available and reputational returns to schooling are public, small transfers convert into institutionalised cultural capital (certificates, grades). Where documentation hurdles persist, public recognition is absent, or surveillance intensifies with age, funds do not convert, and dispositions tilt back toward exit.

Attention to *symbolic violence* keeps the account critical. Policies can misrecognise structural exclusions as individual failure (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977). If forms are rejected on technicalities, if girls internalise poor grades as proof of incapacity, or if "safety" is framed as a matter of dress rather than of public transport and lighting, the field reproduces domination while appearing fair. Kanyashree's promise is real but uneven: without attention to conversion conditions documentation assistance, safe transit, pedagogic translation, publicly recognised achievement the programme risks becoming what critics call "welfare without transformation." Conversely, when these conditions are in place, the same modest transfer reorganises local hierarchies of value, protecting girls' trajectories by altering the symbolic and practical terms of respectability.

This conceptualisation also grounds testable implications. If *illusio* matters, public recognition events and teacher advocacy should correlate with persistence independent of rupee value. If *conversion* is the bottleneck, then retention effects should vary by school-level bureaucratic and pedagogic culture even when stipends are identical. If *hysteresis* is active, early cohorts after policy changes should show higher discontinuation than later ones, controlling for background, as dispositions catch up to new stakes. These expectations move beyond binary judgements of programme success toward a fine-grained account of how state schemes re-weight local fields.

Therefore , by reading Malda's girls through *habitus*, *capital*, *field*, and *illusio*, we see why discontinuation can remain rational under certain histories, how Kanyashree shifts the perceived stakes of schooling, and where friction points lie. The framework neither romanticises agency nor reduces action to structure; it clarifies the practical logics through which small subsidies, reputational signals, and institutional routines combine to make the journey to Class XII either plausible or prohibitive. This sets the stage for the next section, which translates field–habitus dynamics into a capabilities-based account of agency and intersectional justice.

Rethinking Empowerment: Habitus, Capabilities, and Intersectional Justice

While Bourdieu's conceptual arsenal habitus, capital, distinction, and symbolic violence provides a powerful lens to explain why educational opportunities in Malda remain unevenly distributed, it does not exhaust the interpretive terrain. His emphasis on the reproduction of inequality through cultural capital and social fields highlights how girls from Muslim, Scheduled Caste, or first-generation learner households encounter barriers that are not

only material but symbolic. Yet, to appreciate fully the possibilities of empowerment, it is necessary to place Bourdieu in conversation with other theoretical traditions.

Amartya Sen's capabilities approach reorients the analysis from possession of resources to the substantive freedom to achieve valued functioning. In Malda, a girl may be enrolled in school and even receive the *Kanyashree* grant, yet if patriarchal norms limit her mobility, or if infrastructural deficits constrain attendance, her capabilities remain stunted. Sen reminds us that empowerment must be measured not by input or enrolment, but by the expansion of real choices. This lens reveals the gap between policy promises and lived outcomes the dissonance between being counted in a register and genuinely gaining the freedom to aspire.

Naila Kabeer's resources–agency–achievements framework further complicates this picture. Her formulation emphasises that empowerment requires not just resources (like scholarships) but the agency to make strategic life choices, and the transformation of those into tangible achievements. In Malda, while *Kanyashree* provides resources, agency is often fragile mediated by kinship authority, community pressures, or the precarity of female-headed households. The achievements, therefore, remain uneven, as illustrated by girls like Rekha who are "retained" on paper but absent in classrooms. Kabeer's framework thus draws attention to the intermediate processes of negotiation and contestation that lie between the provision of a grant and the lived reality of empowerment.

Kimberlé Crenshaw's theory of intersectionality brings yet another essential dimension (Crenshaw, 1989, 1991). Where Sen and Kabeer attend to capabilities and agency, Crenshaw insists that exclusion is not additive but interlocking (Crenshaw, 1991). A Muslim girl from a Below Poverty Line household in Malda does not merely face "gender plus poverty plus religion" as separate hurdles; rather, these identities co-constitute her vulnerability in ways that make her experience irreducible to a single axis of analysis. The higher dropout rates among Muslim and SC/ST girls revealed in the survey data are best understood through this intersectional lens, which highlights how caste, religion, and gender intertwine with local patriarchy to produce differentiated risks (Crenshaw, 1989). Intersectionality, in this sense, illuminates experiences that neither Bourdieu's class analysis nor Sen's universalist capabilities framework can fully capture.

Together, these frameworks create a richer, layered analysis. While Bourdieu explains how habitus and symbolic violence reproduce inequalities, Sen underscores the need to evaluate empowerment in terms of substantive freedoms. Kabeer focuses on the fragile link between resources, agency, and achievements, and Crenshaw compels us to see how overlapping identities multiply disadvantage. It is in holding these perspectives in dialogue that the complexity of Malda's girls' lives becomes most visible: their empowerment is partial, negotiated, and interjectionally situated, marked by both the promises and paradoxes of policy intervention.

If the capabilities approach shifts attention from the possession of means to the expansion of real freedoms, Sen's wider writings compel a further reorientation: from the rhetoric of equality to the practical demands of equity, from outcome tallies to the ethics of public reasoning, and from abstract fairness to what can be reasonably judged as just within concrete social worlds (Sen, 1999; Sen, 2005). Uniform entitlements such as a flat scholarship or a one-time grant create the outward appearance of parity, yet Sen's concern is with whether girls' capabilities are actually enlarged. Equal inputs may mask unequal conversion: the same rupee converts differently into freedom for a girl in a flood-prone hamlet facing mobility restrictions than for one in a semi-urban neighbourhood with reliable transport and supportive kin. Justice, in this register, requires equity differential attention where disadvantage is layered and persistent rather than an arithmetic distribution of identical benefits (Sen, 1999).

A second refinement is Sen's distinction between opportunity freedom and process freedom. A programme can increase the menu of options enrolment, exam registration, eligibility for a grant yet leave the processes through which choices are made untouched. In Malda, a girl may have the formal option to remain in school but face family deliberations in which her voice carries little weight, or community negotiations where "respectability" and "safety" are invoked to curtail travel, tuition, or time outside the home. Sen's point is that empowerment must be evaluated not only by the options on offer, but by whether the decision-making procedures respect agency, reason-giving, and non-coercion (Sen, 1999; Sen, 2005). Where *Kanyashree* is invoked to delay marriage "for the money," the opportunity expands while process may remain paternalistic; where girls persuade families through reasoned argument, both dimensions advance.

Relatedly, Sen insists on the importance of agency freedom and agency achievement the distinction between having the space to pursue one's valued ends and actually realising them. Your cases in Malda show both: Ayesha's use of the scheme to renegotiate her schooling exemplifies agency achievement; Mariam's intermittent attendance reveals agency constrained by labour demands and seasonal disruption, despite the nominal availability of support. On Sen's terms, policy must cultivate girls as agents participants in public reasoning about their futures rather than treat them as passive recipients whose "welfare" is managed by others (Sen, 1999; Sen, 2005).

Another crucial move concerns the informational basis of judgment. If evaluation relies narrowly on enrolment, pass rates, or disbursement counts, it excludes the very information that matters for judging justice: safe mobility, instructional time actually received, the frequency of silent dropout, the texture of intra-household bargaining, and the presence of respectful deliberation in school committees or village forums. A just appraisal, Sen argues, must widen the informational basis to include what people can reasonably do and be, as well as how decisions are formed (Sen, 1999). Your

Malda design pairing tables with thick case narratives enacts precisely this enlargement of admissible information.

Sen also warns against adaptive preferences: when prolonged deprivation leads people to scale down their aspirations and report satisfaction with meagre options. In Malda, a girl who says she is "content" with minimal attendance because "we are on the rolls and the money comes" may be calibrating her desires to constrained horizons. Treating such satisfaction as evidence of success would be, on Sen's account, a moral error; the point is to expand the feasible set so that contentment reflects choice, not resignation (Sen, 1999).

Finally, Sen's notion of positional objectivity helps interpret the divergences you document between official narrative and village reality. What counts as "progress" looks different from the vantage of a district spreadsheet than from a riverside settlement where transport vanishes in the monsoon and adolescent girls shoulder care work. Recognising the partiality of vantage points does not relativise truth; it disciplines evaluation to consider the positioned evidence without which judgments of justice are incomplete (Sen, 2005). Hence the methodological and ethical necessity of your field-based testimony: it is not anecdotal add-on but constitutive of a more objective assessment.

Read together, these threads demand a different policy posture in Malda: equity over uniformity; attention to process, not just options; agency as the end of intervention, not merely its means; an expanded informational basis for monitoring; vigilance against adaptive satisfactions; and humility about positional standpoints in judging success (Sen, 1999; Sen, 2005). In this light, *Kanyashree* is neither panacea nor pretence. It is a platform whose justice must be measured by the freedoms it substantively enlarges freedoms to learn, to move, to argue, and to choose especially for those situated at the intersection of the district's most stubborn disadvantages.

Conclusion: The Alchemy of Empowerment and the Limits of Policy Reason

The preceding analysis, deeply grounded in Bourdieu's sociology, insists that empowerment particularly in a context as layered as rural Malda cannot be understood, nor achieved, through the delivery of conditional benefits or the arid logic of numbers alone. Rather, what emerges is a vision of empowerment as a slow and difficult process of social alchemy, one in which economic incentives, educational opportunity, and the everyday textures of aspiration are all inextricably woven into the fabric of collective history, shared sensibility, and the struggle for distinction.

It is precisely this entwined complexity that exposes the limitations of a technocratic or economistic approach to gender policy. *Kanyashree*, for all its genuine innovations, remains tethered to the logic of calculability: that is, the conviction that enrolment, delayed marriage, and credentialing are sufficient proxies for the deeper transformation of lives. Yet, as our field evidence and

theoretical excavation make clear, the transmission of empowerment is mediated by the subterranean channels of habitus, by the subtle (and often silent) inheritance of cultural capital, by the unarticulated rules of local doxa, and by the aesthetic codes that demarcate who belongs, who aspires, and who is consigned to the margins. The simple presence of a scheme however universal its intention does not by itself disrupt the tacit hierarchies or aesthetic distinctions that shape a girl's everyday sense of worth and possibility.

What is called for, then, is a reimagining of intervention one that recognises policy as not merely distributive, but as an invitation to participate in the forging of new social possibilities. True empowerment, in this vision, cannot be engineered from above, nor reduced to compliance with administrative rubrics. Instead, it is born of the slow renegotiation of value within the very worlds where girls live: the schoolyard, the kitchen, the market lane, and the quiet rooms where ambitions are voiced and silenced. It is here that symbolic capital, once conferred by the state, must be transmuted into everyday agency by means of collective recognition and the persistent, often unremarked, work of self-formation.

This also demands a more honest, and frankly more ambitious, mode of evaluation. The seductions of quantification the allure of rising enrolment graphs or declining child marriage rates must not blind us to the ambiguities, improvisations, and resistances that pulse beneath the statistical surface. Ethnographic attunement, with its attention to the minor key of experience, to the “taste for the possible” as Bourdieu names it, is vital if we are to glimpse the transformative, or indeed the tragic, dimensions of policy in practice. Empowerment, after all, is lived not in aggregates but in the singularities of recognition, aspiration, and, often, in the wounds of misrecognition that persist where the field of possibility remains tightly circumscribed.

To speak of empowerment, then, is to invoke a horizon that is at once ethical, symbolic, and aesthetic. It is to imagine a world in which the habitus itself might be gently but inexorably reconfigured where new forms of distinction become available not only to the already privileged, but to those who have for too long been disciplined by the constraints of inherited taste and thwarted desire. The challenge for policy, for research, and for the broader civic imagination, is to sustain this horizon: to cultivate not only access, but belonging; not only compliance, but conviction; not only the outward forms of success, but the inward experience of dignity and possibility. In the end, the lesson of Malda is neither the romance of uplift nor the cynicism of critique, but a sober recognition of social change as an art tentative, recursive, and always unfinished. Empowerment is not the sum of its incentives, but the measure of its resonance in the field of everyday life.

To write of empowerment in the wake of this inquiry is to acknowledge that no policy, however inspired or scientifically attuned, can fully orchestrate the moral drama that unfolds in the shadowed interstices between the state and the subject, between the grammar of rules and the fugue of everyday aspiration.

The fieldwork in Malda, when brought into conversation with Bourdieu's subtle sociology, gestures toward a vision of empowerment not as a linear end-state, but as a complex, dialectical process one that is perpetually unmaking and remaking itself at the margins of legibility.

What emerges most forcefully is the *dialectics of recognition and misrecognition* a perpetual movement in which state projects like *Kanyashree* both bestow and withhold, illuminate and obscure. The symbolic capital conferred by the grant is real, but always mediated by the embodied memory of loss, the generational weight of silence, the gentle violence of local doxa that tells some girls they are "less suited" for schooling, or "born" for marriage. In these moments, policy's promise flickers: at once dazzling and fragile, marked by sudden gains, stubborn stagnations, and unexpected reversals. The school, like Bourdieu's art gallery, becomes a site of adjudication a space where taste, distinction, and the very sense of the possible are contested in gestures, silences, glances, and the unspoken discipline of bodies in space.

To think with Bourdieu is to refuse the comfort of final answers. It is to apprehend the "logic of practice" as a kind of social choreography: the state arranges the stage, scripts the part, but the actors improvise, stumble, resist, and at times, pirouette away from the script altogether. Empowerment, then, is not the simple outcome of conditionality, but the unpredictable, always partial, effect of the interplay between structure and improvisation between the field's demands and the habitus's inherited disposition. There is no guarantee that a girl, even when "included" by policy, is truly participating in the illusio of education; and there are always those who unrecorded in any ledger forge new aspirations in the crevices of exclusion.

The policy implication, therefore, is not merely to "do more" or "target better," but to cultivate a radical reflexivity at every level of intervention. Planners, educators, and researchers must be wary of the seductive clarity of numbers and success stories. Instead, they must learn to dwell in the "grey zones" of ambiguous achievement and unfinished agency to attune themselves to the lived aesthetics of empowerment as it unfolds in the everyday: hesitant, interrupted, sometimes vanishing altogether beneath the surface of compliance.

Finally, for scholarship itself, this inquiry is a call to humility a recognition that the most generative analyses do not simply map outcomes but render visible the shadow-structure of possibility, failure, and becoming. It is in the oscillation between hope and disenchantment, between the poetics of aspiration and the politics of allocation, that the sociological imagination finds its true vocation. Here, in the restless dialogue between field and habitus, we glimpse the work of emancipation not as a completed fact, but as an unfinished art one that demands, from all who would intervene, the patience of the ethnographer, the vigilance of the critic, and, above all, the humility to know that every act of empowerment is also an act of re-invention, always unfinished, always still to come.

If this inquiry has taught anything, it is that to study empowerment in the interstitial spaces of rural Bengal is to court ambiguity, contradiction, and the incalculable weight of small, everyday acts. No algorithm can measure the silent revolt of a girl who, for a season, refuses marriage; no table can capture the fleeting confidence in the eyes of a first-generation learner who deciphers a line of poetry alone in her room. These moments, as fragile as they are profound, summon the researcher, the policymaker, and the citizen alike to a more exacting discipline: the practice of attentiveness.

Attentiveness is not mere observation, nor is it passive reception. It is, rather, a radical orientation toward the textures of the ordinary, an ethical stance that honours what often escapes the notice of official reason. To attend is to acknowledge not only the visible successes but also the gaps, the hesitations, and the silent undoing that haunt the data. It is to listen for what cannot be coded: the subtle inflections of voice, the minor gestures of resistance, the idiosyncratic hopes that shimmer beneath the surface of compliance or failure.

Such an ethics resists the hubris of grand design. It knows that transformation if it comes at all will be uneven, discontinuous, and always at risk of reversal. Yet it also refuses despair, choosing instead the stance of patient engagement: to bear witness to lives in the making, to recognize the slow, recursive labour by which girls, families, and communities renegotiate the boundaries of possibility. It is in this willingness to linger with ambiguity, to resist the easy closure of verdict or prescription, that social research rediscovers its critical vocation.

Thus, the last word belongs not to policy, nor even to theory, but to a future as yet unwritten a future composed in the fitful grammar of struggle, care, and imagination. To remain attentive is, in the end, to leave space for this becoming: to hold open the horizon where, in ways both minute and momentous, empowerment might still emerge. Perhaps, in the end, all that can be asked of research is that it holds a mirror up to the uncertain, intricate, and unrepeatable lives it seeks to illuminate never fully grasping, always arriving late, yet still refusing indifference. In the fields and courtyards of Malda, amid the ambiguous choreography of promise and paradox, the story of girls' empowerment remains open, unfinished, and quietly persistent. It is a story written not only in policies or statistics, but in the daily acts of hope, negotiation, and the quiet courage to begin again. This, too, is the work of scholarship: to abide with the unfinished, to offer witness where certainty cannot be found, and to keep faith with those small, often unrecorded, revolutions that make the future possible.

In the end, what the Malda narratives compel us to recognise is that empowerment cannot be captured by any single grammar neither the calculus of cultural capital, nor the ledgers of state policy, nor the moral abstractions of universal justice. It is instead a fragile and unfinished weaving of distinction and aspiration, of freedoms claimed and freedoms withheld, of agency sometimes thick and sometimes barely discernible. If Bourdieu alerts us to the ways in which hierarchies are inscribed in habitus, Sen teaches us to ask

whether real choices are enlarged; if Kabeer reminds us that resources must be transmuted into agency and achievement, Crenshaw insists that we remain vigilant to the simultaneity of marginalities. The lesson of Malda, therefore, is not that empowerment has failed, but that it is perpetually in negotiation lived in registers of resilience and silence, possibility and paradox. To speak of girls' futures here is to honour both the weight of history and the promise of transformation, recognising that the true measure of policy lies not in the uniformity of its reach, but in its ability to illuminate the most shadowed lives and extend to them the dignity of choice.

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Article: Impact of Swachh Bharat Abhiyan on Sanitation Practices Prevalent among Tharu Tribe: A Sociological Study

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Impact of Swachh Bharat Abhiyan on Sanitation Practices Prevalent among Tharu Tribe: A Sociological Study

-- Vimal Kumar Lahari

Abstract

The research form analyses the effects of the Swachh Bharat Abhiyan (SBA) of the Government of India launched in 2014, which focuses on the hygiene-related behaviour of the Tharu tribe residing in the Terai region of Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand. Research adopted the Mixed-Method approach and compiled data through discussion on fifty Tharu families with more than three hundred persons, structured questionnaires and focus groups. Research findings indicate that especially in women and children, a significant increase in the use of health-related hygiene and the use of domestic toilets has been reflected. However, the non -availability of water resources, the intensive interaction of cultural stereotypes and insufficiency of the infrastructure, cause obstruction in fully institutionalizing this transitional process. From the sociological perspective, this study reveals that cleanliness-based practices are not just a private option, but they are inherent in deep socio-cultural sets, structural disparities and gender-based power-relations. This research emphasizes that hygiene behaviour is formed through the process of collective consciousness, cultural attitudes and social reproduction of society. Therefore, research recommends that sanitation initiatives to be taken for tribal communities should be based on cultural relativism, Participatory Planning and Comprehensive Monitoring, so that long -term and sustainable change in these communities can be based on.

Keywords: *Swachh Bharat Abhiyan, Tharu Tribe, Sanitation, Cultural Sensitivity, Gender, Community Participation*

Introduction

The Swachh Bharat Abhiyan (SBA) launched on October 2, 2014, has now entered its second phase. Although the idea of cleanliness in Indian Society has been present since ancient times and was later emphasized during India's freedom movement mainly by leaders like Gandhi it remained under-practiced due to various economic, social and cultural constraints (Chakrabarty, 2015). The primary objective of the SBA is to eliminate open defecation and promote cleanliness in the human environment. Not a government scheme, Swachh Bharat Abhiyan (SBA) is widely accepted as a symbol of a socio-cultural conversion. It is active in solid waste management, environmental hygiene and improvement of women's empowerment. The second phase of the campaign focuses on durability and institutional strength, This All-India Movement has been an indicator of a transformative phase in the field of public health and social consciousness, with deep changes at cultural and structural levels. The active role of government and non-governmental organizations has been decisive in the effective implementation of this approach. Environmental hygiene is considered the cornerstone of a healthy life. In a country like India,

where rural and tribal diversity is excessive, there are problems related to hygiene and complex. Waterborne diseases such as diarrhea, malaria and typhoid are prevalent in remote areas (World Health Organization, 2020). SBA, inspired by Gandhian values, aims to make India free from open defecation and establish modern hygiene behavior in public (Ministry of Drinking Water and Sanitation, 2021). In many rural settings, toilets fall into disuse due to poor maintenance, water scarcity, and lack of behavioral reinforcement (Gupta, Khalid, and Deshpande, 2020). Despite this, the availability of basic facilities like clean water and toilets is still limited today. Their nature, agriculture and cultural tendencies related to cottage industries affect their cleanliness behavior. Traditions such as open defecation and dependence on natural water sources are still prevalent. This study attempts to analyze how to affect these traditional conduct and how social structures and cultural beliefs play the role of an intermediary in the process of adopting hygiene. This research aims to understand this important difference and contribute towards the development of influential policy structure.

Literature Review

Yadav(2025) highlights the comparative metrics between the official data of the sanitaion practices and the lived realities of the people actually suffering from the unhygeinic environment around them. He majorly used the field work in Kanpur gram panchayat, Udaipur(Rajasthan), in which the study finds the forcefullness of being open defecation free as soon as possible lead to the non funtional construction of dysfunctional toilets.

Kumar Alok's book Squatting with Dignity (2010) is a monograph based on Indian rural society, that specificaly is centered on Total Sanitation Campaign afterb 1999. Author explores the lived experiences along with the secondary data available on ground level. Through this, he presents the exploration of the sanitation policy, the institutional factors and the major limitations. This study helps to undferstan the prevailing factors of sanitation and hygiene in the Indian Society.

Dandabathula et.al.(2019) provided an impact assesment of India's Swachh Bharat Abhiyan where he analyzed the trend in acute diarrheal disease (ADD) outbreaks during 2010-2018 using data from Integrated Disease Surveillence Programme, with cordination to toilet construction under SBM.

Arvind Kumar, in his research work “Tribal cultures of India: A study of the Tharu” (2012), has examined the cultural norms influencing the sanitation practices of Tharu communities. He has highlighted rituals and tables related to hygiene, which are culturally significant and sometimes modern sanitation adoptions in the Tharu community. Kumar recommends culturally sensitive sanitation reforms for sanitation acceptance in the Tharu community.

Barnard and colleagues' (2013) analysis of the Total Sanitation Campaign (TSC) in Odisha state suggests that infrastructural expansion, such as quantitative increase in toilet construction, does not guarantee behavioural

transformation. The study found that despite structural acquisition, the rate of utilization remained low, the main reason for which was cultural structuralism, ecological inaccessibility of water-based resources and institutional inefficiency related to maintenance. This deviation is particularly severe in tribal areas where local social life is governed by traditional metaphors, symbols and faith-related codes of conduct. This analysis seems to be very relevant in the context of the Tharu community, where distrust of formal sanitation systems, traditional naturalistic consciousness and geographical constraints, such as water-availability crisis, do not materialise social change. The finding of this research is that top-down planning frameworks alone are not likely to bring about social behaviour change unless community-based participatory planning, timely monitoring, and resensitization strategies are coherently employed.

Seth and Jain (2024) in their article "India's National Sanitation Policies: Evolution, Impact and Recommendations" finds the historical tracing of the Sanitation Initiatives from the Central Rural Sanitation Programme to Swach Bharat Mission, focusing major policy interventions, achievements, and prevailing challenges. They argue that while access to toilets has significantly improved, the real challenge lies in their consistent use and maintenance.

Coffey and Spears' (2017) analysis makes clear that the sanitation crisis in India is not just a product of infrastructural inadequacies, but is deeply rooted in the cultural graces, caste hierarchies and philosophical content of rural social structures. Their anthropologically-based and survey-based research posits that in rural societies, the biological process of defecation is linked to cultural discourses of purity and traditional naturalism, while the use of inclusive toilets is sanctioned as 'modernist impurity'. The authors argue that the Swachh Bharat Abhiyan did not adopt a strategy to penetrate these deeply institutionalised cultural symbols and symbolic capital, thereby limiting its operational impact. This symbolic resistance acquires further institutional complexity, especially among tribal communities like the Tharu, where environmental consciousness and ethnic-based way of life are intertwined with cultural practices.

Mohapatra (2019), in his article "Projected Behavioural Change in Swachh Bharat Mission: A Public Policy Perspective", analyses the mission through the lens of behavioural changeb and public policy, emphasizing that its real success lies not just in the toilet construction but in transforming the behavioural and social norms. Focusing on the comunity oriented sanitation models, the author highlights how SBM adds to the viewpoint collective responsibility of hygiene.

Sharma and Pandey (2020) focus on the Tharu tribe in their study in the context of sanitation challenges and the role of SBA. Their study explores the interplay between traditional hygiene practices and modern sanitation initiatives promoted under SBA. The research uses a mixed-methods approach to get to know about the accessibility, utilization and cultural acceptance and practices of sanitation facilities among Tharu households. The study finds that

despite government efforts adherence to traditional practices often hinders the adoption of modern sanitation methods. This study suggests that incorporating tribal traditions into sanitation campaigns can enhance SBA like schemes effectiveness.

Kumar et al. (2019) in their study investigate the behavioral changes in hygiene and sanitation practices among Tharu women after SBA implementation. Using qualitative interviews, this study finds out that SBA-led awareness programs significantly improved personal hygiene and the use of toilets. However, the challenges like water scarcity and inadequate maintenance of public toilets persist in hilly areas. The study emphasizes the role of women as change agents in promoting community-wide adoption of improved sanitation practices. So, women role will be crucial in the success of this scheme in tribal communities.

Jaiswal and Verma (2021) in their study evaluate SBA's impact on sanitation in marginalized communities like tribes and women etc. with a specific focus on the Tharu tribe residing in northern districts of Uttar Pradesh. The researchers used survey-based data collection methodology to measure key indicators such as toilet construction, usage and overall cleanliness being practiced. The results of this study reveal that while SBA facilitated significant infrastructural development, socio-economic barriers like poverty with illiteracy limited the initiative's long-term success. So, the study suggests integrating community participation and honest implementation of education programs for sustainable outcomes of this and other same type schemes.

Research Gaps

Although the academic discourse focused on cleanliness -related behavior in the Swachh Bharat Abhiyan (SBA) and in rural India is constantly expanded, in the field of research, especially in the context of socially disadvantaged tribal communities such as Tharu, many theoretical and empirical vacancies are still present. While most of the studies offer generalized discussions of the hygiene behavior of tribal groups, there are minority numbers that provide micro-level analysis keeping in mind the specific ecological-cultural structures of the Tharu community. As a result, there is a lack of empirical studies centered to understand the impact of SBA in the content of daily hygiene exercises and living experiences of the Tharu community. Also, most of the available research is operated from practical, infrastructural or economic-functional perspectives, which often negate the underlying sociological aspects of the processes of social change in hygiene. Such as the tradition-based belief system, gender-resolved experience, the role of casteist social stratification and community-based agency, which creates cleanliness results in deep social contexts, has been limited to limitedly so far. Especially it is reflected that no research has yet brought hygiene infection in the Tharu society to serious sociological analysis through the mediation mechanisms of social structure, cultural symbolism and powerful social relations.

The study presented attempts to fulfill this ideological-principal vacancy,

which not only as a technical or practical undertaking, but as a process of culturally underlying social transformation within a tribal society.

Research Objectives

In light of the identified research gaps particularly the scarcity of community-specific and sociologically oriented studies on sanitation practices among the Tharu tribe, the present study sets out to explore the intersections of tradition, social structure and behavioural change in the context of the Swachh Bharat Abhiyan. The objectives of this research are as follows:

1. To investigate traditional sanitation practices and cultural perceptions among the Tharu tribe with particular attention to how ecological beliefs, customary rituals and spatial arrangements shape daily hygiene behaviour.

2. To analyze the impact of the Swachh Bharat Abhiyan on sanitation infrastructure and hygiene-related behavioral changes within Tharu households, assessing both material adoption (e.g., toilet construction) and symbolic acceptance (e.g., hygiene as a moral and social value).

3. To examine the socio-structural and cultural barriers including gender norms, generational hierarchies, economic constraints and religious beliefs that influence the implementation and sustainability of sanitation practices in Tharu-dominated regions.

4. To evaluate the role of women and youth as agents of change, particularly in mobilizing community awareness and fostering behavioural transformation through formal (e.g., school programs) and informal (e.g., household-level) channels.

5. To contribute a sociologically grounded framework for understanding sanitation adoption in tribal contexts by integrating theories of cultural relativism, structural functionalism and diffusion of innovation into the analysis.

These objectives aim not only to document shifts in sanitation practices but also to critically understand the embeddedness of such changes in the social fabric of a marginalized tribal community.

Research Area

The area of research for the present study was Uttar Pradesh state. At present, Tharu tribes reside in large numbers in Uttar Pradesh. At present, the population of Tharu tribes in Uttar Pradesh is 105536, which was the universe of this study. Tharu tribes residing in various areas of Maharajganj district of Uttar Pradesh have been included in the overall population. The details of these areas are as follows:

1.Nautanwa, 2. Sonauli, 3. Bishanpurwa, 4. Pipratola, 5. Bhagatpurwa,6.

Taraini, 7. Sekhuwani, 8. Michlaul, 9. Dagarpur, 10. Doghara,11. Sonhawa, 12. Mahua, 13. Peeparhiya, 14. Parsamali

Tribal Features

The cultural, ecological and social distinctiveness of the Tharu tribe forms the foundational context for the present study. Residing primarily in the Terai belt of the Indo-Nepal border particularly in districts like Maharajganj, Lakhimpur Kheri, and Bahraich the Tharus are officially classified as a Scheduled Tribe and are known for their deep-rooted connection with forests, rivers and subsistence agriculture. Their lifestyle is fundamentally eco-centric, characterized by indigenous agricultural practices, forest-foraging and small-scale cottage industries, which provide the material and symbolic grounding for their sanitation practices. Traditionally, the Tharu worldview integrates hygiene and sanitation with natural surroundings. Cleanliness is viewed not just as a behavioural norm but as a seasonal and ritualistic act linked with agricultural cycles and community festivals. The social structure of Tharu society is basically based on a collectivistic tendency and innovative structure. Family organizations are often concentrated around extended domestic units, where decisions such as land ownership, rituals and hygiene behavior are taken by seniors or traditional leaderships under collective decisive processes. Social gender division is clear-where men are associated with external agriculture-based economic activities, women are the main agents of reproduction work such as domestic hygiene, care work and food making. However, subjects such as the privacy of men or the requirement of protected hygiene sites for women, have been historically become neglected and marginalized in community and policy discourse. The Tharu community is protected through high-level socio-cultural co-functioning and mutual dependence, community rituals, traditional labor systems and networking based on blood relations. This cultural embeddedness (Cultural Embededness) On the one hand for hygiene interventions, on the one hand creates strong structural obligation, on the other hand it also offers potential structural opportunities. On the one hand, the prohibition of external interventions due to the cultural legitimacy of social customs is relatively common.

Limitations of the Study

The research was conducted in remote and resource-limited areas, lacking in amenities such as roads, electricity, the Internet etc. In addition to all this some traditional beliefs and social barriers among the Tharu tribe make it difficult to understand and accept sanitation-related changes. This regional and tribal specificity makes the research suitable for a detailed analysis of sanitation practices and socio-cultural impacts.

Methodology

This study used the qualitative and quantitative based mix approaches. In this study the qualitative approach was used so that a deeper understanding of the

cultural and traditional sanitation practices of the Tharu tribe could be gained, while the quantitative approach was attempted to measure the impact of the Swachh Bharat Abhiyan and the changes in sanitation practices in the tribe being studied.

Methods of data collection

The following methods were adopted for data collection:

Interviews: Structured interviews were conducted with community leaders, women and youth of Tharu tribe.

Survey: 50 households were purposefully selected and their family members were surveyed with a questionnaire on sanitation practices and impact of the campaign.

Focus Group Discussion: Focus group discussions were conducted to understand community participation and to gather collective views.

Sample Selection

50 households having 370 members belonging to Tharu tribe were purposefully selected and surveyed with a questionnaire cum interview schedule having open and closed end questions on sanitation practices and impact of the campaign.

Data Analysis

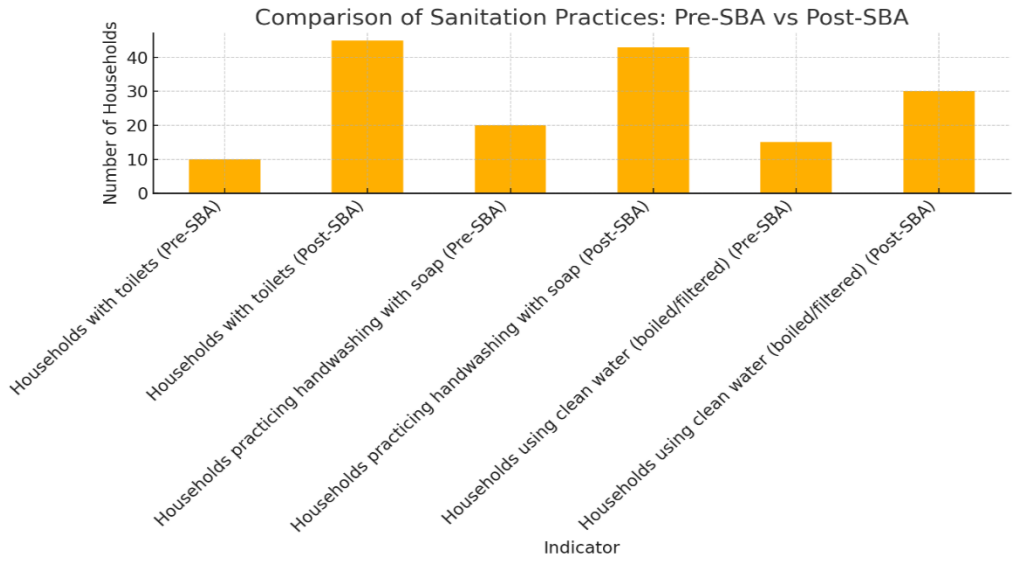
The data collected from the survey method was analysed with appropriate statistical tools so that we could get better understanding of the cultural and social impacts on the tribe being studied. This methodology provides a comprehensive analysis of the impact of Swachh Bharat Abhiyan.

Data Interpretation and Analysis

The present study, conducted across 50 households comprising 370 individuals from the Tharu tribe residing in the Terai region of Maharajganj district in Uttar Pradesh including areas such as Nautanwa, Sonauli, Bishanpurwa, and Pipratola etc. reveals a multifaceted transformation in sanitation practices following the implementation of the Swachh Bharat Abhiyan (SBA) which was initiated in 2014 as a nationwide cleanliness campaign.

Sanitation Indicator	**Pre-SBA Households**	**Post-SBA Households**
Toilet	10	45

Availability		
Handwashing with Soap	20	43
Use of Boiled/Filtered Water	15	30



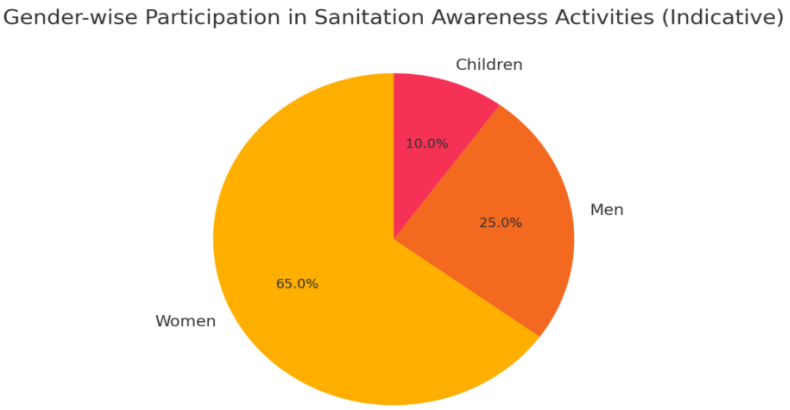
Prior to SBA, only 10 out of the 50 households (20%) had access to proper toilet facilities compelling the majority of families to engage in open defecation a practice often legitimized through traditional ecological logic and cultural norms embedded in their relationship with nature. Yet, post-SBA intervention, the number of households with toilets surged dramatically to 45 (90%), indicating not only infrastructural expansion but also a perceptible shift in behavioural orientation, wherein sanitation moved from being an external governmental prescription to a gradually internalized community priority. The change was even more pronounced in hygiene behaviours, where the percentage of households practicing regular handwashing with soap rose from 40% to nearly 86%, which was largely facilitated through targeted awareness campaigns, school-level hygiene education, and participatory sensitization drives involving women and children as primary agents of transformation. In terms of water purification, which is a crucial determinant of public health in tribal settings, the proportion of households adopting safe water practices (like boiling and filtering) increased from 30% to 60%, highlighting an evolving awareness of the link between clean water and disease prevention, especially concerning diarrheal and enteric illnesses that had been historically prevalent in these regions. Qualitative data from interviews and focus group discussions

revealed that the role of women in facilitating these transformations was particularly significant not merely as passive recipients of infrastructure but as active decision-makers who ensured the proper usage and maintenance of toilets, especially during vulnerable times such as menstruation and pregnancy. Many women noted a newfound sense of dignity and security due to the availability of household toilets, particularly during nighttime, which previously posed risks of exposure and assault. Interestingly, this change extended beyond individual behaviours to spatial restructuring of domestic life families began relocating traditional fish-farming ponds once located close to homes and major sources of mosquito breeding and water stagnation to more distant parts of the village, indicating a deepened ecological sanitation consciousness. Moreover, households began creating separate zones for livestock and elderly or young members thereby internalizing the message of spatial hygiene. Yet, despite such progressive trends certain structural and cultural obstacles remained prominent: chronic water scarcity in hilly and forest-fringe villages hindered regular toilet usage, while cultural beliefs among older generations continued to valorize open defecation as 'natural,' 'pure,' and in harmony with the environment. The persistence of such beliefs underscores the fact that sanitation transitions cannot be viewed solely through infrastructural or behavioural lenses but must be situated within a deeper cultural context that recognizes resistance as well as receptivity. Nevertheless, the SBA has initiated a powerful sanitation discourse within the Tharu community one that merges state-driven developmental imperatives with locally situated cultural logics thereby marking the beginning of what may be termed as a culturally mediated sanitation modernity. These findings point toward the necessity of sustained engagement through culturally tailored interventions, water security provisioning, and women-led community sanitation leadership models to achieve long-term public health gains and behavioural consolidation among tribal populations.

Sociological Analysis

Sanitation is not merely a matter of personal hygiene but an essential mechanism through which the collective health and harmony of society is maintained. The findings of the present study among the Tharu tribe clearly show that the Swachh Bharat Abhiyan (SBA) has, in effect, functioned as a structural intervention that reinforces societal integration and development. From a structural-functionalist viewpoint, the introduction and adoption of sanitation practices like toilet construction and handwashing have not only contributed to better health outcomes but have also strengthened community level cohesion by aligning individual behaviours with collective welfare. The improvements in sanitation, therefore, serve as both symbolic and functional anchors for the larger social structure of the Tharu tribe. However, sanitation behaviours are not adopted in a cultural vacuum; they are embedded in long-standing beliefs and practices. This is where a cultural relativist perspective becomes essential. The traditional lifestyle of the Tharu tribe, which emphasizes living in harmony with nature, has historically influenced their sanitation habits. Practices like open defecation were not merely due to lack of

infrastructure but were often viewed as natural, clean and ecologically integrated. So, the resistance toward using enclosed toilets among some households must be understood not as ignorance but as a product of cultural values. The success of SBA in this context lies in its gradual accommodation into the local ethos, whereby cleanliness was reframed not as an alien idea but as a continuation of Tharu ecological consciousness, now aligned with public health goals. Additionally, the Diffusion of Innovation theory offers an insightful lens into how new sanitation behaviours spread across the community. Women and children, mainly young girls who received hygiene education in schools and through community meetings, acted as early adopters and internal change agents. Their active participation not only facilitated household-level behavioural change but also created ripple effects in the wider social sphere. In this context, women emerged as key influencers in promoting the use and maintenance of toilets, especially during menstruation and pregnancy which significantly enhanced their sense of dignity and safety. This transformation is also reflected in how spaces within homes were reorganized animal sheds moved away, separate spaces created for children and elders all pointing to a deeper sanitation consciousness taking root in the community.



Supporting this interpretation, my field data indicates that a majority of participation in sanitation awareness activities came from women (65%), followed by men (25%) and children (10%). This feminization of sanitation leadership highlights a crucial intersection of gender and community health making women not just beneficiaries but also custodians of hygiene practices. Thus, sanitation in the Tharu tribe's context cannot be seen as a one-dimensional programmatic success but rather as a complex social process where tradition and modernity interact through negotiation, adaptation and gradual transformation. These sociological insights underscore the importance of culturally grounded, gender-sensitive and community-led approaches for the long-term success of such national missions.

Challenges and Recommendations

Although the Swachh Bharat Abhiyan (SBA) has started the process of direct changes in the cleanliness landscape of the Tharu tribal community, many structural and cultural barriers are still disrupting its target achievements. The most prominent of these obstacles is - the firmness of such traditional behaviour and deep cultural monuments, which recognize open defecation as a natural and accepted social conduct. In the light of prior discussion, if it is seen from the point of view of cultural relativism, then this resistance is not illegal or ignorant, but is associated with the structural reality of tribal life-scholars, which has an intensive symbolic significance of proximity to natural places and open lands. As a result, if only infamous means are provided without communicating with these cultural parameters, then it becomes a factor of temporary or inconsistent adaptation in behaviours. In addition, the continuous lack of water resources in inaccessible and mountainous regions institutionalizes the use and maintenance of hygiene facilities. Many toilets constructed under SBA remain unused or semi-activated due to the non-availability of water. Also, for economically disadvantaged families, the cost of repairing or maintenance of toilets remains a major inhibitor. Along with this, inconsistent and slow implementation of schemes, such as uninterrupted manufacturing processes, low quality materials, and absence of technical monitoring-have weakened community belief. Lack of locally trained human resources, which are proficient in repair, monitoring and maintenance, further complicates this challenge. From the point of view of gender relativity, although some progress has been made, women in patriarchal structures are still deprived of equal access to hygiene resources, especially in families where the decision process is male-dominated and women health requirements are considered secondary to policy-making. In the context of these multi -level challenges, some consolidated policy proposals emerge which can provide stability to the achievements of SBA. First, it is necessary to develop an institutional mechanism based on community participation, in which local leaders, tribal senior citizens and women groups are actively engaged in planning construction, implementation, and feedback processes. In the local dialect, cultural-sensitive information, education and communication (IEC) materials should be developed, incorporating Tharu cultural symbols and folk traditions, so that the psychological duality prevailing between cultural identity and state-proposed modernity can be reduced. Second, decentralized water management system to solve the problem of water crisis-such as rainwater harvesting, gravity-based water supply or community water sources is necessary, which can ensure stability of toilet use. Third, empowerment of women-elevated hygiene committees can prove helpful in awareness, responsibility and behavioral change, as women have emerged as transformative agents in field studies. In addition, strict observation and grievance redressal system is necessary for the quality of toilet construction. In the form of "Cleanliness Friends", local youth can be trained and enabled them to repair work and community motivation, ensure employment generation and responsibility. Ultimately, the impact assessment and behavioural audits should be given institutional forms from time to time, so that the continuous

monitoring, evaluation and recreation of the interventions can be possible. If these measures are implemented strategically, the initiatives related to cleanliness can develop into a long-term, community-ownership-based social transformation in tribal communities such as Tharu, which is based on health, dignity and cultural honors.

Conclusion

This research, which presents a deeper sociological discussion of the hygiene behavior prevalent in the Tharu tribe, reveals that the Swachh Bharat Abhiyan (SBA) has not only created changes in physical infrastructure, but has also encouraged the process of structural reorganization in hygiene behavior. The availability of toilets from 20% to 90% increase, as well as widespread increase in hand washing and water purification activities, more than the success of any unique state intervention, reflects the process of converting hygiene to a culturally disciplined social standard. This change is not only limited to subjective practical revival, but rather it indicates the regeneration of domestic spatial organization, gender-based efforts and ecological consciousness. From this it is clear that it is necessary to interfere in tribal communities such as Tharu as a multi -faceted, structural and culturally underlying social process. Although this campaign has become a medium of strength growth of women, improvement in child health and increase in community hygiene, it would be expedient to accept only infrastructural fulfillment is incompetent in decomposing deep cultural monuments and resource-based structural scarcity. Elements such as non -availability of water resources, economic weakness, unprecedented implementation and cultural approach to open defecation are still obstructing institutionalizing inclusive hygiene. These conclusions again confirm that cleanliness is not an immediate technical measure, but it is a continuous functional social project, which expects interactive participation, adaptable strategies and culturally coordinated policy approaches. The achievements obtained from SBA should be long-term preserved, for this it is necessary that future hygiene policies prioritize community-based participation, women-focused leadership and integration of local cultural arguments. The success of SBA in the context of Tharu tribe indicates that when modern public health goals are consumed by tribal cultural structures and social organization, behavioral conversion leads to durability. Therefore, this research not only provides depth to the socio-cultural discourse of cleanliness in tribal India, but it presents practical interconses for policy-makers, development workers and educational communities, which are engaged in the promotion of inclusive and sustainable public health strategies in the underprivileged communities.

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Article: Gendered Identity Construction: An Empirical Study of the Educationscape in Bihar and Jharkhand, India

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Gendered Identity Construction: An Empirical Study of the Educationscape in Bihar and Jharkhand, India

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Abstract

India has recently been drawing significant attention to linguistic landscape (LL) research. The role of educational institutions in gender identity construction in general is not a new area of research in India. However, the role of LL of educational institutions (educationscape) in constructing gendered identity has not yet been explored in India. The present study tries to examine the role of educationscape in perpetuating gendered identity, resulting in rampant gender inequality in the country. This study empirically delineates the educationscape of a total of sixteen higher educational institutions in the two East Indian states of Bihar and Jharkhand, taking into consideration their score in the Sustainable Development Goal, SDG-5 (gender equality) index. It employs mixed methods in analysing the total 149 sampled photographic data. A multimodal approach was adopted to analyse the digital photographs. The findings suggest that higher educational institutions in Bihar and Jharkhand perpetuate gender stereotype identity through signs of the educationscape, and thus educationscape is a site for gendered identity construction.

Keywords: *Linguistic landscape (LL), educational institution, gender, identity, multimodality*

Introduction

An identity is a collection of meanings that characterise individuals as holders of social roles, members of groups or social categories, or distinct individuals with specific traits that identify them. Burke and Stets (2023) discuss three bases of identity: personal, role, and group or categorical identities. The group or social categorical identity (i.e., gender identity) is the major concern of this study. Membership in a categorical identity is defined by the labels and categories that society imposes on individuals. Individuals recognise themselves as members of social categories; therefore, there is a recognition of "us" and a sense of belongingness. Each social category comes with expected behaviours that members are required to follow to maintain their membership in a social category (for instance, gender) to meet the needs of society. Social institutions (educational institutions) maintain a consistent set of values, norms, roles, and expectations that determine how society's needs should be addressed. Social institutions pass down cultural beliefs, values, and norms from one generation to the next through socialisation strategies, bureaucratic procedures, and informal practices. These cultural beliefs, values, and societal norms through social interactions shape how one understands what it means to be categorised as male or female in society. This is why gender identity is a social construct (Butler, 2011) rather than purely biologically determined. It is shaped by society through social institutions, which decide what is considered masculine or feminine. Educational institutions are one of the pertinent gender

socialisation agents. As Molla (2016) contends that educational institutions are crucial in the process of gender socialisation. This process involves individuals learning and internalising the norms, values, behaviours, and expectations related to their gender (Molla, 2016). Educational institutions condition learners' language and socio-cultural practices (Bernardo-Hinesley, 2020). In this regard, Kalekin-Fishman (2004) states that in addition to being vital to a learner's growth, educational institutions serve as spaces that propagate a variety of views about politics, cultures, society, and languages, among others. Further, Dean et al. (2017) observe that the way educational institutions are organised, the curriculum is designed, teaching methods are implemented, and teachers' beliefs influence and perpetuate gendered identity. In this sense, arguably, gender socialisation can also be perpetuated in educational institutions and help construct gender identity through different mechanisms, including curriculum design, classroom practices, institutional policies, and social interactions. The existing literature shows that educational institutions induce gender socialisation through the mechanism of curriculum, textbooks, organisational space, peer influence, institutional discourse, teachers' expectations, play and interaction in the education space, education policy, and cultural norms. Therefore, educational institutions serve as the initial formal source of the gender socialisation process (Tan, 2018). Nonetheless, most of the literature is focused on primary and secondary levels of educational institutions, overlooking the scenario in higher educational institutions. Moreover, the existing research in question underrepresents an Indian perspective. Research also suggests that gender role stereotypes have been depicted in textbooks globally, often representing men and women in contrasting ways. In textbooks, men are commonly portrayed as active figures, whereas women are often portrayed more passively (Foroutan, 2018). Nonetheless, no research has been found that specifically investigates the role of the linguistic landscape (henceforth, LL) in constructing gender (male and female[1]) identities in general and particularly in the Indian context. Yet, the LL study in India itself is a new field of investigation. Moreover, the LL of (higher) educational institutions and their role in gender identity construction has been a virgin area of research. Hence, this study tries to delineate the role of LL, especially LL of educational institutions, which is also called educationscape (LL of higher educational institutions[2]), in perpetuating gendered identity in India focusing the educationascapes of two Indian states of Bihar and Jharkhand considering their poor performance achieving the current Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) of gender equality. Thus, the study argues that educationscape is a site for gendered identity construction, contributing to perpetual gender inequality, focusing on higher educational institutions in Bihar and Jharkhand, India. Moreover, it contextualises the relationship between gendered identity construction and the poor scores in Sustainable Development Goal of gender equality (SDG-5) in the Indian states of Bihar and Jharkhand. Notably, gender equality has been one of the seventeen goals included in the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) framework by the United Nations General Assembly Summit in 2015.

Operationalising the Concept of LL/Educationscape

An ambiguity has been observed among scholars when conceptualising the LL. According to Landry and Bourhis (1997, p.25), LL of a region includes "the language of public road signs, advertising billboards, street names, place names, commercial shop signs, and public signs on government buildings." Scholars such as Landry and Bourhis (1997), Ben-Rafael et al. (2006), Coulmas (2009), and Spolsky (2009) (to name a few) have emphasised the written language as the sole constituent of LL. Backhaus (2007) goes on to say that LL studies are only concerned with analysing the written language of public spaces and nothing more. However, scholars such as Gorter and Cenoz (2017) argue that the study of LL encompasses not just visible written language but also multimodal and semiotic elements and other visual and oral components. Following this conceptual framework, in their studies, Stroud (2016), and Waksman and Shohamy (2016), among others, have also included non-written signs (for instance, images) under the scope of LL. In this vein, Blommaert (2013) contends that LL research areas have been widened, including new inscriptions and non-linguistic signs in public spaces, such as graffiti and posters. The present study also aligns with this perspective and integrates written signs and non-written signs or semiotic landscape (SL) under the scope of LL studies. Many scholars have conducted LL studies focusing on public spaces, including educational spaces. In recent years, exploring the LL of educational settings has garnered increasing attention, often referred to as educationscape (see Brown, 2012; Gorter & Cenoz, 2015; Szabó, 2015; Biró, 2016; Astillero, 2017; Chimirala, 2018; Bisai & Singh, 2018; Jakonen, 2018; Andriyanti, 2019; Bernardo-Hinesley, 2020; Wedin, 2021; Krompák et al., 2022; Reintegrado-Celino & Bernardo, 2023). Written signs on doors, placards, and posters on the walls, combining pictures to inform, instruct, and influence together, constitute LL or symbolic landscape (SL) of an educational space (Krompák et al., 2022) or "educationscape." Simply, as mentioned, the LL of an educational institution is termed as educationscape. It is noteworthy to mention that LL functions as a tool for the construction and negotiation of social identity (e.g., Amos, 2016; Wang & Van de Velde, 2015; Woldemariam & Lanza, 2015) including gender identity. Since the source of LL flow is people or institutions – often referred to as LL actors – it is inherently linked to them, as they also determine how it is expressed. In this sense, the LL of educational institutions is determined either by the government policy in the case of government educational institutions or by the values and beliefs of a person/ group of persons with authority in the case of private educational institutions. This study focuses on the former type of LL of educational institutions or educationscape. Curtin (2009) highlights that the LL functions both as a space for constructing identities and as a representation of them, capturing local, regional, national, and global dimensions of identity. Arguably, it also includes gender identity construction. Dagenais et al. (2009) examine how young children engage with the LL to negotiate their identities, emphasising that these identities are shaped through interaction with the various languages present in the LL. Ben-Rafael (2009) also emphasises the role of the LL in shaping the identities of social actors as

they engage with the collective identities reflected within it. Im (2023) examines the educationscape of an American university during the COVID-19 pandemic and highlights how the institution's identity evolved into that of a protective entity rather than just an educational one. Thus, LL serves as a valuable tool for understanding identity construction and functions as a space for identity formation and/or construction (Im, 2023; Bhujel & Sinha, 2024a, 2024b). It is important to note that research examining the relationship between LL and social identity within the Indian context remains limited, with only a few recent studies conducted by scholars such as Bhujel and Sinha (2024a, 2024b). However, there appears to be no existing research specifically dedicated to exploring educationscape (LL of an educational institution) and the construction of gender identity. This study, therefore, seeks to pioneer such an investigation within the Indian context. The following section examines the relationship between gender and education, drawing on both Indian and international contexts to understand how past research has addressed this issue.

Gender(s) in – Higher – Educational Institutions

The term "gender" does not specifically denote individuals as male or female but rather encompasses the societal roles and characteristics associated with masculinity and femininity (Zulu, 2003, p.98). In other words, gender refers to the characteristics, attributes, behaviours, and activities that society deems suitable for men and women. Individuals develop a sense of their gender through such societal (stereotypes) expectations, resulting in gender identity construction. Stereotype plays a crucial role in gendered identity construction. A stereotype is a fixed and overly simplified idea of a group of people, where every individual in the group is assumed to possess the so-called group characteristics (Morrison, 1992). The attribution of societal roles and characteristics perceived as appropriate for a particular gender is termed gender stereotyping (Zulu, 2003, p.99). Gender stereotyping affects both men and women. For instance, women are often viewed as emotional, dependent, and less assertive, while men are typically seen as independent, assertive, and rational. Men are always considered risk-takers, courageous, rational, and bold. On the other hand, women are seen in roles that require emotional skills.

In his study of South African higher educational institutions, Zulu (2003) reveals that women often cluster at the bottom of the institutional hierarchy. In contrast, men were in leadership and control positions (university officers, Deans of faculties/schools, and Senior administrative officials) (Zulu, 2003). The bottom administrative occupations often require caring and nurturing skills (Zulu, 2003). Similarly, O'Connor (2020) finds an under-representation of women in senior positions (heads of universities) in universities, contrary to men in the European Union. Analysing the contents of the German textbook, Fruehwirth et al. (2024) observe that men are portrayed significantly more frequently than women in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) areas, and care work occupations (nurse, teacher, etc.) were represented as a highly female-connoted occupation. This finding is

reminiscent of Šidlauskienė and Butašova's (2013) result. On the contrary, Peterson (2011) notes the growing number of women occupying senior academic management roles in Swedish higher education. Attributes such as modest, submissive, affectionate, nurturing, people-orientated, and emotionally expressive are often considered to be the characteristics attached to women (Zulu, 2003). Therefore, it is stereotyped that women cannot make rational decisions, hold significant positions in organisations, or perform well in certain professional fields which demand aggression, rationality, emotional inexpressiveness, etc. Petridou et al. (2009) explore the differences in participation rates, attitudes, and perceptions regarding entrepreneurship education between male and female students in Greek higher education institutions. The study highlights a higher enrolment rate of males compared to females in entrepreneurship education programs despite female students showing a stronger interest in the programs (Petridouet al., 2009). This supports the stereotype against women, which Zulu (2003) argues is the caring and nurturing nature of women. This stereotype works as a barrier for women to participate in entrepreneurship education programs. Ledwith and Manfredi (2000) underscore the ongoing challenges women face in higher education leadership. The study reveals that despite policies promoting gender equality, women remain significantly underrepresented in senior leadership positions within higher education institutions. This disparity is attributed to various structural and cultural barriers that persist in the academic environment (Ledwith & Manfredi, 2000).

Notably, examining the impact of globalisation on the subject choice of Indian women students, Chanana (2007, p.591) argues that there was a changing scenario in women's subject choice from the arts stream to the emerging professional courses such as "management, fashion designing, computers, human resource management" which contradicts both Fruehwirth et al. (2024) and Šidlauskienė and Butašova (2013). Basantia and Devi (2022) examine gender presentation in higher educational institutions in northeast India. They find that women hold a lower status than men in all administrative and related positions in the entire range of academic roles (Basantia & Devi, 2022). This finding aligns with Zulu (2003) and O'Connor (2020). According to Manjrekar (2021), the relationship between gender and education in India is complex and varied, and it is part of a bigger study of how education systems, structures, and ideas have developed over time in the country. Furthermore, she mentions that education plays a key role in maintaining gender relations in a society shaped by hierarchy and marginalisation, but it also has the power to question and change existing gender beliefs. However, Rahiman (2023) critically asserts that although women's education in India has significantly advanced since the 1990s, it has not substantially altered the societal structure or improved the social status of women, as gender disparities in educational practices continue to persist. In this regard, it is worth mentioning that India is among the world's rapidly growing economies today, yet it is unfortunate that gender inequality in the education sector continues to prevail (Qadir, 2020). Interestingly, educational institution rather reinforces gender inequality and play a role in gendered identity construction. In her study of gender and the

construction of identity in Madhya Pradesh, India, Page (2005) shows that the Indian education system reinforces traditional gender roles through textbooks, teaching practices, and school culture, shaping children's identities. Capturing the challenges of the new education policy, Singh et al. (2023) note that despite legal progress, gender-based inclusion and exclusion persist in Indian educational institutions, as the 2020 education policy's inclusive measures have yet to fully resolve these issues. Saha (2013) notes that considerable gender inequality persists in household spending on education, and this bias is evident not only in the backward or less developed states but also across more advanced regions of India. Moreover, studies such as Kingdon (2005), Chaudhuri and Roy (2006), and Lancaster et al. (2008) show that Indian households, both rural and urban, tend to allocate more educational resources to male children than to females. Similarly, Geetha (2021), Bhattacharjee (2021), and Sarkar (2021) reveal the pervasiveness of gender inequality in the Indian education system. Thus, most of the available (recent) literature in general and in the Indian context, particularly on the presentation of gender in (higher) educational institutions, reveals discriminatory portrayals of men and women in terms of gender roles. Thus, it can be observed that most of the available literature has discussed gender stereotyping and gender discrimination in higher educational institutions, portraying men and women with binary opposite qualities, especially women as inferior and men with superior qualities.

Thus, it should be noted that the existing research reveals the following important points. Firstly, (higher) educational institutions perpetuate gender stereotypes or gendered identity through various mechanisms. Secondly, gender stereotypes reinforce gendered identity, resulting in gender inequality or discrimination. Thirdly, existing research lacks the LL/educationscape perspective in examining the construction of gender identity, especially within higher educational institutions in India.

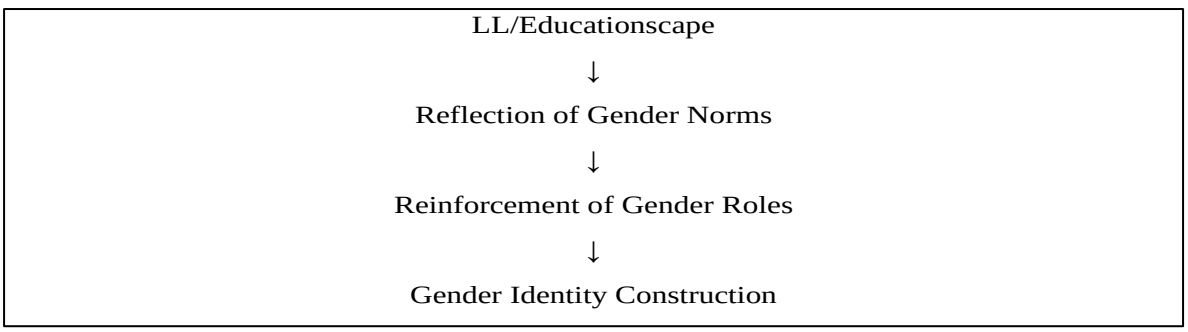
At this juncture, it is noteworthy to mention the locus of the educationscape studies to rationalise the current study. According to Bernardo-Hinesley (2020), educationscape study was initiated by Brown (2012). An educational institution is "a central civic institution, represents a deliberate and planned environment where learners are subjected to powerful messages about language(s) from local and national authorities" (Brown, 2012, p.281). Based on the review of the previous literature concerning educationscape (see. Brown, 2012; Szabo, 2015; Andriyanti, 2019; Bernardo-Hinesley, 2020; Krompák et al., 2022 to name a few), it can be argued that although 1) the focus of most educationscape studies has been schoolscape it has overlooked the LL of higher educational institutions; 2) gender identity has not been the subject of study; rather, institutional linguistic ideology (see Biro, 2016; Astillero, 2017) and pedagogical aspects (see Wedin, 2021) have been the focus of educationscape studies; and lastly 3) Indian scenarios have rarely been addressed (see Bisai & Singh, 2018; Chimirala, 2018) the issues of gender identity construction. Therefore, this study examines the educationscape of higher educational institutions located in the Indian states of

Bihar and Jharkhand in relation to gendered identity construction. Therefore, the major objective of the study is to explore how educationscape contributes to gendered identity construction in India. Thus, the major research question of the study is: How does the educationscape (of higher educational institutions) portray men and women in Bihar and Jharkhand, India? In other words, this study aims to investigate whether and how the educationscape perpetuates gender stereotypes, specifically with reference to higher educational institutions in the two East Indian states of Bihar and Jharkhand.

Theoretical Framework

According to Butler (2011), the meaning of gender is shaped by the cultural context in which it is expressed. Therefore, gender is relative as it is an ongoing performance. Butler (2011), thus, challenges conventional notions of gender and identity, arguing that these concepts are not inherent or fixed but are constructed and performed through language, culture, and social norms. In other words, gender is "performative" as it is not what we are, but it is what we do (Butler, 2011). To say that gender is performative means that "how we understand gender and how we position ourselves as gendered or sexual beings in relation to others is achieved through the repetition and enactment of these activities*"* (Meyerhoff, 2015, p.2). It should be noted that Butler (2011) emphasises the role of language in gender performance by shaping and reinforcing societal norms and expectations related to gender identity. Hence, language provides a means for individuals to challenge or resist normative gender expectations. Since educationscape signs are forms of written or visual language, they both uphold gender-stereotyped roles and provoke questioning of gendered identity. Thus, in this study, the following theoretical (visual) model (e.g., Figure 1) can be formulated.

Borrowing from Ben- Rafael (2009), it is to be mentioned that educationscape formation is a structuration process. The actors – are themselves the products of social structure – produce educationscape in accordance with societal norms and values, which, in turn, reinforce/strengthen the social structure. For instance, a student (a product of society) portrays a woman in his/her sketch as a homemaker because it is a stereotypical role of a woman in society.



Source: The authors

Figure 1. Model of Gendered Identity Construction through LL/Educationscape

The sketch reinforces the stereotype of gender roles and ultimately strengthens – structure – societal norms of gender. It aids in gendered identity construction. In this context, the educationscape reflects the disposition of educational institutions. Therefore, the ideas behind educationscape welcomed by educational institutions are closely connected to the larger symbolic and social frameworks in which these institutions function (Bourdieu, 1990). To borrow from Ben-Rafael (2009), four structuration principles of educationscape formation can be identified: (1) Presentation-of-self, (2) Good-reasons, (3) Collective-identity, and (4) Power-relations. The last two structuration principles highlight the second function of signs of educationscape, as proposed by Landry and Bourhis (1997), to express symbolic meanings (Esteron, 2021). Among these two principles, the collective-identity is the bedrock of the present study. The collective-identity principle of educationscape highlights the social category to which the individual is affiliated (Ben-Rafael, 2009). It implies that the educationscape reflects the social affiliation of individuals, for instance, gender identity, in the current context.

Methodology

Selecting the Study Location

Gendered identity and gender inequality are deeply intertwined (Batra & Reio Jr., 2016; Sen, 2001; Abraham et al., 2024). Societal expectations and stereotypes about gender roles and behaviours contribute to the construction of gendered identities, which in turn reinforce and perpetuate gender inequality. The performance of gender contributes to the perpetuation of gender inequality as gendered identity results in unequal distribution of resources, opportunities, and power between men and women. Therefore, the perpetuation of gendered identity is one of the fundamental reasons for gender inequality. According to Jha and Nagar (2015), gender inequality refers to the unequal treatment or opportunities experienced by individuals based on their gender, encompassing disparities across various dimensions such as social, economic, political, cultural, and legal spheres. Gender issues encompass discussions that address both men and women but often focus on the experiences of women who endure gender inequality (Jha & Nagar, 2015). It is an inherent feature of societies characterised by patriarchy (Kohli, 2017). Patriarchy is a deeply entrenched societal norm in India (Dube, 1988), where women's lives are governed and controlled by male family members from birth until death (Chadda & Deb, 2013). Begum and Sinha (2017) find gender inequality even in language use. Gender inequality is grievous in India (Dube, 1988; Jha & Nagar, 2015; Khan et al., 2023; Abraham et al., 2024). Nobel Laureate Amartya Sen (2001) categorises gender inequality into seven types: mortality, natality, employment, ownership, special opportunity, basic-facility, and household, prevalent in India.

Although India stands as one of the world's most densely populated and rapidly expanding economies, it is positioned moderately to weakly in numerous global advancement indices (Khan et al., 2023). Evidently, according to the United Nations Development Program's (UNDP) Human Development Report (2023/2024, 295), India ranks 108th out of 193 countries in the gender inequality index. Similarly, the country ranks 127th out of 146 countries in the Global Gender Gap Index for the year 2022 (World Economic Forum, 2023, p.11). It is to be mentioned that if we observe the South Asian context then 64.4 percent gender parity has been achieved, the second lowest score of the eight regions (World Economic Forum, 2023, p.6). The NITI Aayog (2018, p.66) shows that India scored merely 36 out of 100 in the SDG-5 index. The score itself shows unsatisfactory performance in achieving the SDG-5 goal by the country. Whereas observing state-level performance, except Kerela and Sikkim, almost all Indian states are in the red zone, and among the union territories (UTs), Andaman and Nicobar Island and Chandigarh are the performers UTs scored between the range of 50-64 out of 100. The country has identified several national indicators and sub-indicators to achieve the SDG-5 goal by the year 2030. Almost all states and UTs have performed unsatisfactorily in achieving the goal, especially the eastern states of the country (NITI Aayog, 2018). The SDG-5 index scores of eastern states of Bihar, Jharkhand, Odisha, and West Bengal reported by the NITI Aayog (2018) are 25, 32, 43 and 40, respectively (e.g., Table 1). Notably, the SDG-5 index scored particularly by the states of Bihar and Jharkhand (25 and 32) is below the national score of 36 out of 100 (NITI Aayog, 2018, p.69).

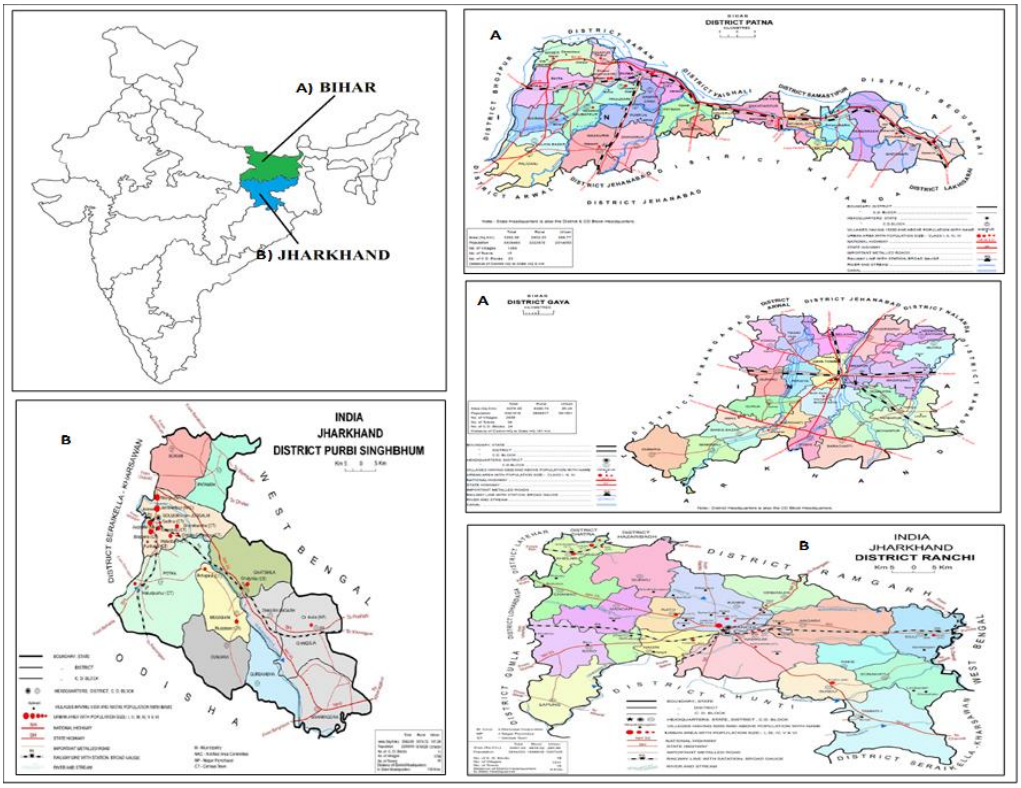
Table 1. SDG 5 index score by Eastern states

State	SDG 5 index score
Bihar	25
Jharkhand	32
Odisha	43
West Bengal	40
India	36

Source: Compiled from the NITI Aayog (2018, p.69) baseline report on SDGs.

Moreover, the states are lagging in achieving many sub-indicators (education, health, economy, and polity) of gender equality (Kumari & Siotra, 2023). More specifically, it is argued that Bihar and Jharkhand are situated at the bottom of the educational index because they fall into the low category in 3 out of 4 educational indicators (Kumari & Siotra, 2023). Therefore, the two states, Bihar and Jharkhand, were purposively selected as the study locations. Similarly, Patna and Gaya from Bihar and Ranchi and Purbi Singhbhum (East Singhbhum) from Jharkhand were purposively selected for this study. The availability of higher educational institutions and the national-level popularity of the institutions were major criteria for sampling the districts (Patna, Gaya, Ranchi, and Purbi Singhbhum). Moreover, higher educational institutions located in the most populated cities in the districts were selected based on 2011 Indian census data[3]. The sampled educational institutions offer undergraduate degree courses, diploma courses, post-graduate degree courses, and doctoral degree courses. A total of 16 (four from each district) higher educational institutions were sampled for this study (e.g., Table 2).

Map 1. Locating the study areas



Source: Compiled from District Census Handbooks, Census of India 2011[4].

Data Sampling and Analysis Methods

The present study is based on photographic data. [One of the images (fig. 4) used in this study has been taken from Gogoi and Sinha (2024)'s published article (see Gogoi & Sinha, 2024). Employing a random sampling method, a

total of 169 digital photographs (of signs of educationscape/signs of educational institutions) were collected from 16 educational institutions. The researchers collected all the posters, art, advertisements, and other images available in the institutions. The photographs were run through inter-rater reliability test. Out of 169 photographs, 165 were identified for the study using a purposive sampling method. The identification of the sample size was done based on the criteria of gender stereotype (mentioned below) following previous literature (e.g., Ledwith & Manfredi, 2000; Zulu, 2003; Petridou et al., 2009; O'Connor, 2020; Basantia & Devi, 2022; Fruehwirth et al., 2024). All 165 photographs were again coded to determine whether they were gender-stereotypical or not, employing Cohen's Kappa (1960) (for two raters) inter-rater reliability measure. The Kappa (*k)* can be realised by the following expression:

$$k = \frac{p_{o-}\ p_e}{1 - p_e}$$

Here, p_o is the observed agreement and p_e is the expected agreement.

The coders were provided with coding guidelines to determine (educationscape) signs (photographs) as gender stereotyped. The study proposed a two-class (k = 2; gender stereotypical/ not gender stereotypical) annotation schema. The two coders were provided instructions on how to follow the annotation schema. Moreover, the raters were provided guidelines on the criteria for rating the signs as gender stereotyped. The criteria were 1) gender stereotype social roles and 2) gender stereotype professional roles. Besides, if the signs were not gender stereotyped, they were also instructed to categorise them as signs reflecting women empowerment and gender equality. The guidelines were prepared based on the previous literature (see Ledwith & Manfredi, 2000; Zulu, 2003; Petridou et al., 2009; O'Connor, 2020; Basantia & Devi, 2022; Fruehwirth et al., 2024).

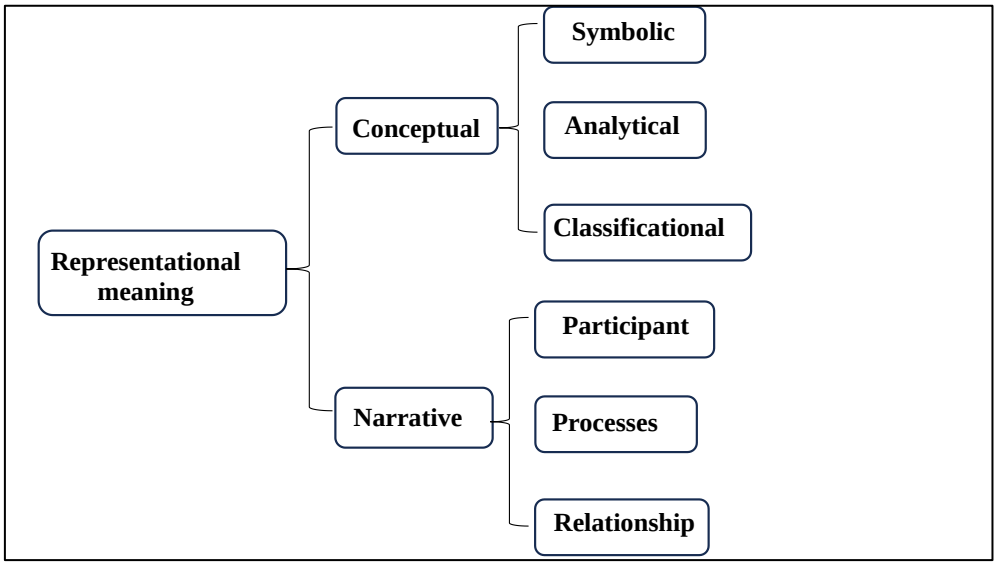
Table 2. Sampled research locations and data for analysis

State	District	No. of Sampled Institutions	Total Photographic Data Collected
Bihar	Patna	4	42
	Gaya	4	40
Jharkhand	Ranchi	4	33
	Purbi Singhbhum	4	50
	Total	16	165

Source: Field data

Some representative samples of signs of educationscape underwent qualitative examination employing the multimodal approach (grammar of visual design) proposed by Kress and van Leeuwen (2006). According to Kress and van Leeuwen (2006), multimodality framework refers to the incorporation of various semiotic modes in crafting a semiotic output or occurrence. The grammar of visual design developed by Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) is a framework for understanding how images communicate meaning through their structural elements. It draws parallels with linguistic grammar, proposing that visual compositions have their own syntax and semantics. This framework comprises three primary components: representation, interaction, and composition (Mulyawan, 2020). However, in the current study, the narrative representation process (e.g., Figure 2) has only been utilised (based on the research question) as an analytical tool. According to Kress and van Leeuwen (2006), in the narrative representation process, the actions performed by all actors or characters depicted in the image are revealed, along with their messages. This encompasses the actions of human figures, their scale, positioning, gestures, and statements, as well as any implied messages conveyed by the background and setting of the image (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006). Narrative representation involves a 'vector' (action) that links different participants, illustrating a 'doing' or 'happening' relationship (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006). The main communicative goal of these visual images is to provide viewers with a unique experience by blending narrative and persuasive content (Wu & Cheong, 2022). Some important components can be identified in the narrative representation process (e.g., Figure 2): represented participant(s), process/action, gaze, circumstances, and relationships (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006).

Figure 2. Representational dimensions of visual grammar



Source: Kress and van Leeuwen (2006); Mulyawan (2020, p.3).

Notably, gender is regarded as a fundamental component of social structure (Correa, 2009). Visuality plays a crucial role in the performance of gender, as "we consume gender identity with our eyes, bodies, and minds" (McCullough, 2024, p. 483). Visual discourse combines text and images and reaches all users (Romera, 2015). Qualitative researchers in diverse disciplines (such as feminist psychology, sociology, and anthropology) have consistently maintained that visual data (such as images) are not neutral but instead offer interpretations of the social world; they are deliberately "constructed" to convey specific narratives, truths, and perspectives of reality in a constructive fashion (McCullough, 2024, p. 487). According to Romera (2015), images indeed convey the perpetuation of stereotypes. On one hand, men and women continue to be shown engaging in activities closely linked to traditional gender traits. On the other hand, there is a noticeable lack of female representation in roles of power within public spaces. The separation of social roles persists: women are associated with the private sphere, while men are aligned with public life and authority. Erving Goffman's (1979) seminal work *Gender Advertisements*, also states that in advertisements, men and women are represented contrastingly.

Rose (2001) provides comprehensive approaches for examining the visual construction of gender across various forms such as images, advertisements, architecture, and media. Though originating in film theory, Mulvey's (1975) notion of the 'male gaze' plays a crucial role in understanding the visual construction of gendered identities within media and popular culture. While Butler (2011), however, does not focus exclusively on visual analysis, her theory of gender performativity has significantly shaped scholarly interpretations of visual gender representations as constructed and continually enacted performances. Hooks (1992) examines visual culture by highlighting the intersections of race, gender, and class in visual representations, challenging dominant portrayals and presenting alternative, counter-hegemonic viewpoints. Similarly, Australian sociologist Connell's (2005) analysis of hegemonic masculinity has been widely utilised in visual studies to investigate how male identities are formed and reinforced through visual representations. In her study, Tickner (1988) employs visual analysis to explore the portrayal of women in the suffrage movement, linking artistic representation to the formation of political identity. Gill (2007) also investigates how modern visual media, particularly advertising and reality television, shape feminine identities within the context of neoliberalism and post feminism.

Results

The interrater reliability report indicates that the majority of the signs are gender stereotyped in terms of analytical categories of gender social and professional roles. Cohen's Kappa score indicates substantial agreement among the two raters and suggests some degree of consensus in their rating with $k = .69$ value. Similarly, based on the responses from the raters, the signs

of the educationscape can be classified into the following thematised categories:

Table 3. Distribution of visual signs in educational institutions

Thematic Category of Visual Sign	Frequency	Percent
Gender stereotype social roles	93	56
Gender stereotype professional roles	56	34
Women empowerment	11	7
Gender equality	5	3
Total	165	100.0

Source: Field data

Table 3 shows the distribution of signs in the sampled educational institutions. It indicates that 149 (90 percent) of the total signs of educationscape reflect gender stereotypes. Only 16 (10 percent) signs of the educationscape are non-gender stereotypes. Based on the responses from the raters, 93 (56 percent) signs show gender-stereotyped social roles and 56 (34 percent) signs show gender-stereotyped professional roles. In other words, women are shown as emotional and nurturing, physically attractive, submissive and passive, homemakers, caregivers, customer service, (fashion) models, dancers, influencers focusing on beauty, less ambitious, politically unaware, religious, technically not sound, and hosting sociocultural events. Moreover, women are shown in professions that are not directly related to science and technology. They are shown promoting beauty products. Besides, some of the signs of the educationscape show women in the role of motherhood. In contrast, men are shown as breadwinners, strong (physically and emotionally), leaders, risk takers, technically skilled, independent, handymen, and competitive. Moreover, men are shown to have professions that require technical skills. They are shown in professions such as engineering and architecture, while women are shown in modelling, promoting fashionable clothes, beauty products, etc. This indicates that women have no professional temperament like men. However, 16 (10 percent) signs of the educationscape simultaneously challenge gender stereotypes in terms of women empowerment (7 percent) and gender equality (3 percent). These signs suggest the necessity of breaking the boundaries of gender stereotypes by encouraging women to participate in all fields of professions. Moreover, it represents women in the space outside of household confinement and shows the sky as the limit for them.

Now, it is imperative to interpret some of the representative signs of educationscape qualitatively to show gender representation primarily through

the property of narrative representation proposed by Kress and van Leeuwen (2006).

Figure 3. Narrative picture of a woman

In Figure 3, a woman is depicted wearing colourful traditional clothing and holding a *diya* (a traditional oil lamp) in a household setting. The image shows the woman decorating the house with diya. The narrative representation process often involves examining the participants, actions, settings, and sociocultural context (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006). In this figure, the woman and the diya are represented participants. The woman is dressed in colourful traditional clothing, indicating her cultural background and festival occasion. She is holding a plate full of diya on her right hand and lifting a single diya on her left hand. She is focused and going forward (perhaps outside) from the room. The diya is a traditional oil lamp, often associated with religious or festive activities in South Asian cultures in general and in Indian culture particularly. The diya symbolises light, purity, and dispelling of darkness, and it is often used in rituals and celebrations like Diwali in India. The action of the woman (holding diya) can be described as a "material process" in terms of Kress and van Leeuwen (2006). This action signifies an event or ritual taking place. The traditional clothing and diya suggest a specific cultural setting inside a house at night. By analysing all the elements of the image, one can construct a narrative that the image portrays a woman adorned in vibrant traditional attire holding a diya with a gentle, reverent expression. This scene is set against a backdrop that hints at a festive or religious occasion, perhaps Diwali, the festival of lights. The act of holding the diya, a symbol of purity and enlightenment, suggests a moment of spiritual significance. The colourful clothing and the warm glow of the diya together convey a sense of cultural celebration and community identity, highlighting the woman's connection to her cultural roots and the collective practice of her community. The image

represents the connection between women and the cultural role(s) that are expected from them during festivals in eastern India.

Figure 4 can be interpreted based on its narrative structures and elements. The image shows a man, an architect, working on his table in his office. The man is the primary participant, with other represented participants such as pen, table, desk (goal), and architectural tools in the image. He is focused on the professional activity.

Figure 4. Narrative picture of a Man

The vector in this image suggests purposeful engagement and concentration of man in the work on the desk. This is also a text-picture. The text "Architecture" explicitly identifies the man's profession and the nature of his work. Attributes of the image, such as architectural tools, the text "architecture," and man's vector, altogether narrate the image as a depiction of professional engagement and expertise in the field of architecture. The man's activity signifies the detailed and creative work involved in architecture. The presence of the written text architecture (circumstance, secondary participant) provides explicit context, reinforcing the professional theme and making the image's message clear. Thus, as a transactional structure Figure 4 portrays a man in the profession of architecture. In other words, the image (of the man working at his desk with architecture in the background) can be interpreted as a visual story of a professional deeply engaged in architectural work. The vectors, participants, and setting work together to convey a narrative of concentration, expertise, and context within the architectural field.

Figure 5. Narrative picture of a woman flying in the sky

In Figure 5, a woman is shown flying through the sky with her arms outstretched, assisted by birds. The birds are aiding her flight and are connected to her by threads. The represented participants in the image are the woman (actor), sky (goal), birds, and threads. The image shows a transactional structure. The woman is the primary actor, actively engaged in the process of flying (action). The birds are also participants, aiding in the action. The threads connecting the woman to the birds create vectors that indicate movement and direction. The outstretched arms and flight paths of the birds further emphasise the dynamic action. The open sky (circumstance) serves as the backdrop, indicating freedom, expansiveness, and possibly a sense of boundlessness. The manner of flying, with arms outstretched and assisted by birds, suggests a harmonious and almost magical or surreal interaction between the woman and the birds. The dark colour of both the woman and the birds suggests a sense of mystery, melancholy, or introspection. The threads connecting the woman to the birds symbolise connection, support, or interdependence, which can also be interpreted as ties to nature. Thus, the image can be seen as a rich, dynamic narrative that communicates themes of freedom, connection, and possibly transcendence.

Discussion

The findings of this study indicate that the majority of signs of the educationscape depict women engaging in household roles that align with sociocultural gender stereotypes (see Figure 3). Women are represented as emotional, nurturing, and professionally not competent as compared to men. Interestingly, no sign in the educationscape shows men in the household domain. Men are depicted as emotionally and physically stronger than women. The finding is consistent with Foroutan (2018). Moreover, men are shown in technical professions like architecture. Contrary to this, women are shown in

the profession of dancers and (fashion) models. This finding is aligned with Zulu (2003). In her research, O'Connor (2020) finds that women are under-represented in senior positions in higher educational institutions in the European Union. Whereas the present study reveals a complete absence of women in top professional roles, especially within technical fields. Moreover, in this study, it is discovered that women are depicted in lower-status socioeconomic occupations, aligning with O'Connor's (2020) finding. In other words, this study finds that educationscape portrays men and women in the "binary opposition" in the words of Lévi-Strauss (1983), with men depicted as superior to women. Therefore, it should be noted that such a projection of genders in the educationscape contributes to the perpetuation of gender inequality in the societies of Bihar and Jharkhand. The findings suggest a connection between the subpar performance of Bihar and Jharkhand in meeting the SDG-5 goal (as illustrated in Table 1) and the ongoing societal stereotypes related to gender identity, which influence and are influenced by the educationscape of these states. This is the reason Ben-Rafael (2009) called LL formation a structuration process. It is to be mentioned that the study highlights the crucial role of educationscape in constructing gendered identities and reinforcing both gender inequality and discrimination. Therefore, it can be argued that educational institutions are not neutral arenas of opportunity but are instead sites where social inequalities are reproduced and legitimised (Bourdieu & Jean-Claude, 1977). Further, according to the findings, despite predominantly displaying gender stereotypical signs, the educationscape also includes, albeit in smaller numbers, signs that challenge gender stereotypes. These signs (challenging gender stereotypes) represent Lefebvre's (1991) concept of 'perceived space' of higher educational institutions in Bihar and Jharkhand. On the other hand, signs representing gender stereotypes can be termed as 'lived space' (Lefebvre, 1991) of educational institutions in the Indian states of Bihar and Jharkhand. Despite the limited sample size, this study attempts to delve into the process of gender identity construction through educationscape. It also suggests one of the sources for the relatively poor performance of the Indian states of Bihar and Jharkhand in achieving the SDG-5 goal. Hence, the study can be a cornerstone in exploring the educationscape as a site for gendered identity construction, adding LL perspective to existing gender studies. Nonetheless, the findings of the study are limited to the societies of Bihar and Jharkhand, which cannot be generalised for the entire Indian context. A serious study should be conducted, gathering samples representing Indian society, taking into account the findings of this study in order to understand the disparity in gender equality scores between India and other countries.

Conclusion

The present study deals with the issue of gender identity construction in the educationscape of the higher educational institutions of the Indian states of Bihar and Jharkhand. It investigates the role of educationscape in promoting stereotyped gender roles and explores its contribution to perpetuating gender inequality in Bihar and Jharkhand. The findings suggest that educationscape

portrays men and women in terms of gender stereotype roles. The educationscape primarily portrays both men and women in roles that align with socio-cultural expectations. The educationscape, thus, perpetuates gender stereotypes and reinforces gender inequality, contributing to the construction of gendered identities. Nonetheless, educationscape also promotes women's empowerment and gender equality, even if only to a small extent, as the findings suggest. Further, the study indicates the integral relationship between stereotype gender identity construction in the educationscape and the pervasive gender inequality in the Indian states of Bihar and Jharkhand. The study highlights the importance of primary socialising agents, specifically educational institutions, in promoting gender stereotypes in society. Therefore, until primary agents of socialisation, like educational institutions, become gender-neutral, achieving gender equality will remain an unattainable goal in Indian states like Bihar and Jharkhand. Thus, it is crucial to reflect on the obstructive role those educational institutions play in achieving the SDG-5 goal, particularly in Bihar and Jharkhand, and more broadly across India. This reflection is essential for developing foundational and effective policies to address the issue of gender inequality in Indian society.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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Notes

1. In this study, we have included only two genders, man and woman, for the unavailability of the signs on other genders.

2. In this study, higher educational institutions refer to the educational institutions of any kind (technical, professional, or general degree) that provide education above the higher secondary level education in India.
3. https://censusindia.gov.in/census.website/data/population-finder; https://censusindia.gov.in/nada/index.php/catalog/42611
4. District Census Handbooks, Patna- https://censusindia.gov.in/nada/index.php/catalog/299; Gaya- https://censusindia.gov.in/nada/index.php/catalog/266 ; Ranchi- https://censusindia.gov.in/nada/index.php/catalog/570 ; Jharkhand, Purbi Singhbhum- https://censusindia.gov.in/nada/index.php/catalog/557

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Article: Navigating Barriers and Opportunities in Primary Education: A Sociological Study of the Kutia Kondha Community in Kalahandi District, Odisha

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Navigating Barriers and Opportunities in Primary Education: A Sociological Study of the Kutia Kandha Community in Kalahandi District, Odisha

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Abstract

This paper investigates the multifaceted barriers and emerging opportunities in primary education among the Kutia Kandha community, a Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Group (PVTG) residing in Kalahandi district, Odisha. Employing both qualitative and quantitative methods, the study critically examines how geographical isolation, poverty, linguistic constraints, and socio-cultural traditions impede educational participation. Findings indicate that inadequate infrastructure, scarcity of trained and culturally sensitive teachers, and gender-based inequalities continue to marginalize Kutia Kandha children within the formal education system. The persistence of traditional livelihood practices and limited parental literacy further exacerbate dropout rates and low academic attainment. While government initiatives such as the Mid-Day Meal Scheme have marginally improved attendance, their overall impact remains constrained by poor implementation and limited community involvement. The study underscores the need for a more inclusive and contextually relevant educational framework that integrates indigenous knowledge systems, promotes gender equity, and ensures active local participation. This sociological inquiry highlights how education, when appropriately adapted to cultural realities, can act as a transformative mechanism for empowerment and social inclusion among PVTGs in Odisha.

Keywords: *Kutia Kandha, Primary Education, PVTG, Educational Barriers, Odisha*

Background of the Study

Tribal communities are geographically remote, which makes accessibility issues worse because many villages lack proper educational resources, such as schools, trained teachers, and necessary learning materials. High dropout rates are frequently the result of tribal students' increasing alienation from the official educational system due to the linguistic gap between their dialects and the language of teaching. Research shows that parental ignorance of the value of education and a lack of government assistance severely hinder educational advancement in these areas (Panda & Mahapatra, 2021).

Due to their isolated location, linguistic difficulties, and ingrained socioeconomic inequalities, the Kutia Kandha tribe confronts several barriers to educational growth. The tribe's literacy rate is still well below the state and national averages, highlighting the narrow scope of formal education programs. Another significant problem is gender imbalance in schooling, as cultural customs usually place a higher priority on domestic duties than on girls' education (Mishra, 2019).

Additionally, tribal students' cultural identity and self-confidence are adversely affected by institutionalised prejudice in educational institutions. Enhancing student engagement and boosting learning results might be achieved by bridging the gap between formal education and indigenous knowledge systems through the integration of tribal languages and culturally relevant teaching techniques into mainstream education (Das, 2020).

The Kutia Kandha, a unique cultural and socioeconomic group that mostly resides in the mountainous areas of Kalahandi, Rayagada, and Kandhamal districts, was identified by the researchers as a Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Group (PVTG) in Odisha. Their traditional way of life has a high reliance on the natural environment, as seen by its sustainable agriculture methods and forest-based livelihoods. The Kutia Kandha still experience socioeconomic marginalisation, especially when it comes to access to high-quality education, despite several government initiatives to raise their level of living. Examining the educational circumstances of the Kutia Kandha in Kalahandi district and determining the obstacles to their access to quality education are the goals of this study. The results will improve knowledge of educational inequalities in tribal areas and suggest practical ways to inclusive development.

Drawing on the nomenclature employed in ancient Greek administrative systems, the term "tribe" originated in imperial and colonial tales. When the phrase was first used, it described organisations that were self-governing and had the power to choose their own leaders. However, the word was misused by colonial writers to characterise groups that were seen to be undeveloped, secluded, primitive, and backward; these groups were frequently identified by darker skin tones. These groups are commonly known as Adivasis or Janajatis in India, and the Sanskrit name for their regions was Atavika states, which means "forest or border states." These republics acknowledged the suzerainty of greater Indian empires while operating as autonomous kingdoms. The word "tribe" was introduced by the Indian Constitution after independence, along with standards for identifying them. Tribes can be identified and categorised by a presidential notification, according to Article 342(1). Within the parameters of the Constitution, these communities are identified and distinguished by certain traits.

- Primitive traits
- Distinctive culture
- Geographical isolation
- Shyness in contact with outsiders and backwardness

Among the most marginalised and insecure communities are Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs), who continue to follow traditional customs in all spheres of life, such as spirituality, education, health, and agriculture. These tribes frequently carry on customs like underage marriage, depending only on traditional healers for medical care, and making paddy their

only source of income. Their high mortality rates especially the startlingly high rates of child mortality are mostly caused by such behaviours. There have been worries expressed that if proactive government actions are not taken, these groups may go extinct.

Two consecutive census reports following India's independence brought to light the appalling conditions faced by several indigenous populations. In response, the government formed a commission to look into their status, which was chaired by U.N. Dhebar from 1960 to 1961. Numerous research corroborated the commission's conclusions, which showed stark disparities within tribal groups. It suggested identifying the most underprivileged and archaic tribal communities, whose numbers were diminishing. The government then designated 52 settlements as Primitive Tribal Groups (PTGs), a subgroup under the larger tribal classification.

Twenty more towns were added in the Sixth Five-Year Plan, increasing the total to 72. In the Seventh and Eighth Five-Year Plans, that number rose to 74 and 75. However, using data from the 1991 Census, no new PTGs were found (Pradhan, 2017). This classification was changed to PVTG in 2006. The government had already implemented welfare programs like ITDA, MADA, micro-projects, and cluster pocket initiatives before they were formally recognised. Nevertheless, these initiatives did not cover tribes residing in scattered villages and suburban areas; instead, they were covered by the Dispersed Tribal Development Projects (DTDP) (Tara Dutt, 2015).

Characteristics of PVTGs in India

When it comes to tribes, PVTGs are thought to be the least developed. They preserve a uniform culture and unique way of life while living in lonely, hard-to-reach places, frequently in small, isolated communities. These groups follow long-standing social customs and have a rich cultural legacy. They live in great poverty and support themselves through a basic subsistence economy. Their social structure is centred on a hereditary village chief and consists of non-kinship organisations such as village priests, tribal councils, and young dormitories for marriage offers. They seek therapy from local healers because they are very spiritual, worship many deities connected to nature, and think that spiritual curses are the cause of sickness and adversity. They use unwritten languages and scripts for communication, and they fiercely oppose outside intervention in their social structures, liberties, and territories. PVTGs are renowned for their peaceful disposition and lack of hopes for the future, despite their terrible poverty. They continue to be extremely susceptible to exploitation, illnesses, and death (Ota & Mohanty, 2022).

In India, especially vulnerable tribal groups (PVTGs) are not specifically addressed by the Constitution, but they are included in the larger category of tribal communities. The central Ministry of Tribal Affairs oversees their identification process, which is based on suggestions from Union Territories and state governments. The standards for assessing PVTG status have been set by the Ministry of Home Affairs. These criteria have led to the classification

of 75 of the 750 recognised tribal tribes as PVTGs. Dispersed among 17 states and one Union Territory, these communities are thought to be more vulnerable than other tribes.

PVTGs all across the states and Union Territories in India

In the below table show that PVTGs all across the states and Union Territories in India.

Table-1 The distribution of PVTGs all across the states and Union Territories in India

SL.NO	Name of the States/Union Territories	No. of PVTGs residing	Name of the PVTGs
	Odisha	13	Birhor, Bonda, Didayi, Juanga, Hillkharia, Kutia Kondha, Dongaria Kondha, Lanjiasaura, Loadhas, Mankidia, Paudi Bhuyan, Saura, Chuktia Bhunjia,
	Bihar (including Jharkhand)	09	Asurs, Birhor, Birija, Hillkharia, Korwas, MalPaharia, Parhaiyas, Sauriapaharia, Savar
	Karnataka	05	Jenu Kuruba, Koraga
	Gujarat	02	Kathodi, Kotwalia, Padhar, Siddi, Kolgha
	Kerala	05	Cholanaikayan, Kadar, Kattunayanka, Kurumbas, Koraga
	Madhya Pradesh (including Chhattisgarh)	07	Abujh Marias, Baigas, Bharias, Hill Korbas, Kamars, Saharias, Birhor
	Maharashtra	03	Katkaria, Kolam, Maria Gond
	Manipur	01	Marram Nagas
	Andhra Pradesh	13	Bodo Gadaba, Bodoporoja, Chenchu, Dongria Khond, Gutob Gadaba, Khond poroja, Kolam, Kondareddis, Konda Savaras, Kutia Khond, Parengi poroja, Thoti
	Rajasthan	01	Seharia
	Tamilnadu	06	Kattu, Nayakans, Kotas, Kurumbas, Paniyans, Todas
	Tripura	01	Reanga
	Uttar Pradesh (including	02	Buxas, Rajis

	Uttarakhand)		
	West Bengal	03	Birhor, Lodhas,Totos
	Andaman and Nicobar Islands	05	Great Andamanese, Jarwas, Onges, Sentinelese, Shom Pens

Sources: Ministry of Tribal Affairs, GOI

In the above table 1 discuuses that according to the 2011 Census, PVTGs may be found in all six of India's regions. With 13 of the 75 identified groupings, Odisha has the largest concentration of PVTG among the 17 states with PVTG populations. Interestingly, one tribal community in the Nicobar Islands and all four in the Andaman Islands are categorised as PVTGs. Variations in PVTG population sizes have been noted in studies. The Sentinelese and Andamanese tribes, which are found in the Andaman Islands, have the smallest populations under this category, whereas the Saharia tribe, which is dispersed over Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan, is the largest of the known PVTGs.

Odisha is home to 13 of the 75 Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs) in India, making it the state with the most PVTGs. The tribes of Bonda, Didayi, Dongria Kondh, Kutia Kandha, Juang, Hill Kharia, Paudi Bhuyan, Lanjia Saura, Saura, Chuktia Bhunjia, Birhor, Mankidia, and Lodha are among them. In districts like Malkangiri, Kandhamal, Kalahandi, Rayagada, and Keonjhar, these communities were mostly found in isolated and inhospitable areas. Their unique languages, distinctive cultural identities, and ancient knowledge systems are all ingrained in their way of life. The Malkangiri Bonda community, for example, is well-known for their unique clothing and environmentally friendly shifting farming methods. Known for their efforts to protect the environment and their opposition to industrial encroachment, the Dongria Kondh people live in the Niyamgiri hills (Padel & Das, 2010).

As an example of a close interaction with nature, the Kutia Kandha, who live in the districts of Kalahandi and Kandhamal, cultivate podu (shifting) and rely on forest resources for their livelihood.

SC & ST Population of Odisha and Kalahandi

In the table-2 discusses that SC & ST Population of Odisha and Kalahandi.

Table-2 Population with SC & ST and their Percentage to total Population of Odisha and Kalahandi as per 2011 Census.

Region	Total Population	SC Percentage	SC Population	SC Percentage	ST Population
Odisha (Total)	41,974,218	17.1%	7,179,593	22.8%	9,577,142
Kalahandi	1,573,054	18.2%	286,301	28.5%	448,327

Source: Census of India, District Statistical Handbook Kalahandi 2022.

In the above table 2 examine that the sociocultural significance of Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs) in the region's population structure is highlighted by the demographic profile of Odisha and Kalahandi district. Of the 41,974,218 people living in Odisha, 17.1% are SCs (7,179,593) and 22.8% are STs (9,577,142). In contrast, of Kalahandi's 1,573,054 total population, 18.2% (286,301) are SCs and 28.5% (448,327) are STs. certain figures demonstrate how well-represented certain under-represented groups are in the district and the state.

Sex Ratio among SC & ST of Odisha and Kalahandi

Sex Ratio among Sheduled Cast & Sheduled Tribe of Odisha and Kalahandi in the table-3. Data on sex ratios sheds light on gender dynamics in Odisha and Kalahandi's SC and ST groups.

Table-3 The distribution of Sex Ratio among SC & ST of Odisha and Kalahandi by residence as per 2011 Census

Region	Category	Total	Rural	Urban
Odisha	SC	979	988	979
	ST	1031	1031	991
Kalahandi	SC	1016	1015	1025
	ST	1032	1032	1024

Source: Census of India, District Statistical Handbook Kalahandi 2022.

In the above table 3 examine that the large part to traditional social structures and lower rates of female migration, SCs (Odisha: 988; Kalahandi: 1015) and STs (Odisha: 1031; Kalahandi: 1032) have comparatively balanced gender ratios in rural areas. Nonetheless, due to reasons like migration for work, gender gaps are more pronounced in metropolitan areas, with lower sex ratios among SCs (979) and STs (991) in Odisha. It's interesting to note that the urban SC sex ratio of 1025 in Kalahandi is a reflection of particular socioeconomic or cultural circumstances that encourage more gender equity in the area. (Table 3).

Literacy Rates in Odisha and Kalahandi

There are significant gender and geographic differences in Odisha's literacy rates.

Table-4 Literacy Rate of Odisha and Kalahandi

Region	Category	Total Literacy (%)	Male Liteacy (%)	FemaleLiteracy (%)
Odisha (All Category)	Total	72.9	81.0	64.0
Kalahandi (All Category)	Total	59.8	71.0	46.0
	Rural	57.0	70.0	44.3
	Urban	81.0	88.4	74.5

Source: Census of India, District Statistical Handbook Kalahandi 2022.

In the above table 4 elucite that here are significant gender and geographic differences in Odisha's literacy rates. The impact of patriarchal traditions on women's education is shown in the notable disparities between males (81%) and females (64%), despite the state's overall literacy rate of 72.9%. The lower literacy rate of 59.8% in Kalahandi underscores the region's developmental obstacles. The benefits of improved infrastructure and greater knowledge in urban settings are highlighted by the fact that rural areas, with a literacy rate of 57%, lag well behind urban centres, where literacy rates approach 81%. Male literacy rates are higher than female literacy rates in every region, highlighting enduring gender disparities in educational access. At 44.3%, rural female literacy in Kalahandi is very low, indicating ingrained sociocultural impediments. However, higher literacy levels in urban areas suggest steady progress toward decreasing the gender gap, driven by improved access to educational resources and altering social views.

Primary Schools and Teachers in Kalahandi and Lanjigarh

There are notable differences in the gender representation and teacher distribution in primary school, according to the data.

In the table 5 discusses that Despite having 1,382 schools and 3,362 teachers, the male-to-female teacher ratio (about 2.4:1) in the Kalahandi district indicates a clear gender gap in the teaching profession. With just 149 schools and 304 teachers, the situation is particularly worrisome in Lanjigarh, a block that is primarily tribal. With 257 male teachers and only 47 female teachers, Lanjigarh has a glaring gender gap. Students may suffer as a result of this imbalance, especially females, who gain a great deal from having female teachers as role models. Furthermore, Lanjigarh's low teacher population highlights structural resource limitations and the challenge of keeping teachers in isolated rural locations.

Table-5 Number of Primary Schools and Teachers in Kalahandi and Lanjigarh (2021-2022)

Region	Schools	Total Teachers	Male Teachers	Female Teachers
Kalahandi (Total)	1382	3362	2377	985
Lanjigarh Block	149	304	257	47

Source: Census of India, District Statistical Handbook Kalahandi 2022.

Students in Kalahandi and Lanjigarh

There are social and gender differences in student enrolment, according to the data.

Table-6 Number of Students in Kalahandi and Lanjigarh Block (2021-2022)

Region	Total Students	Male Students	Female Students	SC Students	ST Students
Kalahandi (Total)	60,327	30,498	32,824	10,549	21,954
Lanjigarh Block	5,470	2,777	2,693	1,312	3,317

Source: Census of India, District Statistical Handbook Kalahandi 2022.

In the above table 6 elucite that in Kalahandi district, there are more female students (32,824) than male students (30,498), indicating that gender equality in education has advanced. In contrast, the gender disparity is smaller in Lanjigarh block (2,777 males and 2,693 females), which reflects the logistical and cultural difficulties encountered in tribal communities. Significant participation of Scheduled Castes (10,549) and Scheduled Tribes (21,954) is also shown by the enrolment numbers, highlighting the necessity of focused educational interventions. The high percentage of ST students in Lanjigarh (3,317 out of 5,470) is indicative of the block's primarily tribal makeup, whereas SC students make up a lower percentage (1,312). The implementation of inclusive policies, such as scholarships, infrastructure upgrades, and gender-sensitive initiatives, is essential to addressing these gender and

community-based gaps. that address the particular requirements of those living in indigenous areas. (Table 6).

Kutia Kandha: A Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Group (PVTG) of Kalahandi

The Kutia, Dangaria, and Desia are the three primary subgroups of the Kandhas, a significant tribal group in Odisha. The distinctive dwelling design of the Kutia Kandhas is distinguished by the presence of levels below ground level. The Desia Kandhas live on plains with non-tribal people, but the Dangaria Kandhas, also known as Malia Kandhas, live in high-altitude hill regions. Although their original language, Kui, is the Kandhas' primary language, they can converse in Odia and utilise it to interact with others. Though fair-skinned people are infrequently seen among the clan, the Kandhas are generally dark-skinned. They typically have a powerful yet slender physique. With a considerable Mongoloid admixture, the Kandhas, the largest of Odisha's 62 tribes, have close racial links to the Proto-Australoid stock. They were well-known in the past for their unwavering loyalty to regional feudatory chiefs and were actively involved in the Indian independence movement. The Kandhas are renowned for their courage, friendliness, and optimism. Their shared values include being extremely giving to visitors and defending adversaries who seek safety. The Kandhas have historically had a close relationship with nature, which supports their traditional customs and helps them live in harmony with their surroundings. For internal communication, they have a written and spoken language of their own.

Demographics of Lanjigarh Block

In order to empower the populace, improve socioeconomically, and achieve equitable development in the area, this issue must be addressed.

Table-7 The Population Distribution of Lanjigarh Block

Particular	Male	Female	Total
Children (Age 0-6)	4,311	4,207	8,518
Literacy	48.43%	25.43%	44.91%
Scheduled Caste	5,442	5,510	10,952
Scheduled Tribe	10,912	11,636	22,548
Illiterate	12,147	17,819	29,966

Source: Census of India, District Statistical Handbook Kalahandi 2022.

In the above table 7 discusses that according to the 2011 Census, there were 47,451 people living in the Lanjigarh Block of the Kalahandi district, with 23,555 men and 23,896 women spread over 11,269 households. There were 1,014 females for every 1,000 males on average. The average literacy rate in Lanjigarh, which reflected the region's developmental issues, was 44.9%, and all of the population lived in rural regions. Eight,518 people, or 18% of the population, were children aged 0–6. The child population sex ratio was 976

females per 1,000 men, which was marginally lower than the average sex ratio. These numbers demonstrate the necessity of focused efforts in Lanjigarh Block related to gender equality, education, and child welfare. The information supplied highlights important socioeconomic and demographic markers for a particular area. The distribution of the population among the 8,518 youngsters ages 0–6 is a significant highlight. With 4,311 male children and 4,207 female children, this group exhibits a virtually balanced sex ratio, indicating equitable gender representation in this age range. Both advancements and enduring disparities are seen in the literacy numbers. The general literacy rate is 44.91%, however there is a noticeable gender gap: women are far less literate (25.43%) than men (48.43%). This discrepancy highlights how vital it is to overcome gender-based educational disparities and increase everyone's access to educational opportunities. The area's marginalised groups are further highlighted by the socioeconomic composition. Of the population, 22,548 are members of the Scheduled Tribe (ST) community, while 10,952 are members of the Scheduled Caste (SC). These numbers highlight how crucial it is to comprehend the socioeconomic circumstances of these areas in order to carry out focused development programs meant to lessen inequality and promote inclusive growth. Additionally, the data shows that illiteracy is a major problem that affects 29,966 people, 12,147 of whom are men and 17,819 of whom are women.

The first time indigenous tribal people saw structured schooling was when Christian missionaries brought formal education to them (Xaxa, 2011). However, because they believed that schools were incompatible with their traditional way of life, many tribal kids considered them to be unwelcoming and reluctant to attend. The fact that teachers were present and viewed as outsiders by their society added to this unease. Consequently, the high dropout rates among tribal communities have been attributed in part to the cultural gap between the formal education system and the traditional way of life.

A number of institutional and systemic barriers make it extremely difficult for the Kutia Kandha, a Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Group (PVTG), to advance in their schooling. Their educational chances are restricted by a number of factors, including geographic remoteness, pervasive poverty, limited access to educational institutions, and inadequate infrastructure. Investigating the Kutia Kandha's current educational situation, identifying the main obstacles to their education, and assessing the efficacy of current policies and initiatives aimed at closing the educational gap are the objectives of this study.

Supported Literature Review

Black women academics in South Africa's higher education system confront a number of social, cultural, and institutional obstacles that restrict their participation, according to Ramohai's (2014) investigation. The study brought to light problems like the predominance of white men, biassed knowledge evaluation, and unfair promotion standards, all of which work against black women's attempts to get fair access and inclusion in academic settings and make them feel excluded.

Rajam and Malarvizhi (2011) used purposive random sampling and a pre-tested interview schedule to gather data from 600 respondents in order to investigate the educational circumstances of tribal children in the Nilgiris district. In order to relieve schoolgirls' household responsibilities and encourage their academic endeavours, the study suggested connecting crèches with schools.

Dash et al. (2013) explored the education of tribal girls in the Keonjhar district of Odisha, interviewing 300 parents and 50 instructors. Their results demonstrated how important parental attitudes are in influencing tribal girls' educational development, whether they are encouraging or discouraging. The survey also noted that a major obstacle to enhancing females' education in the area is a lack of suitable infrastructure.

With an emphasis on the efficacy of government policies and initiatives, Gautam (2013) examined the educational standing of Scheduled Tribes in India. According to the study's findings, the fundamental reason why indigenous people continue to lag behind is illiteracy. Issues like low program knowledge, the scattered layout of tribal communities, and a lack of administrative commitment were noted despite numerous efforts to enhance educational results. In addition to urging administrative officials to better meet the unique requirements of tribal communities, the study recommended using local media and tribal leaders to raise awareness.

Objective of the paper

1. To discuss the various issue and challenges of primary educational status of Kutia Kandha community of Kalahandi district of the state of Odisha.

Methodology Adopted for the Study

This study takes a descriptive approach and combines qualitative and quantitative research approaches. The study was carried out in the Lanjigarh block, which has 278 villages and 26 Gramme Panchayats. Of these, 28,975 belong to the Kutia Kandha PVTG community, which consists of 14,872 females and 14,103 males. One particular Gramme Panchayat, Bhatangpadar, was specifically chosen for this study. Five villages—Sulia, Saked, Hatigaon, Kolagaon, and Sindhibahali—were selected at random from inside this Panchayat. The combined population of these communities is 250 people. A sample of fifty respondents was chosen from the entire population in order to evaluate their level of education. Purposive, multistage, and basic random sampling techniques are all used in the sampling design. Due to their importance to the study's goals, Bhatangpadar Panchayat and the surrounding villages were chosen using purposive sampling. To guarantee an impartial selection of 50 responders from the selected population, simple random sampling was then used. The Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) software and Microsoft Office programs were used to analyse the data. It is significant to remember that this study's scope is restricted to Bhatangpadar, a

single Gramme Panchayat, guaranteeing a targeted investigation of the educational difficulties encountered by the Kutia Kandha PVTG group.

Findings and Discussion

A) Literacy Rate Among Children

The gender-specific distribution of students in primary and upper primary levels is revealed by the enrolment data

Table-8 Enrolment of students in Primary Schools

CLASSES	BOYS	GIRLS	TOTAL	PERCENTAGE (%)
Class-I	10	5	15	12.7%
Class-II	12	6	18	15.2%
Class-III	5	9	14	11.8%
Class-IV	3	4	7	5.9%
Class-V	6	8	14	11.8%
Class-VI	12	5	17	14.4%
Class-VII	8	6	14	11.8%
Class-VIII	9	10	19	16.4%
TOTAL	**65**	**53**	**118**	**100%**

Sources – Primary Data, 2023

In the above table 8 examine that the gender-specific distribution of students in primary and upper primary levels is revealed by the enrolment data. There are 118 pupils enrolled, 65 of whom are boys and 53 of whom are girls, or 55% of the total. There are noticeable differences in the enrolment trends among the various courses. For instance, Class IV has the lowest enrolment, with only 7 students, while Class II and Class VIII have the greatest enrolment numbers, with 18 and 19 students, respectively. In terms of percentages, Class VIII has the most enrolment share (16.4%), while Class IV has the least

(5.9%). These numbers demonstrate variations in class enrolment and show a clear gender gap in the student body distribution.

B) Rates of Dropout

The information provides insight into socio-educational issues and their wider ramifications by highlighting dropout rates among kids at different school stages.

Table-9 Dropout rates of children

CLASS	BOYS	GIRLS	TOTAL
Class I-V	10	8	18
Class VI-VIII	3	2	5
Class IX-X	1	0	1
Total	14	10	24

Sources – Primary Data, 2023

In the above table 9 examine that A total of 24 dropouts—10 girls and 14 boys—were documented, exposing social issues that impact educational involvement, specifically with regard to gender dynamics, retention, and access. Boys drop out at higher rates than girls in lower levels (I–V), which is a result of both cultural norms and economic pressures that value boys' education over regular education. However, the lack of girls in upper classes (IX–X) highlights structural obstacles including restricted secondary school access and social norms that limit girls' educational opportunities. In order to promote social justice and human growth, dropout rates must be decreased. Systemic barriers including poverty, gender inequality, cultural norms, and a lacklustre educational system must be addressed for interventions to be effective. Societies can improve social cohesion, stimulate economic progress, and empower individuals by establishing an inclusive and equitable educational system that benefits all children, irrespective of gender or socioeconomic background. In order to create more sustainable and fair societies, addressing dropout rates is a social imperative that goes beyond educational programs.

C) Sociological Insights into the Mid-Day Meal (MDM) Scheme

The information highlights the Mid-Day Meal (MDM) program's sociological significance in the Kutia Kandha community. The program, which is being used at a school in Sulia, promotes inclusion and equity by providing universal coverage among enrolled children.

Table 10 Impact of Mid-Day Meal Scheme on Educational Indicators Among Kutia Kandha Students

Indicator	Description	Data/Findings
Total Number of Schools Covered	Number of schools in the Kutia Kandha region providing MDMs.	1 Schools i.e (Sulia,)
Number of Beneficiary Students	Total number of children receiving MDMs (segregated by gender and age group).	All
Attendance Rate (%)	Average daily attendance before and after the implementation of MDM.	Increase 80 percent
Nutritional Impact	Number of malnourished children identified and percentage improvement post-MDM.	NIL
Educational Outcomes	Improvements in literacy, numeracy, and pass rates linked to MDM participation.	Improved
Parental Perception	Survey data on parents' views about MDM's role in education and nutrition.	Supportive
Challenges Faced	Issues like quality of food, regularity of meals, or infrastructural deficits.	Infrastructural deficits.

Source: Author Compilation

In the above table 10 study that its success in lowering absenteeism by attending to urgent food security requirements is evidenced by a noteworthy 80% increase in attendance. Better educational results, such increased reading and numeracy, emphasise the connection between cognitive development and physical health. Trust in institutional attempts to improve child welfare is further demonstrated by positive parental perceptions. To optimise the program's influence on promoting educational fairness, regulatory changes are necessary, as infrastructure deficiencies highlight systemic disparities.

D) Accessibility Challenges for Primary Education in Tribal Areas

There are serious sociocultural issues with education access in tribal communities, as seen by the data on school distance for students in Classes 1 through 5.

In the study that about 19% of kids walk between one and two kilometres to school, and only 6% go more than three kilometres. Young tribal students, especially girls and smaller children, are disproportionately affected by these difficulties since long travels frequently lead to exhaustion, lower attendance, and greater dropout rates. Due to the inadequate distribution of schools throughout isolated tribal areas, this issue highlights spatial disparities in educational infrastructure. Social exclusion and educational marginalisation

are sustained by these obstacles. To address these problems and provide equal access to education, localised solutions are needed, such as building more schools and offering transport.

Barriers to Primary Education Among the Kutia Kondh

Due to physical barriers, the geographical isolation of the villages makes it extremely difficult for Kutia Kondh children to attend schools in nearby locations.

Table-12 Barriers to Primary Education Among the Kutia Kondh

Category	Details
Physical Barriers	Geographical isolation of villages makes it difficult for children to attend schools in nearby locations.
Socioeconomic Barriers	High poverty levels and reliance on forest-based livelihoods lead to an increase in child labor.
Economic Contribution	Financial incentives encourage parents to send children to school, but parental illiteracy limits appreciation of long-term educational benefits.
	Children often engage in traditional cultural activities over formal education.
	Children support families by grazing, gathering firewood or fodder, and tending livestock.
	Conflict between school hours and work schedules in subsistence-based agriculture.
Teacher-Related Barriers	Shortage of trained and culturally aware educators.
	Teacher superiority complex and lack of recognition of indigenous values and lifestyles.
	Single-teacher schools with irregular teacher attendance.
Family Environment	Parents primarily engaged in labour and agriculture lack exposure to modern education systems.
	Limited viewpoints and issues like substance abuse affect children's mental and financial health.
Language Barriers	Absence of a written script for tribal languages and curriculum in foreign regional or national languages hinder

	understanding and participation
Infrastructure Barriers	Long commute to schools disproportionately affects girls and younger children.
	Lack of culturally relevant curricula and poor infrastructure exacerbates challenges.
Administrative Barriers	Limited awareness about government assistance programs.
	Neglect of tribal education by authorities results in disadvantages for the Kutia Kondh.
Proposed Interventions	Culturally relevant curricula, improved infrastructure, and awareness campaigns to address educational barriers.

Sources – Primary Data, 2023

In the above table 12 discusses that inequalities in literacy and educational performance within this community are made worse by socioeconomic differences. Child work is on the rise as a result of high poverty and reliance on forest-based livelihoods. Due to financial incentives, many tribal parents say they would be happy to send their kids to school; yet, their own illiteracy frequently prevents them from fully appreciating the long-term advantages of education. Many Kutia Kondh school-age youngsters choose to engage in traditional cultural activities over formal education because they are mentally detached from it. By performing jobs like grazing, gathering firewood or fodder, and tending to livestock, many kids also help support their families. Since children frequently have to help their parents make a living, the contradiction between school hours and tribal work schedules is a major obstacle. Children are essential to household economies since the Kutia Kondh's main occupation, agriculture, is mostly subsistence-based and uses low-productivity techniques like shifting and terrace cultivation. Another significant barrier to educational advancement in tribal areas is the shortage of trained and culturally aware educators. Many educators exhibit a sense of superiority and fail to recognise the values and ways of life of indigenous groups. Additionally, tribal areas frequently have single-teacher schools with irregular teacher attendance.

Educational outcomes are also significantly influenced by the family environment. Due to their primary employment in labour and agriculture, tribal parents are not well-versed in contemporary educational systems and social mores. This limited exposure frequently results in limited viewpoints and problems like substance misuse, which have a detrimental effect on children's mental and financial health and, eventually, their academic achievement. Since many tribal languages do not have a written script,

language hurdles pose a serious problem for the Kutia Kondh. The curriculum, which is frequently presented in foreign regional or national languages, makes it harder for students to understand and participate, which raises the dropout rate. Tribal pupils become even more alienated and lose interest in learning as a result of the curriculum's misalignment with indigenous knowledge. Other obstacles include a lack of knowledge about government assistance programs and the long commute to school, which disproportionately impacts girls and younger children. Additionally, the difficulties are made worse by the administration's disregard for tribal education, which puts the Kutia Kondh at a disadvantage when it comes to getting a good education. To address these complex obstacles and advance educational fairness for the Kutia Kondh population, targeted interventions are crucial. These include culturally relevant curricula, enhanced infrastructure, and awareness campaigns. (Table 12)

Conclusion

The Kutia Kandha community in Kalahandi district faces numerous sociocultural, economic, and infrastructure challenges that have a significant impact on their educational status. Geographic isolation, poverty, traditional cultural traditions, and a lack of educational resources are the main causes of high dropout rates, gender inequality, and poor literacy levels. A comprehensive strategy is required to successfully address these issues, one that includes strengthening infrastructure, expanding teacher preparation, increasing community awareness, and modifying the educational system to better reflect tribal traditional values. To guarantee equitable access to education, encourage social participation, and aid in the general development of tribal regions, targeted initiatives are necessary.

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Article: Curriculum In School Education: A Comparative Study Of History Textbooks Of Cbse And State Board Of Odisha In India

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Curriculum In School Education: A Comparative Study Of History Textbooks Of Cbse And State Board Of Odisha In India

--Garima Rath

Abstract

This article presents a comparison of history textbooks of Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) and the Odisha State Board in India, with a focus on class IX and X books. The comparison has been done using qualitative content analysis. The paper is based on Althusser's (1971) theory on ideology and Apple's theory of education and power to highlight how school textbooks reflect dominant ideologies. The paper finds that CBSE history textbooks are better structured and provide a nuanced understanding of a particular topic, which is absent in the Odia textbooks. However, they are similar in the way they provide primacy to the perspective of the Indian National Congress (INC) and overlook subaltern perspectives. The analysis shows that the history textbooks attempt to inculcate a singular national identity among students, which highlights how school curriculum shapes students' understanding of history and identity and functions as an ideological state apparatus.

***Keywords**: History textbooks; Curriculum Analysis, Indian Education, Identity Formation, Ideology*

SCHOOL CURRICULUM, IDEOLOGY AND POLICIES

Education, one of the important markers of a developed society, is regarded as a tool of social transformation. Its importance is evident in the myriad policies undertaken by stakeholders to enhance its quality and access. Curriculum is one such major aspect of education that affects its quality. Sociology has a plethora of works that highlight the problematic aspect of the content of textbooks used in school (Apple 1979, Kumar 2001, Thapan 2014, Guichard 2010, Jain 2004). The paper borrows from such works and attempts to develop the idea that the knowledge imparted in schools through textbooks, which is generally considered as the legitimate knowledge of the society, is not the same everywhere. It differs depending upon different boards, publishers, and the type of school one attends, whether a government or private school. Such a difference in knowledge is mainly evident while analysing social science textbooks, where subjects like history and civics are taught. The information that is provided about the past and concepts such as 'identity', 'democracy', 'politics' are interesting to review as this reveals the ideological orientation of the school, the publisher, and the author of these books, the policy under which these textbooks are framed, and finally the orientation of the State. Thus, this paper aims to problematize the idea of knowledge provided in schools. This is done by comparing history textbooks of classes IX and X of the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) and the State Board of Odisha, which is called the Board of Secondary Education (BSE). The reason for taking the Odisha State Board is to highlight the differences between the

Central and regional curricula. Naik and Gundemeda (2023) have also highlighted how citizenship is visualised in multiple ways by states with different cultures and political agendas. They also highlight the political history of Odisha and mention how the independent state of Odisha came into being. In this context, it would be interesting to see how the national and state textbooks present history to the students, as these textbooks become a way of identity formation among them. This comparison would help in understanding the relationship between being an Odia and being an Indian. Further, there is a dearth of such regional comparisons of textbooks with the national ones. This paper attempts to highlight the underrepresentation of such regional comparisons as well. The paper examines how national and local history are portrayed in the CBSE and Odisha State Board textbooks. It further attempts to understand the nature of identity that the history textbooks are trying to create among the students.

The paper relies on Althusser's concept of ideology (1971) and argues that the school curriculum is a product of the ruling class's ideology and therefore not objective or legitimate as it is often argued to be. Social science education in schools is deeply subjective and culturally loaded (Apple 1979, Kumar 2001, etc). For instance, Sylvie Guichard (2010) portrays how history textbooks prevalent in India were influenced by various narratives of nationalism. She has mainly highlighted two narratives of nationalism- secular nationalism, propagated by the Congress party of India, and religious nationalism, propagated by the Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP). She focuses on how they affected the teaching of history in schools before the National Curricular Framework (NCF) 2005. This points to the fact that schools need to be understood not as singular entities but also as related to the outside world and thus involved in the nexus of the cultural, social, economic, and political. Hence, Anuradha Sharma (2016) argues that while looking at schools, one needs to incorporate the idea of "spatiality" and "temporality" (2016, p.xxvi) and understand that the school is not a singular monolithic entity rather it is a place where all spheres of life converge, and hence the kind of knowledge that is imparted in schools becomes part of this nexus.

There have been various ideological battles around the issue of representation in the textbooks. The debate around history textbooks used in schools has undoubtedly been one of the longest debates in the history of school education in India. With careful examination, one also notices that such debates have moved beyond the physical boundary of the Indian nation-state[i]. Hence, this shows the important role of history textbooks in identity creation. Using Anderson's (2006) idea of the imagined communities, textbooks were initially used by the nationalist Indians to portray a certain idea of the newly independent country. Neeladri Bhattacharya (2009) traces the history of such debates and highlights that it started with the need to improve the textbooks that were initially taught to children. Romila Thapar (2009) was given the responsibility to write the new textbooks. Despite her unwillingness, she still wrote it for the greater cause of the nation. However, what followed after the new textbooks were published was the lengthy process of fighting with

various political groups. The fight continues to date, more so after the National Education Policy (NEP) of 2020. Though the textbooks taken for this study were published before 2020, these books are still used now. Some of the chapters of these textbooks, mainly the CBSE ones, have been dropped and are not taught anymore. However, the Odia textbooks haven't been revised yet. As Krishna Kumar (2001) highlights, one can notice that the "politics of mention"(2001, p.72), i.e., what is mentioned and what is omitted, depends on who is in power. It would be interesting to note what topics are now omitted from these textbooks. As Shalini Advani argued, "the structuring of knowledge is extremely similar to the structuring of power" (Advani 1996, p.2077).

It is therefore important to highlight the curricular framework under which these textbooks were made. The paper highlights a few important points of the NCF 2005 and the SCF 2007. The Odisha government books also follow the NCF 2005 along with the State Curricular Framework (SCF 2007). The SCF 2007 is in tandem with the NCF 2005. The NCF 2000 document brought by the BJP government underwent a major change after the fall of the government in 2004, which was incorporated in a new document called the National Curricular Framework 2005 brought up by the Congress Party, which was the ruling party then. Complying with the earlier policies like the National Policy on Education (NPE) 1986, Secondary Education Commission (1952-53), etc., this new document sought to change the National Curricular Framework for School Education (NCFSE) 2000 in congruence with the Yash Pal Committee Report called 'Learning without Burden' (1993). This document introduces itself as a newly proposed curriculum framework to lessen the burden on the students introduced in the previous NCF. It lists five main principles for the preparation of curriculum:

- connecting knowledge to life outside the school,
- ensuring that learning is shifted away from rote methods,
- enriching the curriculum to provide for overall development of children rather than remain textbook centric,
- making examinations more flexible and integrated into classroom life and,
- nurturing an over-riding identity informed by caring concerns within the democratic polity of the country. (NCERT 2005, p.5)

Following these guidelines, the document aims to bring creativity and self-reliability to school education while upholding the ideals of a democratic country. This document also specifically mentions being sensitive to the issues of marginalized groups in the country and attempts to provide spaces for the voices of these groups as well. Besides, the role of social sciences in creating a strong sense of civic identity has also been emphasized in this document. While proposing curricular changes for social sciences, it has been highlighted that:

It is believed that the social sciences merely transmit information and are text centered. Therefore, the content needs to focus on a conceptual understanding rather lining up facts to be memorized for examinations. Reiterating the recommendations of '*Learning Without Burden* (1993), emphasis has to be laid on developing concepts and the ability to analyze sociopolitical realities rather than on the mere retention of information without comprehension. (2005, p.50)

Further, it also emphasizes the fact that social sciences are as important as natural sciences and shouldn't be treated as inferior, as they too engage in scientific enquiry and employ various kinds of methods. Broadly, it categorizes social sciences into the disciplines of history, geography, political science, and economics, and delineates specific subject matter of each of the disciplines while emphasizing cross-disciplinary approaches as well. The new curricular framework also encourages multiple ways of imagining the nation, with equal focus on the national as well as the local elements. It also highlights the importance of teaching children about the ideas of caste inequalities, gender issues, rural-urban gap, etc., which can help them relate the content of the books to their immediate surroundings.

Similarly, the SCF 2007, which is based on the NCF 2005, also lists down its various principles; these are:

- Linking the knowledge with outer environment.
- Getting rid of Rote Learning.
- Not to confined only to textbook but aims at all round development of child.
- Flexible and integrated & valuation into classroom life.
- Nurturing an over-riding identity informed by caring concerns within the democratic policy of the country[ii].

One of the most important concepts that this study uses is 'ideology'. Ideology can be defined as a body of ideas, values, and norms that are generally accepted as given in society. One of the major theorists that this paper has referred to for understanding ideology is Althusser (1971). Althusser maintained an epistemological break from the traditional Marxists in understanding and analysing society. The basic Marxist understanding of society gave supremacy to the economic base. It was believed that the economic base determined the superstructure of the society; hence, all the political, cultural, and legal institutions are seen as derivative of the economic base. Althusser, on the other hand, moves a step forward in claiming that there is relative autonomy of the superstructure from the economic base and talks about a reciprocal action in the sense that the superstructure also plays a role in determining the base. His theory on ideology is one of the most influential theories in Marxism. This theory is developed while writing about the Ideological State Apparatus. He defines ideology as a system of ideas and representations (images, myths, etc) which dominate the mind of man or a social group. He thus says that "ideology is the representation of the imaginary relationship of individuals with their real conditions of existence" (Althusser

1971, p.153), and it further 'interpellates' individuals and constitutes them as subjects who accept their role within the system of relations of production. Thus, ideology not only gives individuals a false sense of reality, but it also turns them into subjects, with them being hardly aware of it.

Althusser (1971) is of the view that many institutions function as Ideological State Apparatuses. In the pre-capitalist society, he argues that the Church played an important role in transmitting this ideology to the masses. In the capitalist society, education or schools have taken the position of the Church. Thus, the educational system operates on the ideology that justifies and legitimises the ruling class domination or the capitalist system, thereby creating false consciousness, due to which those being exploited hardly realise it. Thus, education, in addition to reproducing the skills required for the labour force, also reproduces the ruling class ideology and socialises the masses in terms of it. It reproduces attitudes and behaviours required by different groups in the division of labour. So, there are proper courses for the managerial positions that teach them how to practice crafts and thereby rule the workforce as agents of the ruling class. Thus, Althusser argues that no ruling class can ever maintain their power through coercion only; it is only when they operate based on an ideology that they can prolong their rule. This particular article relies on Althusser's idea of the ideological state apparatus to see how far the ideology of the state affects the content or the curriculum of school education.

Michael Apple (1979) is another leading theorist who has highlighted the relationship between ideology and education. In one of his most celebrated works, *'Ideology and Curriculum'* (1979), he talks about the cultural mediations that happen in school by looking at the relationship between culture and economy and how the curriculum in schools is loaded with cultural meanings. Drawing heavily from Gramsci's (1971) idea of hegemony[iii], he argues that education has to be understood as an ideology that reproduces the existing social relations and structures. He gives primacy to the superstructure in understanding this. He argues that schools should be analysed in the ideological dynamics and not just be reducible to the aspect of economic relations, although it is influenced by it. Apple (1979) argues that school not only controls people or their behaviour, but it also controls meaning. This is evident in the kind of knowledge that is taught in schools, which is perceived to be the legitimate knowledge, the knowledge that everyone must possess. In doing so, the schools provide cultural legitimacy to one particular set of ideas that are regarded as knowledge, and this belongs to one specific group in the society. However, the ability of a group to make its knowledge the legitimate knowledge for the whole of society is dependent upon the group's political and economic power. So, power and culture are not static entities that are mutually exclusive; rather, they are attributes of the existing economic relations of the society. They are entwined in such a way that economic power and control are also related to cultural power and control. He argues that there are many ways that the schools produce structural inequalities, and some of these include through their curricula, pedagogy, and evaluation process. This

present paper will focus on the curricular practices of schools to understand the ideological bearings on school knowledge.

This paper adopts the qualitative content analysis approach to analyse history textbooks of classes IX and X of CBSE and the State Board of Odisha[iv]. Since the paper aims to have a critical analysis of the curriculum (i.e., the subject material of textbooks taken for this study), this method was deemed to be the most appropriate one. In total, four books have been analysed. The CBSE boards have separate books for history and civics. However, the Odisha State Board does not provide separate books for history and civics. Initially, the study had listed out certain themes based on which the books would be analysed. However, certain themes also emerged during the reading of the texts. The Odisha Board textbooks used in this study are written in Odia. The author has tried her best to provide accurate translations whenever necessary.

The textbooks[v] used for the study are:

- India and the Contemporary World-I, CBSE, First edition, March 2006.
- India and the Contemporary World-II, CBSE, First edition, March 2007.
- History and Political Science, class IX, BSE, Odisha, 2012.
- History and Political Science, class X, BSE, Odisha, 2013.

CBSE HISTORY TEXTBOOKS

The class IX and X history books are titled 'India and the Contemporary World-I & II' respectively, and they introduce the reader to the connection and linkages between the history of India and the rest of the world. Class VI-VIII books provide a history of India, and the two books taken up for this study (Class IX-X) link this history of India with other countries across the world to highlight interconnections between these countries. As it has been mentioned in the introduction, history cannot be contained within definite territorial boundaries always (NCERT, 2006). An attempt has been made in these books to provide a better understanding of the contemporary world not through the history of the West only, but through different colonies and other countries in the East or Africa, or South America.

The CBSE books of both class IX and X are divided into three sections: 1) Events and Processes, 2) Livelihoods, economies, and societies, and 3) Everyday life, culture, and politics. Through these sections, space has been provided not just for important events such as the French Revolution or the Nationalist movement in India, but to everyday activities and routines of people's lives and their histories such as different economic patterns, the origin of the press and the newspaper or the history of novels, thereby providing a history of the everyday. These books also provide pictorial depictions of events (like newspaper cuttings, etc); definitions of various terms, and other boxes such as 'Activity' where the students are asked to give answers based on images provided in the chapter, or on hypothetical situations related to the topic discussed. To give an example, the chapter on Nazism has a poster attacking Jews; in the 'Activity' box, the students are asked to

interpret the meaning of this poster. Boxes called 'Sources' are present, which give some additional information about a topic being discussed. For instance, the chapter on the French Revolution has these sources, which present ideas of some eminent leaders or philosophers of that time.

STATE HISTORY TEXTBOOKS

The Odisha Board does not have separate books for history and civics as already mentioned. The textbooks are named 'History and Political Science' classes IX and X, respectively. Each chapter at the end contains exercises, which are questions directly based on the same chapter. Further, within each chapter, there are boxes called 'did you know', which provide additional factual information about any particular topic, and 'work for you', which asks students to further engage in the topic. For example, in the chapter on the establishment of independent Odisha, students are asked to find out the names of Bengali people and British officials who also aided in the development of the Odia language.

Both class IX and X history books mention in their introduction the importance of reading history. These books propose that history not only helps in learning about major events of the past but also highlights notions about culture, tradition, administration, and civilisation. These books reiterate the importance of knowing about the history of one's community (the term 'jati' is mentioned here), people, and culture, as it will help in shaping the present as well as the future of a society by influencing the way of thinking of its members.

Both books are formed by the guidelines of NCERT and SCF 2007 as well. Both textbooks are divided into four sections, which have four, five, or six chapters each. While the class X book focuses on independence and development in India and Odisha, the class IX book presents a history of the major events of the world by focusing on concepts of colonialism, the World Wars, and so on.

COMPARISON OF CBSE AND ODISHA BOARD TEXT BOOKS

After analysing the textbooks discussed above, this section will highlight certain important differences or similarities (if any) that were found in the textbooks used for the study in this chapter. This comparison will focus on both the form and the content of the textbooks under analysis. Emphasis is, however, placed on the content of the textbooks, while a brief comparison of the organisation of this content (form) is provided here.

Form of the textbooks: Upon scrutiny, it can be argued that CBSE history books of class IX and X are more organised than the Odisha Board books. As has been mentioned in the above analysis, the CBSE textbooks are divided into various sections that do not just provide information about important events or processes of the world, but also about how everyday life has been constituted through emphasis on sports, novels, and clothing. Similarly, the

histories of various livelihoods and economic activities have been provided, which also make the reader aware of how the world today came to be shaped in terms of the existing economic situations. The CBSE textbooks attempt to provide a history that connects India to the rest of the world. The CBSE books of IX and X focus on concepts such as 'modernisation' and 'nationalism', and through various chapters present these ideas under various contexts and chart their development at various places. The chapters are interlinked and demonstrate how certain developments in one part of the world influence historical developments in other places. For instance, the whole modernisation process taken up by different parts of the world during different times was influenced by the French Revolution, and the textbooks bring this detail to the children remarkably. Interestingly, information here is also provided in the form of various images that have historical importance. For instance, while talking about the rise in female allegory of the nation, pictures of Germania for Germany, Marianne for France are provided. The section on economic livelihoods, which provides information about pastoralists and other tribes, also provides the students with various pictures that help students identify these groups and their unique features. Such pictorial depictions are important as they help students identify certain symbols with a historical event, and they also help keep the students interested in the text.

The Odisha Board textbooks are also divided into various sections, which are ordered chronologically, and they attempt to interlink these chapters, which is not as effective as the CBSE textbooks, though. The Odia textbooks present the history of important events only, while failing to connect history to the everyday life of the students. Since it has been mentioned in the introduction of the books that they also follow NCF 2005 guidelines, the portions covered in both CBSE and Odisha Board textbooks are almost the same. Both focus on movements in Russia, Indo-China, India, and Europe, but the Odia books have no sections that focus on the history of economies and culture. These books do have chapters on economic development in India post-independence; however, these are presented as the steps taken by the government to develop the country. The books fail to provide a history of the world economy and its linkage with India. These books have very limited pictorial depictions; they only provide images of freedom fighters or the leaders of various movements.

The CBSE history books are also extremely engaging with the students and help them to think critically about certain topics. This is evident from the Activity boxes that are present in each chapter of the books. For instance, based on a picture in the chapter on the French Revolution, students are asked the following question: "Explain why the artist has portrayed the nobleman as the spider and the peasant as the fly?" (X NCERT, p.5). There are boxes called 'Sources' which also provide interesting information about a topic by highlighting excerpts from various books. Such critical engagement is absent in Odisha Board textbooks. Although there are boxes called 'did you know' and 'work for you', and they do provide additional information, but they fail to provide a link to the history of the everyday lives of those who lived back

then. History is presented in these books only as events or important dates, not as experiences that shaped the world today.

Content of the textbooks: There are certain themes[vi] based on which the differences or similarities in the content of the textbooks would be highlighted here. These are:

PORTRAYAL OF INDIAN NATIONAL CONGRESS (INC) AND GANDHI:

On careful examination, one can notice that both CBSE textbooks and Odisha Board textbooks privilege Congress and Gandhi. This is evident from Class X book of the Odisha Board, where the section on the independence struggle of India is named as 'Gandhiyug'. The section with various chapters highlights the steps that were taken by the INC, particularly under the leadership of Gandhi, to achieve an independent country. These chapters do not highlight the role of any other political parties or leaders like Bhagat Singh, Periyar, and Dr Ambedkar. In fact, as Pathak (2002) notes, Congress is seen as the most important agent of nationalist struggle. Even while discussing the role of Odisha in the independence struggle, the entire focus is on the leaders who represented Odisha at the INC. Madhusudan Das[vii] and others are projected as under the guidance of the INC. The role of INC has also been highlighted in the struggle for achieving independent Odisha. The State Congress, with the support of the INC, was the primary agent that brought independence to Odisha. The role of tribal communities and those belonging to other sections of society that did not participate in the movement by Congress has been completely omitted from the books. CBSE textbooks also follow a similar pattern. The chapter on the Nationalist Movement in India focuses entirely on the role of Congress and Gandhi. There has been hardly any mention of the role of the Hindu Mahasabha or the Muslim League. Even the role of regional parties gets no space in this chapter. This points to the fact that Indian history is presented to the students from the perspective of Gandhi and the INC.

CONSENSUAL IDEA OF HISTORY:

This theme borrows from the previous one. Pathak (2002) argued while analysing CBSE textbooks that history is portrayed in a consensual way, bereft of dissent within. This is so because of the privilege given to the INC and Gandhi. As history is written from their perspective, the internal conflicts that existed within various Indian parties have been hardly mentioned in both textbooks. The CBSE textbooks do mention how the masses react to the movements by Gandhi and also mention the failure of Congress to accommodate people from the lower-class society because of their affiliation to the rich and people of higher strata; however, they remain silent on the issue of caste. Dr Ambedkar has been mentioned only in two lines, where he is mentioned as the leader of lower caste groups who did not trust the INC. The role of these lower caste movements finds no mention in any of the textbooks of CBSE or the Odisha Board. The Odisha Board textbooks, however, do not even provide a single line on the limitation of Congress or anything to disrupt this consensual view. History, therefore, in both textbooks is devoid of internal

conflicts and dissent. The enemy is seen as the outsider- the British, and the people or the masses are seen as unified towards a common enemy.

SPACE GIVEN TO SUB-ALTERN PERSPECTIVES:

As is evident from the above two themes, there is no space given for subaltern perspectives in the history textbooks of either of the Boards. The books talk nothing about Dr. Ambedkar, Periyar, and Jyotiba Phule. Caste is not seen as a problematic aspect for presenting history as history is seen as one, the only one fought under the leadership of Congress. Such similarity is also observed when talking about the Odia movement. The role of the Paik Rebellion has been completely omitted in these books, and tribal leaders like Laxman Naik, Birsa Munda, or tribes like Kondhs have been given no space in the history of Odisha. Women, however, are given importance in the CBSE textbooks, not as leaders but as active symbols of nationalism. While talking about the female allegory of the nation, one can notice the changing status of women in history. Through the depictions of Germania, Bharat Mata, the role of women in strengthening the nationalist feeling is conveyed to the readers. Also, in the nationalist struggle of Indo-China, the role of women as nurturers, fighters has been mentioned; this chapter charts the changing roles of women and how they move away from traditional roles. Similarly, in the Indian Nationalist struggle, two lines have been mentioned about Rokeya Begum, but one finds no mention of Savitribai Phule. Women are, however, not given as much space in Odia textbooks. Only the names of one or two women leaders who were part of the Odisha State Congress were mentioned while discussing the Odia freedom movement. Thus, one can notice that selective omissions in space given to various groups while presenting national history in both CBSE and Odisha Board textbooks.

NOTIONS ABOUT IDENTITY:

This theme would attempt to explore what kind of identities the history textbooks of CBSE and the Odisha Board are trying to create among the students. To explore this, it would be easier to focus on how nationalism has been represented in the textbooks. As evident from the above themes, the chapters on the nationalist movement aim to create a pan-Indian identity. This is evident from the chapter on the Indian nationalist struggle in the CBSE X book, which focuses on various steps taken to create a pan-Indian identity to inculcate the feeling of nationalism among the masses. This was done through folklore, songs, and various symbols as mentioned in the textbook. In all these attempts, the enemy was the British, against whom the struggle was waged. This chapter mentions the limitations of using Hindu symbols in creating the nationalist feeling in two lines, but there has been no further discussion on it. Despite this limitation, the importance of Bharat Mata, national songs like ‘Vande Mataram’, are seen as creating a pan-Indian identity, which was seen as the most important identity. However, the CBSE book presents no conflicts or contradictions within this identity. The nationalist struggle against the British created a pan-Indian identity with no contradictions in it.

The Odisha Board textbooks also portray a similar notion. The section on Indian Nationalist struggle, although has no specific chapter on the creation of Nationalism, but the way history is presented in a consensual manner reiterates the idea of a pan-Indian identity. Furthermore, the class IX Odisha Board textbook has a section on Indian heritage, which focuses on Indian traditions and cultures, which also reemphasise this common Indian identity. Through its focus on tolerance, family life, marriage, this section presents a pan-Indian identity that exists despite various caste and religious groups existing in India. Through the notion of 'parampara,' the chapter highlights how there exists a traditional Indian identity. Such a notion is further applied to the local Odia identity, which also seems to derive from the Indian identity. For instance, it is mentioned that:

Very few countries display the culture of "unity in diversity". It is this diversity that exists in Indian culture, makes it enriched and progressive. This diversity has also helped in maintaining the unity of the country (IX BSE, p.120).

Furthermore, the local and national identities are not seen as at loggerheads but as complementary and derivative of each other. As Naik and Gundemeda (2023) have noticed in their work that Odia textbooks used in schools focus on creating a pan-Odia identity. However, the creation of such an identity largely ignores many geographical areas of Odisha, mainly its southern and western parts.

But the government of Odisha has only focused on the partial history of Kalinga (coastal Odisha) and projected it as the history of Odisha by rejecting and ignoring the history and cultures of southern and western Odisha, thus in a way teaching an incomplete, partial, ignorant perspective about the past. The teachings of coastal Odisha, its historical events and personalities as Odisha history have more significant pedagogic implications to school children from both the regions (Naik and Gundemeda 2023, p.82).

Therefore, although the textbooks identify that people from various social groups coexist in India and Odisha, they still emphasise the pan-Indian and the pan-Odia identity that binds people together because of a common tradition.

CONCLUSION

Based on the above analysis, it can be concluded that CBSE and Odisha Board textbooks are extremely different when it comes to the way information has been presented. CBSE textbooks are more structured and provide a nuanced understanding of a particular topic, which is uncharacteristic of Odia textbooks. The Odia textbooks provide information not as historical events but as general knowledge to be rote learnt. However, despite these major differences, one can find striking similarities in the textbooks when it comes to the way Indian history is presented. Both the textbooks have given primacy to

the perspective of INC and have given less or no space to subaltern perspectives. The intensity of such distorted representation, however is higher in the Odia textbooks than in the CBSE books, which at least mention certain limitations[viii], although very briefly. The importance given to pan-Indian identity in both the boards is striking as they fail to recognise multiple identities that coexist in India. Further, these multiple identities are often not complementary to the national identity. The importance given to pan-Indian identity is more evident in the Odia textbooks when the section on Indian heritage is discussed. Both culture and tradition are seen here as monolithic entities devoid of nuances. Thus, through such presentations, a national identity is emphasized. The use of history to create a singular national identity has numerous repercussions, as it does not provide necessary attention to the multiple identities that citizens possess. Thus, CBSE textbooks and more particularly, Odisha Board textbooks can be seen as promoting the ideology of a monolithic national identity. Thus, as Althusser (1971) argues, here we can see how school education, mainly history education, acts as an ideological state apparatus.

Further, it can be argued that in India, as Krishna Kumar (2001) notes, the purpose of education has always been linked to nation-building, given its colonial history. Such an agenda has a huge bearing on what should be taught, mainly in the social sciences. It is also indicative of the kind of country we are trying to build. Thus, school knowledge, mainly social science textbooks, should be seen in the larger context of nation-building and identity creation (Kumar, 2005). Thus, school education, rather than being pedagogical, becomes political (Kumar, 2001). Such an understanding of school education also has large implications for how educational policies are framed in this country[ix]. The findings highlight the need to integrate multiple perspectives in school textbooks, which will help in critical thinking. This will also help in highlighting India's socio-cultural plurality. Further, this indicates that school is not a monolithic entity; it is a place where all spheres of life converge, and hence the kind of knowledge that is imparted in schools becomes part of this nexus. This has been highlighted by Bernstein, who also argues that "The power relationships created outside the school penetrate the organization, distribution and evaluation of knowledge through the social context of their transmission" (Bernstein 2003: 154). Hence, the organization of knowledge (curriculum) depends on those who are in power in a society, thereby dictating the quality of education itself.

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[i] The California State controversy of History Textbooks by various Hindu Groups in the year 2005-2006. For more details refer to Bose 2008.

[ii] https://scertodisha.nic.in/curriculum/#

[iii] Gramsci's idea of hegemony states that the ruling class doesn't rule only through coercion but by shaping the ideological, moral, and cultural values of the society, where their

worldview appears as common sense for the society. It influences how people act, behave, and also understand the world.

[iv] Qualitative content analysis is "a research method for the subjective interpretation of the content of text data through the systematic classification process of coding and identifying themes or patterns" (Hsieh and Shannon 2005: 1278). Content analysis in general is an organized study of the communicative material that not only includes texts but also images, music, and many other representative forms of communication. Krippendorff (2004: 18) also defines it as "a research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from texts (or other meaningful matter) to the context of their use." Initially, content analysis came up as a quantitative method, but over the years, it incorporated elements of qualitative elements in its methodology. This article similarly moves away from the quantitative aspect of content analysis that generally asks 'what' the text depicts. It also focuses on 'how' the text depicts and 'why' it depicts what it does. At a primary level of observation, the manifest function of the text or the content that is 'what' does the text say is seen, but on proper scrutiny, the questions of 'why' does the text say this and with 'what effect' can also be properly understood.

[v] The textbooks used for this study were selected on the basis of purposive sampling, as classes IX and X are considered the most important years of secondary education in India.

[vi] These themes have been selected to examine how the ruling state's ideology affects what is taught as history in schools. The role of the Congress Party in maintaining pan-Indian identity is important here. It is related to its understanding or imagination of how India is supposed to be.

[vii] Madhusudan Das was a prominent figure in Odisha who helped in the creation of the independent Odisha State. He was a lawyer by profession and also founded the Utkala Sammilani in 1903 to fight for the unification of Odisha. He used to write poems, which were often taught in schools to students in Odia language classes.

[viii] The limitation of the Congress to incorporate minorities and other lower groups has been mentioned in class X history textbooks. The lower classes (workers and peasants) couldn't put their trust in the Congress as the industrialist and rich peasants supported it; the Congress therefore, could never support some claims of these depressed sections. Similarly, the 'Untouchables', Muslims were wary of the Hindu majority of Congress and hence did not support the Congress led Civil Disobedience movement.

[ix] See the National Educational Policy 2020 to understand the relationship between educational policies and identity creation in India.

https://www.education.gov.in/sites/upload_files/mhrd/files/NEP_Final_English_0.pdf

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Article: Exploring the Impact of Language Variations on Child Readers: An Ideational Metafunctional Analysis of Comic Stories in 'Balarama'

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Exploring the Impact of Language Variations on Child Readers: An Ideational Metafunctional Analysis of Comic Stories in 'Balarama'

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Abstract

This research explores the impact of language variations on children's reading experiences and cultural perceptions by analyzing comic stories published in 'Balarama,' a children's magazine in Malayalam, before and during the COVID-19 pandemic. Using the Transitivity Analysis Framework in Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), this study delves into the socio-linguistic dimensions of comic texts within contexts from five different comic stories published across six issues of Balarama during 2019-2020. The analysis focuses on functional elements such as Theme, Mood, Voice, Processes, Participants, and Circumstances. The findings reveal a predominance of the Verbal Process Type and participant roles such as Sayer, Target, Actor, and Goal. This indicates a significant emphasis on dialogic interactions, reflecting real-world, spoken activities. By highlighting these linguistic and social processes, the research underscores how authors of Balarama comics employ language to construct social realities and cultural norms. The study shows that these narrative strategies are designed to engage and educate young readers, fostering cultural awareness and enhancing their socio-linguistic competence. By situating this analysis within a socio-linguistic framework, the research provides insights into the intricate relationship between language variations and their effects on children's cognitive and cultural development. It contributes to our understanding of how language functions as a social semiotic system in children's media, particularly in the context of significant societal changes brought about by the pandemic.

Keywords: Children's Comic Stories, Covid-19 Pandemic, Language Variations, Systemic Functional Linguistics, Sociolinguistics, Process Types, Participant Types, Circumstances

Introduction

Children have a relentless curiosity over everything around the world. A study on their interests and motivations by 'Frontiers in Psychology' finds that children usually prefer storybooks that contain more causal information (Margaret, 2020).[1] And we often find it difficult to answer their questions of What? Why? and How? "Children know perfectly well that unicorns aren't real, but they also know that the books about unicorns, if they are good books, are true books." (Ursula, 1979)[2] The Children's Literature Association accentuates that the information gathered by children through reading influences their worldview as well as the moral standards (Audsley, 2019).[3] It will also condition their language quality and improve literacy. To be more specific, the choice of words and lexical differences in stories can create a significant impact on the young reader's intellect. From affecting basic language skills to moulding moral judgments, there are many ways in which a

writer's lexical choices can influence the reader's mind (Audsley, 2019).[4] Therefore, research on the author's choice of words and its influence on the readers is necessary to provide a civilized, unbiased, humanitarian story-telling experience to children at their young ages. Lexical choices and differences can be studied using Transitivity analysis in Systemic Functional Linguistics. Language analysis in systemic functional linguistics gives importance to the functional aspects of language. Therefore, the six transitivity process types in systemic functional linguistics constitute a particular model for a distinct domain of experience (Halliday, 1985).[5]

The primary objective of this research is to explore the profound influence of language variations on children's reading experiences and their cultural perceptions. This study focuses on analyzing comic stories from 'Balarama,' a widely acclaimed children's magazine published in Malayalam. The analysis employs Halliday's Transitivity Analysis Framework within the domain of Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL). By utilizing this framework, the research aims to uncover the intricate relationship between linguistic choices and their socio-cultural impact on young readers.

CONVENTIONS

ACC	Accusative	LOC	Locative
ASP	Aspect	NEG	Negation
AUX	Auxiliary	Pl.	Plural
DAT	Dative	POT	Potential Mood
GEN	Genitive	PP	Present Progressive
IMP	Imperative	PRP	Present Participle
INF	Infinitive	PST	Past
INT	Interrogative	SOC	Sociative

Sociolinguistic Context:

Language is a dynamic entity that reflects and responds to societal changes. The COVID-19 pandemic has significantly impacted daily life, leading to new terminologies, shifts in social norms, and changes in communication patterns. Analyzing Balarama Comics within this context allows us to explore how these broader social changes are mirrored in the language used in children's media. Comics are a potent tool for language acquisition and socialization among children. They not only provide entertainment but also impart cultural norms, values, and social behaviors. Variations in language, such as the

introduction of new words or changes in narrative styles, can affect how children learn language and understand their world. Halliday's framework categorizes the verbs in a text into different types of processes (material, mental, relational, verbal, behavioral, and existential) and identifies the participants involved in these processes. By analyzing the processes and participants in Balarama Comics, we can identify how actions, thoughts, relationships, and dialogues are presented to children and how these presentations have shifted during the pandemic. The way reality is constructed in the comics through transitivity choices can reveal underlying ideologies and values. Changes in language can influence cognitive development by introducing new concepts and ways of thinking. Emotional development can also be impacted by how feelings and experiences are depicted in the comics. During the pandemic, children might be exposed to new emotional vocabularies and coping mechanisms through the stories they read. Language variations in the comics can affect children's cultural and social understanding. For instance, the introduction of pandemic-related themes and language (such as social distancing, quarantine) can shape how children perceive and navigate the new normal. This analysis not only sheds light on the evolving linguistic landscape but also provides insights into how such variations influence children's language acquisition, socialization, and overall development.

To facilitate a comprehensive socio-linguistic investigation, this research undertakes a qualitative analysis of texts within various contexts. Specifically, it examines five distinct comic stories spread across six issues of Balarama published during 2019-2020. This qualitative approach allows for a detailed exploration of several crucial linguistic elements present in these stories, including Theme, Mood, Voice, Processes, Participants, and Circumstances.

Theme and Mood: Analyzing the thematic structure and mood reveals how narrative focus and emotional tone are constructed and how they guide readers' engagement and responses; Voice and Processes: Examining the narrative voice and the types of processes (material, mental, relational, etc.) provides insights into the portrayal of actions, thoughts, and relationships, highlighting the socio-cultural roles and identities being represented; Participants and Circumstances: Identifying the participants involved in the processes and the circumstances surrounding them elucidates how social roles, relationships, and contexts are linguistically constructed and conveyed to the readers.

This research also seeks to explore the implications of language variations on the cultural perceptions of young readers. By analyzing the selected comic stories, the study aims to elucidate how linguistic choices and variations within the narratives shape readers' understanding and interpretation of cultural concepts. This exploration is rooted in socio-linguistic theory, which considers language as a social practice that both reflects and influences cultural norms and values. Through this comprehensive analysis, the research endeavors to contribute valuable insights into the field of children's literature and language education. It enhances our understanding of how language

variations can influence cultural awareness and the worldview of child readers, highlighting the socio-linguistic dynamics at play in the realm of children's media.

Review of Literature

M.A.K Halliday from the London School of Linguistics developed the notion of Systemic functional linguistics, inspired by J R Firth, his teacher (Halliday, 1961)[6] as well as from the works of Saussure, Hjelmslev, Malinowski, Boas, Sapir, Whorf, etc. His main concepts on systemic functional grammar include Metafunctions, Systems, Lexicogrammar, and Rank. He considers the fundamental property of language as the functions it is intended to serve and calls it the Metafunction. He explains the notion of meaning-making through the description of the network of systems involved in it (Halliday, 2009).[7] When it comes to studying the contribution of the structure of the language to the meaning-making process, we have to reanalyse the earlier semiotic concepts. It is where the notion of the Systemic Functional approach comes into the limelight with its capability of analysing texts in their contexts to provide a general theory of language which could account for how the organizational structure of language construes meaning-making comprehensively. M A K Halliday is inspired by J R Firth in proposing Systemic Functional Approach (Halliday, 1961).[8] The Systemic functional linguistics model first evolved from Firth's study on languages. He disagreed with Structuralists as well as Formalists in terms of how they treat language. They were concerned only with the anatomy of language while Firth emphasized both aspects; anatomy and physiology of language. Firth extended Malinowski's opinion of meaning (1923)[9] which is, 'function in context', and therefore the concept of linguistic meaning was seen as a 'complex of contextual relations' (Fatima, et.al, 2008).[10]

The systemic functional linguistic framework is used by Linguists as well as researchers across the globe as a qualitative tool for language analysis. To name a few, C.M.I.M Matthiessen's, *Lexicogrammatical Cartography* (1995)[11] describes English grammar in the systemic functional linguistic perspective. *Construing Experience Through Meaning: A Language-Based Approach to Cognition* (1999)[12] is a book by Matthiessen and Halliday that explores the semiotic approach to cognition. Ruqaiya Hasan has extended Halliday's model of systemic functional linguistics. She argued that context is essential in resolving Saussure's dichotomy of 'langue' and 'parole'. She has also made a theoretical distinction between 'relevant context' and 'material situational setting' through her works (Hasan, 2009a).[13] J. R. Martin's contribution to the genre-based approach to language education is a breakthrough in SFL. Influenced by Halliday and other Systemic Functional linguists of that time, Martin created a theory called Discourse Semantic Theory which can explain the structure of texts and their organization based on the perspective of Metafunctions.[14] *English Text: System and Structure* (1992)[15] and *Transitivity in Tagalog: A Functional Interpretation of Case* (1996)[16] are the two major works by Martin based on SFL. *The Systemic*

Functional Interpretation of Transitivity Templates in News Reports is a study by Fatima. et al (2008)[17] published in the NUML Journal of Critical Inquiry which focuses on bringing out the lexical differences in news reports to figure out the transitivity templates and underscore the manner of engagement maintained by the news reporters. *A Study of Non-Finite Clauses in English from the Systemic Functional Perspective* by Bingjun Yang (2018)[18] defines the non-finite clauses and their position in Halliday's rank scale model, by dividing the clauses by the types of phenomena and clarifying their effects. *The Transitivity Process Analysis on Popular Songs by The Beatles* by Harbi. et al (2019)[19] published in IJLEAL reveals how The Beatles employed different processes in their lyrical writing of their popular songs in order to communicate their experiences of the world. *Qualitative Interview Analysis, the Use of Systemic Functional Linguistics to Reveal Functional Meanings* by Loretta Fernandez (2018)[20] demonstrates the usefulness of the application of systemic functional linguistics to qualitative interview texts, to provide the functional account of the interview text, revealing the semantic meanings through the grammatical and the lexical choices of the interviewee.

The number of children's magazines currently being published in the Malayalam language exceeds twenty.[21] Weeklies constitute the highest number followed by fortnightlies and monthlies.[22] Malayala Manorama publishes three weeklies and one fortnightly magazine while Mathrubhumi publishes two fortnightlies and one weekly. Deshsabhimani, Prabodhanam, Mangalam, Samastha Kerala Jamiyyathul Ulama, Kerala Sasthra Sahithya Parishad, and Toms are the other publishers. Balarama weekly published by M M Publications under the Malayala Manorama group is one among the most read magazines for children in India.[23] The other magazines published by Malayala Manorama Group include Balarama Amar Chitra Kadha, Balarama Digest, Kalikkudukka, Magic Pot, etc. The weekly is usually issued on Fridays. A wide range of puzzles, moral stories, quizzes, fables, classics, rhymes, and comical series are part of this magazine of which, Mayavi, Soothranum Sheruvum, Jungle Book, etc. are the popular stories among the readers. Shikkari Shambu, Shuppandi, Kalia, etc. are the stories by Amar Chitra Kadha (Indian Book House) published in Balarama.[24]

Research on children's magazines in Malayalam are limited in number. In an article titled *Children's Magazines and Different Childhoods* in Kerala, Noorunnida M, Ph.D. scholar from Centre for Women's Studies, University of Hyderabad, states that, "Children's literature, as a category, is often related to the position of 'minor' literature in the literary canon, which can be a reason for the lack of research in this category." (Noorunnida, 2019)[25] *The Classic Popular Amar Chitra Katha* (2008)[26] by Nandini Chandra based on the Amar Chitra Kadha story series published in Malayala Manorama's Balarama and other weeklies that delves into the core issues of communalism and history writing depicts the stimulating and troubling potentials of Amar Chitra Kadha as a force in modern Indian history. *Sculpting a Middle Class—History, Masculinity and the Amar Chitra Katha in India* (2010)[27] is an article by Deepa Sreenivas which explores the historical comic books of Amar Chitra

Kadha genre that capture and promote a middle-class masculine identity, personality, and its impact on history writing and pedagogy. *Telling Different Tales: Possible Childhoods in Children's Literature* (2011)[28] by Deepa Sreenivas, published by Sage Publications, New York, analyses how a set of stories for children published in a series called Different Tales, set in minority communities depict the complex ways in which children negotiate and cope with the material conditions of their marginality.

Methodology

Systemic functional linguistics as a methodology is a qualitative tool for analysis. It analyses texts in terms of functional and semantic frameworks (Halliday, 1985).[29] Methodologies in SFL can be qualitative, quantitative, or sometimes a combination of both. The methodology of qualitative analysis examines texts in contexts whereas quantitative analysis doesn't consider contexts. Systemic functional grammar uses the methodology of thematic analysis, mood, appraisal analysis, etc. (Fernandez, 2018).[30]

The present research uses analytical, descriptive, qualitative, and quantitative methods for language analysis. Texts in Malayalam, which are action and interaction- oriented, were selected from Balarama based on the popularity among readers. Taking clauses in contexts from a total of 30 comic stories (same series of five different comic stories from six different issues) each consisting of 3-4 pages from the Balarama magazine issued before and during the Covid-19, a corpus of around 250 clauses was compiled. Halliday's Transitivity System Network was used as the methodology to study the corpus. Process types, Participant types, Frequency, and their order were marked and compared among the magazines.

Theory

The research employs Halliday's Transitivity System Network model within the framework of Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) for text analysis. SFL, a comprehensive theory of language, provides a detailed understanding of how meaning is constructed within socio-cultural contexts. Unlike traditional modular approaches that isolate sentences and clauses, SFL emphasizes the significance of text as a whole, integrating its context. SFL connects the three major dimensions of language analysis: bottom-up, roundabout, and top-down approaches, ensuring a holistic examination of linguistic features. This methodology does not separate lexical and grammatical aspects but instead analyzes them in an integrated manner, reflecting the interconnectedness of language functions. The System, Metafunctions, Rank, and Lexicogrammar are some closely associated pertinent terms, which comprise Halliday's Systemic Functional Grammar (Halliday, 2004).[31] Through this framework, the research explores discourse in terms of its semantic context, cultural background, and situational factors. By examining how language operates within specific social and cultural environments, the study reveals how linguistic choices reflect and shape social identities, relationships, and cultural norms. This socio-linguistic perspective

allows for a nuanced understanding of how language variations influence children's reading experiences and their perceptions of cultural concepts, providing valuable insights into the dynamic interplay between language and society.

3.1.1. Ideational Metafunction

Halliday defines Metafunction as, "the organization of the functional frameworks around systems." (Halliday, 2009)[32] "The Metafunctions in systemic functional linguistics are not hierarchized, they have equal status and each is manifested in every act of language use." (Hasan, 2009)[33] Metafunctions include ideational, interpersonal, and textual factors which are generated concomitantly. Every human experience can be transformed into meaning, which Halliday calls Ideational Metafunction, which is 'language as reflection.' It consists of experiential and logical meaning. It is the way in which reality is represented (Halliday, 2009).[34] Transitivity is the main aspect of this function. Transitivity talks about the Processes in the verbal group, the Participants in the main group, the Circumstances in which the process occurs, when, where and why they take place, etc. through prepositions and adverbs (Berry, 1975).[35] Transitivity Process Types constitute a particular model for a distinct domain of experience (Halliday, 2004).[36] Processes are of 6 types in English which are divided into 3 major types and 3 minor types.

Material process:

In material clauses, the Actor brings the change, he does the deed. Actor and Goal are the two main participants in Material clauses. Other participants include Scope, Recipient, Client, and Attribute (Halliday, 1985).[37]

[1]

Once,	an elephant	Abducted	Mowgli.
CIRCUMSTANCE	ACTOR	MATERIAL PROCESS	GOAL

In material clauses, the Actor assumes a central role in effecting change or initiating action, serving as the agent of transformation or the instigator of deeds. The Actor embodies agency and exertion of power, actively engaging in actions that shape the discourse and influence its outcomes. Conversely, the Goal represents the target or recipient of these actions, embodying the endpoint or beneficiary of the Actor's efforts within the socio-linguistic context. The relationship between the Actor and the Goal in material clauses reflects broader social dynamics and power structures within the discourse. The actions undertaken by the Actor and their impact on the Goal may mirror societal hierarchies, power imbalances, or cultural values embedded within the communicative context. Additionally, the selection and portrayal of Actors and Goals in material clauses can be influenced by social norms, ideologies, and discursive practices prevalent in the community.

Mental process:

Mental clauses are the ones that relate to our mental world or mental consciousness. As Mental clauses cannot be accounted for with the existing terms two distinct participant roles are introduced by Halliday which are Senser and Phenomenon. Senser is the one that senses or feels those participants who are human or human-like (Halliday, 2004).[38] A Phenomenon can be a thing, an act, a fact or a metaphorical one.

[2]

He	Saw	a pond	down	the valley.
SENSER	MENTAL PROCESS	PHENOMENON	CIRCUMSTANCE	

Mental clauses offer a unique window into the realm of human cognition and consciousness, providing insights into our internal thought processes, perceptions, and emotions. These clauses illuminate the ways in which individuals navigate and interpret the world around them, shaping their understanding of reality and influencing their interactions with others. The introduction of distinct participant roles in mental clauses by Halliday (Senser and Phenomenon) reflects the recognition of the complex interplay between language, cognition, and social experience. The Senser embodies the human or human-like agent who perceives, interprets, and experiences the mental phenomena articulated within the discourse. By attributing sensory and cognitive functions to specific participants, the analysis of mental clauses unveils the intricate mechanisms through which language constructs and reflects individual subjectivity and perspective. Furthermore, the Phenomenon in mental clauses encompasses a diverse range of entities, including tangible objects, actions, facts, and metaphorical constructs. This broad categorization underscores the multifaceted nature of human experience and cognition, highlighting the capacity of language to represent and articulate complex mental phenomena in various forms.From a socio-linguistic standpoint, this analysis deepens our understanding of how language mediates and shapes subjective experiences, cultural norms, and social interactions. It underscores the dynamic interplay between language, cognition, and social context, illuminating the ways in which linguistic choices reflect and construct individual and collective identities, beliefs, and worldviews.

Relational process:

Relational clauses are another type in the classification of processes that function to identify and characterize both the outer and inner experiences. Relational clauses offer a fascinating avenue for socio-linguistic exploration, as they serve to not only identify and characterize outer phenomena but also to illuminate internal sensations and interpersonal relationships. The selection and portrayal of attributes, qualities, and identities within relational clauses may be influenced by societal hierarchies, power dynamics, and cultural

values, thereby shaping the construction and negotiation of social meaning within the discourse.The three categories that fall under the Relational clause are Intensive, Possessive, and Circumstantial clauses. Intensive relational clauses can be Attributive or Identifying. In the Attributive type of intensive clauses, the entity has something which is ascribed to it called the 'Carrier' (Berry, 1975).[39]

[3]

Thomas	Is	the leader.
TOKEN	RELATIONAL IDENTIFYING PROCESS	VALUE

[4]

Mathew	Is	wise.
CARRIER	RELATIONAL ATTRIBUTIVE PROCESS	ATTRIBUTE

Behavioral process:

Behavioral processes are not defined using typical characteristics because they have the same features of other Major processes too (Halliday, 2004).[40] In a Behavioral clause, the participant who is behaving is called the 'Behaver'.

[5]

She	is	laughing.
BEHAVER	BEHAVIORAL PROCESS	

Verbal process:

Verbal processes are minor, which function as the provider of creativity in narratives by setting dialogues (Halliday, 2004).[41] Verbal clauses make it possible to report and quote.

The Verbal clauses constitute 3 major participant functions.

1. Receiver is the one to whom the saying is directed.

2. Verbiage corresponds to what is said.

3. Target is the entity that is targeted by the process of saying. (Berry, 1975)[42]

[6]

The father	said,	"tell	your mother	that
SAYER	VERBAL PROCESS		RECEIVER	
I	Will	be	Late	Today."
VERBIAGE				

Existential process:

Existential clauses are not common in discourse. They represent the existence or happening of something (Halliday, 1985). [43] When the Existential clauses occur in discourse, they usually contain the verb 'be'. They also contain a distinct circumstantial element of time/place. 'Existent' is the event/entity that is being said to exist in existential clauses.

[7]

There	is	water	here
EXISTENTIAL PROCESS		EXISTENT	CIRCUMSTANCE

Qualitative Analysis

Five popular comic stories from each of the six issues of Balarama before and during the Covid-19 pandemic were compiled to analyse it both qualitatively and quantitatively. The infamous '*Mayavi'* along with '*Luttappi'*, '*Soothran'*, '*Shikari Shanku'*, and '*Jungle Book*' were the stories selected from Balarama.

Theme & Voice

In systemic functional linguistics, Theme emerges as a pivotal element within the clause, serving as the locus of analysis and a point of departure for discourse exploration. Systemic functional linguistics delineates the structure of a clause into various types, with thematic structure constituting a fundamental aspect. This thematic structure is characterized by the Theme-Rheme binary, akin to the informational structure delineated by the Given-New dichotomy. The examination of Theme within systemic functional linguistics offers insights into how language functions as a tool for organizing and conveying information within discourse. The Theme serves as a linguistic device through which speakers and writers strategically position and prioritize elements within the clause, thereby shaping the flow and coherence of the

discourse. Moreover, the thematic structure reflects broader communicative goals and intentions, influencing the ways in which speakers construct meaning and negotiate social interactions. When we study Theme, it is important to mark the variations in clauses on the basis of Voice. "In SFL the Operative-Receptive orientation of the clause marks the 'effector' and 'affected' of the process" (Halliday, 1985).[44]

[8a]

(Operative)	luʈʈa:ppi	ɔ: mleti	t̪i̪n̪n̪u
	Luttappi	omelette	eat-PST
	Theme	Rheme	
	"Luttappi ate the omelette"		

[8b]

(Receptive)	ɔ: mleti	luʈʈa:ppi	t̪i̪n̪n̪u
	omelette	Luttappi	eat-PST
	Theme	Rheme	
	"The omelette was eaten by Luttappi"		

Within the pages of Balarama, the stories primarily revolve around a captivating cast of main characters, who prominently emerge as the central Theme. These characters, such as Mowgli, Mayavi, Raju and Radha, Kuttoosan, Luttappi, Soothran, Sheru, and many others, predominantly encompass various animals and serve as the focal point for the story's unfolding narrative. The stories featured in Balarama magazine predominantly concentrate on the adventures, mischief, moral messages conveyed by these characters, and the valuable lessons learned by the villains, often posing ethical questions for reflection.

The nominal group comprising these characters, serving as the thematic nucleus, frequently incorporates descriptive adjectives that highlight the distinctive traits of the characters. Additionally, their actions are portrayed through verbal groups and adverbials, providing a dynamic portrayal of their endeavours. Apart from the main characters, Balarama introduces a range of recurring villains, including thieves, burglars, mischievous goblins, and both cruel animals and humans, who also assume the position of the Theme. Additionally, enigmatic and magical elements, as well as food items, contribute to the thematic composition of the stories.

Moreover, the nominal group encompassing the Theme in Balarama stories may feature the use of pronouns such as I, You, He, She, It, among others, further enriching the narrative tapestry and adding depth to the character interactions and perspectives.

Throughout Balarama, the strategic utilization of thematic elements, combined with the portrayal of engaging characters and their vibrant adventures, captivates the young readers and fosters their imaginative and moral development. By emphasizing the significance of moral values and ethical dilemmas through the characters' experiences, Balarama magazine not only provides entertainment but also serves as a valuable medium for children to learn and grow. The diverse array of thematic components, from the character-driven narratives to the inclusion of mysterious and magical elements, create an immersive reading experience that keeps young readers engaged and sparks their imagination.

[9] (Balarama 2019, Oct 5)

kuʈʈu:san	maɳɳappam	cuʈʈu	kaɭikka:nɨ	pɔ:vukaja:ɳɔ:?
Kuttoosan	mudpie	Bake-PRP	Play-INF	go-PP-INT
Theme	Rheme			
"Is Kuttusan going to play baking mud pie?"				

[10] (Balarama 2019, Nov 2)

çikka:ɾi	ɲaŋaɭe	pinnila:kki	ʈuɪanŋŋu	kaɖalil	eʈʈi
Hunter	we-ACC	Leave behind-PST	Row-PST	sea-LOC	Reach-PST
Theme	Rheme				
“The hunter rowed and reached the sea, leaving us behind.”					

[11] (Balarama 2019, Nov 2)

accana:najuɖe	makanɨ	eʈɪre	varuɲɲu
father-elephant-GEN	son	towards	Come-PP
Theme		Rheme	
“The father-elephant’s son is coming towards”			

[12] (Balarama 2019, Nov 2)

luʈʈa:ppi	avarɔ:ɖɔppam	selfi	eḍuṯṯu
Luttapi	with they -SOC	selfie	Take-PST
Theme	Rheme		
"Luttapi took a selfie with them"			

As Receptive constructions are hardly found in the magazine, it is difficult to make a generalization even though from the limited texts it is clear that in most of the cases, Goal acts as the Theme in Receptive Constructions.

4.2. Mood

The Mood element in a clause constitutes the meaning of the clause in the acts of exchange. The Mood realizes the selection of mood in a clause. In the analysis of clauses on the basis of interpersonal meaning, intonation makes a significant contribution (Halliday, 1985).[45] Mood as a system constitutes Declaratives, Imperatives, Interrogatives and Exclamatives. In Malayalam, there are also cases of verb-less constructions like other Dravidian languages. Relational Identificatory clauses in Malayalam children's magazines are mostly verb-less. "Identificatory clauses in Dravidian languages and also in Russian, are generally verb-less." (Prakasam, 2004)[46] In such situations interrogative markers like a:, a:nɔ:, etc. which provide the texts with a mood of 'asking question' are found.

[13a]

Avan	maɳḍana:?
"Is he a fool?"	

[13b]

avana:	maɳḍan?
"Is he the fool?"	

Rising and falling tones also set the mood in Malayalam language. Questions are asked usually with a rising tone whereas declarations or statements are made with falling tones.

[13c]

Avan	maɳḍana:? [Rising]
"Is he a fool?"	

[13d]

Avan	maɳɖanalla [Falling]
“He is not a fool”	

In the case of Children’s stories in Malayalam, it is seen that polarizable clauses, especially declarative ones, are more in number than non-polarizable clauses like exclamations, optatives, suggestions, etc. Imperative and interrogative clauses come second and third respectively under polarizable clauses. The case is the same with all the three magazines analysed in this research.

Polarizable clauses

Declaratives, Interrogatives and Imperatives come under the polarizable clauses.

[14] (Balarama 2019, Oct 5)

ɔrikkal	ɔru	a:na	maugl̥ije	ʈaʈʈikɔɳɖɨ	pɔ:ji
once	One	elephant	Mowgli-ACC	abduct-PST	
“Once, an elephant abducted Mowgli”					
Declarative					

[15] (Balarama 2019, Oct 5)

niŋal̥-a:ɳɔ:	kuɾukk-eriɲɲaʈɨ?
You be-PRES-INT	Snare throw-PST
"Are you the one who threw the snare?”	
Interrogative	

Non polarizable clauses

The non-polarizable clauses are Suggestives, Hortatives, Exclamatives, Optatives, Cautions, and Vocatives.

[16] (Balarama 2020, Feb 29)

e:	maɾuɲɲɨ	kaɾiccɔ:
This	medicine	have
“Have this medicine”		

Suggestive

[17] (Balarama 2020, Feb 29)

Eŋki	ini	ve:ʈʈil	pɔ:ka:m	namukkɨ
Then		home-LOC	go-POT	us-DAT
“Let’s go home then”				
Hortative				

Processes, Participants and Circumstances

The investigation involved quantifying the frequency of process types within the comic stories of Balarama, both before and during the Covid-19 pandemic. The results revealed that the Verbal Process Type was the most prevalent across all periods examined. The analysis encompassed comic stories from all six issues of Balarama, each belonging to the same series, which resulted in a significant overlap in participants among several texts. However, an interesting distinction emerged in terms of circumstances, wherein the stories during the pandemic shifted their focus from schools, playgrounds, and public places to the domestic sphere, emphasizing indoor activities.

The majority of participants in these stories were superheroes, villains, and animal characters, accounting for approximately 90% of the cast, a common trend observed in all three magazines, pre- and post-pandemic. Additionally, certain animal characters also assumed the roles of wizards and goblins. It is noteworthy that stories featuring a binary between good and bad were prevalent in these magazines. Moreover, all the stories aimed to impart moral messages to readers, with some concluding on a humorous note. A comparison between stories before and during the pandemic revealed notable differences, primarily evident in the circumstances and actions depicted. The stories during the pandemic frequently incorporated elements related to Covid-19 restrictions, such as quarantine, lockdown, social distancing, hand washing, masks, and fever. Words like violations, death, police, and government also exhibited higher frequency compared to previous narratives. Consequently, the morals conveyed in most stories shifted towards lessons related to the Covid-19 pandemic.

Apart from the comic stories, Balarama also featured special series aimed at children's education and learning. Common elements included quizzes and puzzle-related games, which provided interactive engagement for young readers. The prevalence of the Verbal Process Type and participant types such as Sayer, Target, Actor, and Goal underscored the focus on realistic actions that occur in the real world. The storytellers strategically employed dialogic and conversational narration to effectively engage the readers, as children tend to concentrate more when their favourite characters engage in dialogue and conversations rather than relying solely on the author's narration. Given the

analysis's focus on comic stories, it becomes evident that the narrative format within these stories is predominantly conversational, with the character drawings and visual representations actively interacting through the medium of pictures.

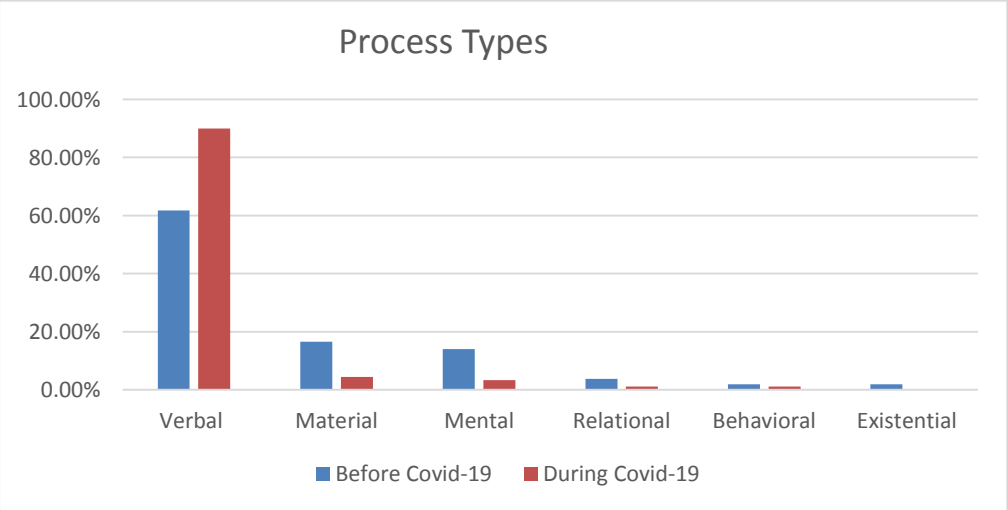
Quantitative Analysis

The texts were analysed quantitatively to mark the process types and participant types along with their frequency and order.

Process Types

Process types from the compiled magazine corpus before and during the Covid-19 were analysed and the numbers were used to calculate the percentages with respect to the total number of processes.

Process Types	Before Covid-19	During Covid-19
Verbal	61.78%	90%
Material	16.5%	4.4%
Mental	14.01%	3.3%
Relational	3.8%	1.1%
Behavioral	1.9%	1.1%
Existential	1.9%	0



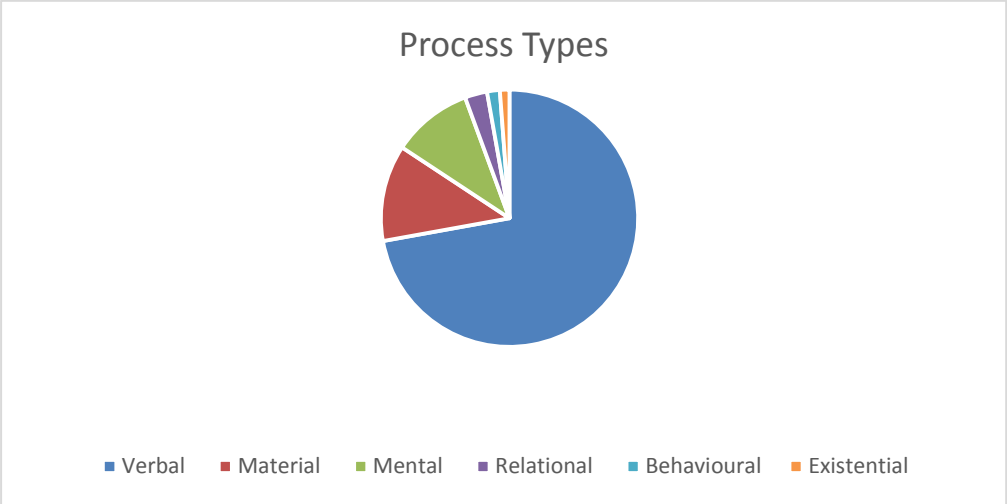
Within the pages of Balarama, a comprehensive analysis of process types illuminates intriguing linguistic shifts that occurred during the Covid-19

pandemic. By quantifying the distribution of process types, we gain invaluable insights into the evolving dynamics of storytelling. Prior to the pandemic, the Verbal Process Type commanded a substantial presence, constituting a noteworthy 61.78% of process types in Balarama. However, during the Covid-19 pandemic, this percentage skyrocketed to an astounding 90%, reflecting a staggering increase of 28.22% compared to pre-pandemic levels.In contrast, Material Processes, which held the second-highest position with a respectable 16.5% before the pandemic, experienced a significant decline of 12.1% during the Covid-19 era, plummeting to a mere 4.4%. Similarly, Mental Process Types, comprising 14.01% before the Covid-19 outbreak, encountered a substantial drop of 10.71% during the pandemic. The Relational Process Type, accounting for 3.8% of the overall distribution, surpassed the Behavioural and Existential Process Types, each representing 1.9% before the pandemic.

Interestingly, all three process types experienced a decrease during the Covid-19 pandemic, with the Existential Process Type even reaching a striking percentage of zero. This shift can be attributed to the prevailing circumstances of the pandemic, which seemingly propelled the Verbal Process Type to the forefront. As verbal communication and dialogue assumed heightened importance during periods of isolation and restricted social interactions, the frequency of Verbal Processes surged, captivating young readers and offering them a sense of connection and familiarity amidst uncertain times. By meticulously examining the fluctuations in process types, this investigation sheds light on the intricate relationship between language usage and contextual factors, unveiling how linguistic patterns adapt to reflect the evolving landscape. Join us as we navigate the rich tapestry of process types in Balarama, unravelling the nuanced linguistic choices that both shape and are shaped by the extraordinary circumstances of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Total percentages of different Process Types (before Covid-19 + during Covid-19)

Process Types	**Percentage**
Verbal	72.06%
Material	12.1%
Mental	10.1%
Relational	2.8%
Behavioural	1.6%
Existential	1.2%

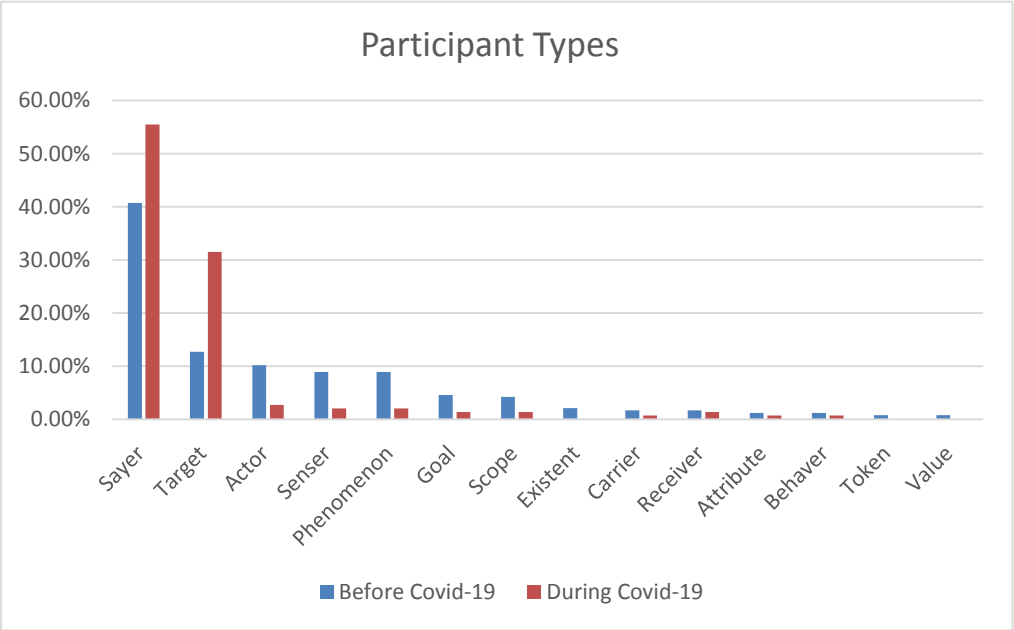


Participant Types

Texts of different genres tend to assign varying roles to participants. Children's magazines in Malayalam are no different. In order to study the roles assigned to participants and their frequency, the number of participants in each text was marked and counted. Percentages of the participant types were calculated using these numbers.

Participant Types	Before Covid-19	During Covid-19
Sayer	40.7%	55.5%
Target	12.7%	31.5%
Actor	10.17%	2.7%
Senser	8.9%	2.05%
Phenomenon	8.9%	2.05%
Goal	4.6%	1.4%
Scope	4.2%	1.4%
Existent	2.1%	0
Carrier	1.7%	0.7%
Receiver	1.7%	1.4%
Attribute	1.2%	0.7%
Behaver	1.2%	0.7%

Token	0.8%	0
Value	0.8%	0



Taking centre stage in Balarama is the participant type known as Sayer, embodying the power of verbal expression. Before the pandemic, Sayer reigned supreme, constituting a substantial 40.7% of participant types, signifying the dominance of verbal dialogues in Malayalam children's magazines. However, during the pandemic, the percentage of Sayer participants soared to an impressive 55.5%, reflecting a remarkable increase of 14.8%. This surge underscores the magazine's commitment to engaging young readers through dialogue-driven storytelling, enabling them to immerse themselves in the captivating world of words.

Following closely in the participant hierarchy is the Target, a Verbal participant akin to the Sayer. Prior to the pandemic, the Target claimed the second position with a respectable 12.7% representation, showcasing its importance in facilitating interactive exchanges. However, during the pandemic, the percentage of Target participants witnessed a significant surge, leaping by a remarkable 18.8% to reach an impressive 31.5%. This surge indicates the heightened significance of communicative dynamics, as characters engage in dialogue to convey messages and advance the plot, forging deeper connections with readers during challenging times.

The Actor, representing the agents of action, secured the third highest position before the pandemic, accounting for 10.17% of participant types. However, during the pandemic, this percentage dwindled to a mere 2.7%, albeit retaining its place in the participant hierarchy. This decline may be attributed to the shifting focus of narratives during the pandemic, which emphasized other participant types in the storytelling process.

Furthermore, the participant types of Scope and Goal, embodying the breadth and aims of actions respectively, exhibited higher percentages in Balarama, both before and during the pandemic. Prior to the pandemic, Scope and Goal accounted for 8.9% of participant types, showcasing their significance in advancing narrative arcs. Even during the pandemic, they maintained their relevance, albeit at a reduced percentage of 2.05%. Conversely, participant types such as Carrier, Attribute, Token, Value, Existent, and Behaver were comparatively rare in Balarama, as evidenced by the figures, indicating their limited presence in the magazine's storytelling landscape. Moreover, the pre-pandemic percentage of Scope participants highlights the prevalence of intransitive verbs over their transitive counterparts, reinforcing the focus on self-contained actions and character experiences.

Total percentages of different Participant Types (before Covid-19 + during Covid-19)

Participant Types	**Percentage**
Sayer	46.33%
Target	19.9%
Actor	7.3%
Senser	6.2%
Phenomenon	6.2%
Goal	3.4%
Receiver	1.6%
Scope	1.3%
Carrier	1.3%
Existent	1.3%
Attribute	1.04%
Behaver	1.04%
Token	0.5%
Value	0.5%

Observations and Findings

The analysis of Balarama magazine reveals that the Verbal Process is the most frequently occurring process type. It is followed by the Material Process, with the Mental Process being the third most common. The Relational Process Type exhibits a higher frequency than both the Behavioural and Existential Process Types. Interestingly, all three process types experienced a decline during the Covid-19 pandemic, with the frequency of the Existential Process dropping down to zero. This decrease may be attributed to the sudden surge in the frequency of the Verbal Process Type during the pandemic.

When considering all six processes in Balarama before and during the Covid-19 pandemic collectively, the Verbal Process emerges as the most frequent process type. The Material Process follows next in frequency, while the Behavioural and Existential Processes constitute the least frequent categories. Turning to the participant types, the Sayer is the most frequent participant in Balarama. The Target occupies the second position, followed by the Actor. On the other hand, the Carrier, Attribute, Token, Value, Existent, and Behaver exhibit lower frequencies, as evidenced by the figures.

Upon examining all participant types in Balarama before and during the Covid-19 pandemic, the Sayer remains the most frequent participant type, with the Target being the second most common. The frequency of the Actor indicates a prevalence of Active clauses before and during the pandemic. Senser and Phenomenon exhibit similar frequencies before and during the pandemic. In contrast, the Carrier, Attribute, Token, Value, Existent, and Behaver manifest as the least frequent participant types in the comic stories of Balarama before and during the pandemic.

The current research underscores the prevalence of Operative constructions in children's magazines compared to Receptive constructions. Additionally, Active constructions outnumber Passive ones, with many passive constructions lacking agents. Furthermore, almost all Passive Voice constructions unfold through time in the Past Tense. In most of the comic stories during the pandemic, there is a notable shift in focus from schools, playgrounds, and other public places to homes and indoor activities. The circumstances depicted in the stories during the pandemic predominantly incorporated words such as quarantine, lockdown, social distancing, hand washing, mask, fever, and other pandemic-related terms, which were not mainstream during the initial stages of the pandemic. As a result, the moral messages conveyed in many of the stories have also shifted to incorporate Covid-19-related learnings and themes. Overall, the comprehensive analysis of Balarama magazine provides valuable insights into the patterns and trends observed in process types and participant types, emphasizing the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on linguistic choices and story elements within children's comic stories.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this research undertaking delved into a comprehensive analysis of children's comic stories derived from Balarama, the most renowned children's magazine in the Malayalam language. A meticulously selected corpus of 30 comic stories, consisting of 15 stories before the pandemic and 15 stories during the pandemic, was examined. The selection process was based on the stories' popularity among young readers, ensuring a representative sample for studying lexical choices and transitivity processes. Given the transformative impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on children's education and socialization, this research aimed to explore transitivity patterns and lexical disparities in storytelling between the pre-pandemic and pandemic periods. The analysis sought to unveil variations in the frequency of Process Types, Participant Types, and their combinations through the study of transitivity patterns and lexical choices employed by the storytellers.

To undertake a comprehensive analysis, a combination of qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methodologies was employed to dissect the text corpus. Quantitative analysis enabled the identification of lexical choices and their frequencies, shedding light on the prevailing trends. On the other hand, qualitative analysis focused on examining voice constructions, circumstances, and lexical differences, providing deeper insights into the nuances of storytelling. The findings revealed that the Verbal Process emerged as the most frequent process type in Balarama, both before and during the pandemic, indicating a dominance of verbal dialogues and a higher level of objectivity. Conversely, the Behavioural and Existential Processes were the least prevalent. Participant types were also examined, with the Sayer occupying the top position, followed by the Target. Operative constructions were more prevalent compared to Receptive constructions in Balarama magazine.

Notably, during the pandemic, the lexical differences and variations in circumstances within the magazine issues prominently featured Covid-19-related terminologies and situations, such as quarantine, hand washing, fever, police, mask, and more. Balarama magazine tactfully shifted the focus of some moral stories to incorporate Covid-19 rules and restrictions, aiming to educate young readers about these crucial aspects and encourage compliance. As children tend to be drawn to superheroes and comic characters, they are more likely to internalize and follow the moral lessons conveyed by their favourite characters. In a time where social distancing is paramount, limiting children's opportunities for socialization, one potential avenue for parents to explore is to encourage their children to read more. By fostering a connection with these comic characters, young readers can embark on a journey of learning and growth together with their fictional companions which Balarama has successfully incorporated in their stories during the time of the Covid-19 pandemic, as we learn from the research.

In essence, this research study serves as a comprehensive exploration of children's comic stories from Balarama magazine, meticulously analyzing lexical choices, transitivity patterns, and the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic

on storytelling. By uncovering the prevailing linguistic trends and examining the ways in which stories have adapted to the pandemic context, the study offers valuable insights into the dynamic nature of children's literature and the potential for storytelling to educate and engage young readers, particularly during challenging times.

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Book Review: Caste Discrimination and Exclusion in Indian Universities: A Critical Reflection

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--Akash Sulochana

"Turn in any direction you like; castes are the monster that crosses your path" (Ambedkar, 2020, 47), writes Ambedkar regarding the pervasive presence of caste in India. N. Sukumar, in his book, 'Caste Discrimination and Exclusion in Indian Universities: A Critical Reflection' (2023), substantiates Ambedkar's thesis by showing how caste persists in its various subtle and direct forms in Indian Universities and continues to matter as a central social concern. Sukumar's study includes survey research of 600 students from the Scheduled Caste category across ten selected Central and State Universities, mixed with in-depth interviews of selected case studies.

The existing literature highlights the influence of the nationalist and modern liberal visions on the dominant imagination of modern universities in India. However, as a social institution, Indian universities remain a site of perpetual tension and conflicts of interest. On the one hand, it promotes critical thinking and contests dominant discourse; on the other hand, it nurtures privileged section monopoly over knowledge and curbs dissent. It also fails to address inclusivity within the university (Pathania et al. 2023). Against this backdrop, the significance of this study lies not only in underscoring various ways in which caste discrimination and exclusion operate in 'unequal spaces' of the university but also in understanding its social semantics from SC students' perspective.

The book comprises six chapters. The first introductory chapter covers a broad range of literature on the conceptualisation of exclusion in higher education and a broader debate on the role of caste in academic space. The prevalent scholarship on caste limits its existence to reservation and political mobilisation. The author problematised this tendency of a narrow reading of caste, which does not extend its engagement to investigate its embeddedness in a privileged lifeworld and structure of inequality. With that purpose, he highlighted how the upper castes use generational social and cultural capital embedded in 'caste habitus' [1] (p. 65) to monopolise wealth and knowledge. In naturalising capabilities of the upper caste, it simultaneously suspects the capabilities of the marginalised. This suspicion is also rooted in Brahmanical ideology, which perceives dalits as less capable of living a life of the mind.

Chapter two uses government data (specifically, the enrolment rate of students in multiple courses and teachers' recruitment across states in the country) to make a case for the hostility of the university space. The author cited the AISHE report of 2028-19, highlighting the lowest SC students' percentage (5.5 per cent) in 'Deemed University Private and Other' (p. 49). The statistics underscore the need for reservation in private education institutions to ensure fair representation and democratisation of higher education.

Chapter three dwells on the survey data, underscoring how 'unequal spaces' have been reproduced in the university space. According to primary survey data, 62.8% of students believe that the discriminatory attitude of teachers persists towards SC students in viva/interview, and 61.3% of respondents believe caste is the reason for this (p. 81). 32.6% of students faced discrimination in the classroom/laboratory/research activity (p. 90), whereas 36.4% faced it in the hostel (p. 100). In such a hostile environment, it is no wonder that caste (19.4%) remains the primary determinant for the SC students in giving their faculties preferences for supervision (p. 87).

Chapter four builds on twelve case studies of SC students (and four additional ones collected from secondary sources) to highlight detailed descriptions of dalit students' experiences of discrimination. The discrimination based on dominant social attitudes, behaviour, and prejudicial practices of the upper castes can be broadly summarised into three tendencies: accusing, capitalising, and discrediting. The accusing tendency of upper castes makes dalits responsible for "snatching others' rights" (p. 129) by taking undue benefit of reservation for getting admission in the education institutions. The capitalising tendency utilised any opportunity to humiliate dalits in the public sphere, such as highlighting small grammatical faults during viva (p. 126). The discrediting tendency ascribes SC students' success to factors apart from individual capability. For instance, the credit for a good score goes to good handwriting rather than the subject knowledge (p. 125); being a topper in the class is easily dismissed by saying the person does not have command over spoken English and therefore does not deserve to be an inspiration for the class (p. 132) However, at the same time, success of upper caste attributed not only to the individual merit but also used to demonstrate their caste superiority by making "caste as a merit claim" (p. 71).

The overall effect of this tendency is it legitimised Brahmanical prejudice in general perception. The 'quota child' becomes a stigmatised identity, which works as a constant reminder for dalit students that they do not deserve a place in the first place. By reducing human beings to their social identity, the dominant caste justifies their everyday discrimination against dalit students. The author shares a similar experience whereby he was objectified as a 'quota student' while studying and as a dalit scholar or SC/ST observer in the interview panels as a teacher (p. 75). To counter this injustice, 'radicle equality' demands democratic and equal space for dalits beyond the question of mere fair representation. The internalisation of stigma and dominant perception leads SCs to question their worth by "feeling a bit undeserving" (p. 139) after getting admission from a reserved category. Further, it led to questioning their eligibility to avail the benefit of reservation by facing the constant accusation that "rich dalits are abusing the system" (p. 137). The recent Supreme Court opinion on adding a creamy layer for SC/ST reservation will exacerbate stigma on reservation, especially among second and third-generation dalit students who already face various forms of discrimination and remain a minority in the university space.

Chapter five investigates SC students' suicide cases by tracing their psychosocial condition using available digital and physical records. It observes how lack of belongingness, institutional apathy, Brahmanical stereotyping and weaponising merit lead SC students to feel lonely, different, and marginalised in university space. The conclusion aims to critically evaluate existing attempts to address caste-based discrimination in the campuses and propose alternative suggestions. The problematics in the policy such as NEP 2020, weakening official bodies SC/ST cells because of prioritising institutional interest (p. 172), student organisations' confinement to their social groups (p. 172), suspecting capabilities of dalit students and considering assertive dalit as 'troublemakers and anti-social' (p. 173) are the reasons for collective failure.

Beyond regulatory mechanism, the author attributed failure to the gatekeepers of the academia, i.e., socially dominant communities who "exhibits a blind spot when it comes to Dalit-Bahujan co-habiting their elite habitus" (p. 171). In suggestions, along with policy changes and collective efforts, the author proposes 'radicle empathy', especially from those who possess power in institutions and within the social location (such as caste, class, gender, etc.) and make them more entitled in terms of being reflexive and sensible about their positionality and treatment towards marginalised.

One limitation of the study is its methodological choice and scope of the study. Because of the survey method and a limited number of in-depth case studies, the findings of the survey data lack a thick description to discuss findings in greater detail. For instance, it would be helpful to foreground differences in the state and central university students' perceptions in determining choices with the help of descriptive narratives to facilitate discussion in analytical terms. The study is limited to public universities and marginalised groups, so it does not give the whole picture of the way power functions from a privileged point of view. Further, it does not provide a comparative analysis of public and private universities.

Apart from these limitations, the work is a timely scholarly intervention against the backdrop of increasing suicides on university campuses. This study is a promising contribution to the fields of educational studies, political science, sociology of education, caste studies, discrimination and exclusion, and it will remain a valuable resource for policy-makers to make inclusive policies. What the author shows in this study is that although suicide is one extreme form of protest[2] against caste discrimination and exclusion, its accumulative everydayness needs to be put into the light to create a university as a safe and inclusive space for the marginalised sections in the country.

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[1]Taking a clue from Bourdieu and social dominance theory, the author defined 'caste habitus' in terms of how caste is organised based on group-based hierarchies, which also hints towards their accumulation of different forms of capital over a period of time and its transfer within the same group which reproduced inequality. For more, see p. 64-67

[2] The author expresses the semantic meaning of the suicidal act as 'kill themselves as a silent protest' (p. 68)

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Book Review: Globalization and Sustainable Development: Towards a New Paradigm

Author(s): K.V.Reddy, A.Muthulakshmi and C.Devendiran

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Globalization and Sustainable Development: Quest for New Paradigm - edited by Sheila Rai and Dhirendra Vaipeyi, Published in Society Publishing, Canada 2021. Pages183+ ISBN: 978-1-77469-008-6.)

--K.V.Reddy, A.Muthulakshmi and C.Devendiran

Globalization is no more a strange phenomenon. For over three and half decades the process of globalization is there affecting the development and life of peoples belonging to both the developed and developing nations. In the wake of collapse of Soviet Union-led socialist world in late 1980s, liberal-capitalist world became widespread across the globe. The globalization process has been associated with the implementation of three objectives viz., liberalization, privatization and globalization (LPG) in various countries. Consequently, economic activities at home and abroad were so liberalized and privatized that the public sector institutions have suffered critically. Even, governments at all levels have reduced so much to spent on social welfare. Obviously, the globalization process had penetrated even the third world countries that were faced with the problems of governance and development. While the advanced countries had benefitted more from the globalization process than that were underdeveloped ones, both of which witnessed mixed results. Although there are some positive developments with the process, there appear many a negative effect during the last three decades or so. Expectedly, the developed nations had derived better outcomes during the period, but that was not the case with the other nations.

As globalization is about enhancing better connectivity among nations, irrespective of their developmental status, world has become a global village. As part of ensuring more economic development, trade and commerce have been promoted in a big way. Erstwhile trade barriers and complex governance impediments have been attempted to during the process of globalization. Various international institutions both financial and others became more active and set certain developmental goals for being implemented in the countries. While the millennium development goals (MDGs) that were formulated in 2000 were hardly achieved by 2015, the sustainable development goals (SDGs) were to substitute the former goals thereafter. Certain stated goals were addressed in some states, many other goals are yet not realized at all. In an attempt to remedy the MDG challenges and thereby to ensure implementation of SDGs, various states and their governments have initiated some developmental programs. Expectedly, the developmental process has to be sustainable one that would provide requisite economic opportunities to the marginalized communities. But contrary is the situation in several third world countries. Despite a decade has been passed with the implementation of these goals, not much development is achieved in very many sectors. Left with only just five years, its expected to expedite the process of development in the third world countries like India, if the SDGs are to be realized by 2030.

Viewed in this backdrop, this book is an attempt at focusing on the issues and concerns of globalization and sustainable development in different parts of the

world. More than the quantum of development, it is about methodology of development in different settings that had been covered in the book. In other words, the book talks about various development models from different countries like the African-Tanzania, Asian giants China and India. accordingly, different authors have covered different challenges, issues and problems of development that were covered in the discussion.

This book is a collection of papers presented at an International Conference organized by International Political Science Association in collaboration with Indian Society of Gandhian Studies, University of Rajasthan, Jaipur. this book its very useful and important, which covers 10 papers on different themes, authored by eminent persons at home and abroad. While the two editors have set the tone for orienting the study along globalization and sustainable development lines, as part of introduction, twelve other contributors have covered ten different themes in the book.

This book has made an attempt to search for new models or alternative models to overcome the developmental issues, problems and challenges. Therefore, various contributors and authors have tried to give their perspective in different directions. Some of the themes that were covered in this study include, globalization, sustainable development, climate change, good governance, ICT and SDGs, waste management in urban areas, corporate responsibility, human security, different models of development, and gender issues.

In the first chapter, globalization climate change; sustainable development and human security, Preeti Sharma has analyzed the data on climate change and its negative impact on human security and environment. Second chapter on impact of urban development on environment by V. Shekhawat and A. K. Gupta focuses on effects of increased urban spread in major cities. According to author, increasing urbanization causes creation of heat island, leading to poor air quality, degrading water resources, and polluting land resources. The rapid urbanization poses severe challenge in the area of creating more infrastructure and services. This ever-widening gap affects the life of citizens, especially marginalized ones. The author rightly feels the need of mitigating these severe environmental problems for gaining sustainable urban development. It of course warrants multidisciplinary holistic approach and a active participation of all stakeholders.

In the third chapter, role of gender in development and microfinance has been discussed by Warby and Pellegrino. Their focus was on how women could play an important role in political arena so as to ensure development. V. Satyanarayana has discussed the significant role of multinational corporations in the global economy in the fourth chapter. Besides, it has dealt with the corporate social responsibility- an institutional perspective, as the MNCs have become international global institutions that could ensure development through their corporate role of social responsibility in various countries. In the fifth chapter, good governance as milestone and safeguard of human rights, Suman Maurya has analyzed the necessity of good governance in safeguarding

human rights in the process of socio-economic development. The author feels that both the good governance and human rights have common attributes like participation, equality, transparency, responsibility and dignity. She discusses at length these and many other elements of good governance which ensure equitable and sustainable development besides contributing protection of human rights.

In the sixth chapter entitled, Women as Change Agents of Sustainable Development in South Asia, Snehil Kacker outlines the impact of climate change on women in South Asia. The condition of women has been worsening because of disasters, whether natural or man-made. The author discusses the impact of climate change on women in many South Asian nations including China and India. It also highlights the crucial role women are playing bringing societal change and sustenance thereof. The author enriches her study by discussing a number of case studies. The author also presents an alternative discourse on the importance of women in sustainable development and protecting human rights. She also highlighted that the importance of women as change of agents should be recognized in the arena of academia as well as environmental policy making process. There are many examples to show how women are playing their role in the field of environmental protection and conservation. Women constitute 50 % globally, and they involve in all aspects of development whether it is social, cultural, political and economic development. But they are not recognized as they deserve. It is time one recognizes women's role in governance that would enhance good governance for ensuring sustainable development at all levels.

In the seventh chapter, SDGs: Integration and ICTs to deliver sustainable development goals myth Vs evidence, S H Khawaja and A. Ayesha have observed that smart policy designs and ideas were the best vehicles to address gaps in ensuring social cohesion, poverty alleviation promoting education and better health care standards. Hence, there is a need of integration of policies through the ICT models in the planning process so as to secure achievement of the SDGs. In the eight-chapter, waste management as a key component of sustainable environment, M. Sharma critically analyses the role of failing municipal authorities in providing adequate and efficient service of waste management in cities. Her paper deals with sustainable waste management with a focus on expanded waste management hierarchy and extracting value from wastes. It emphasizes on minimization of wastes and initiating community-based waste management that seems to be only sustainable way to manage this waste.

Ninth chapter is aimed at critically discussing ujamaa: an alternative model of development, by Radha Kumari in the context of African nation, Tanzania. President Julius Nyerere was responsible for offering an innovative and native model of development in his country. Socialism and democracy were considered as main components of the ujamaa model that achieved some results in the country. Yet, there are a few failures with the model in the context of globalization. Both the editors, DKVajpayee and Sheila Rai have come out with certain conceptual understandings about global governance in its various dimensions as part of the tenth chapter. Different models of

development being implemented in India, china and elsewhere have been studied as an attempt at searching for a viable model of development in the concluding chapter.

Finally, it may be concluded that the developmental process had been marked by globalization and its implications. Although there are typical domestic challenges for sustainable development in different countries, certain common goals are set out at the international level. Be they MDGs are SDGs, which helped to ensure development in some countries, though varying accomplishments are discernible. In any case it is hardly possible to articulate any single paradigm of development for diverse countries in the world at a time when globalization has had its effects thereon. This book is a good reader for those interested in the implications of globalization on sustainable development in India and outside.

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Book Review: Identity, Conflict, and Counter-Narratives: Dalit Experiences in Culture, Politics, and Stigmatisation

Author: P.G. Jogdand

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Identity, Conflict, and Counter-Narratives: Dalit Experiences in Culture, Politics, and Stigmatisation Edited by Yagati Chinna Rao and Raj Sekhar Basu. Orient Black Swan Private Limited, 2025, PP 342, Rs. 1160, ISBN 978-93-5442-920-0

--P.G. Jogdand

The essays in this volume were presented at a special panel on 'Dalit History & Politics' held at the seventy seventh session of the Indian History Congress in 2016 at Thiruvananthapuram. It is the story of the untouchables or the history of the Dalits which has remained unnoticed or un-recognized. It is said that the historical contribution of Dalits has not been acknowledged by the mainstream historians in India.

In the name of history what we have is 'elitist historiography', which is one sided or partial while history of the 'others' has gone unnoticed. History of the others or masses was not the concern of the elites who have authored the history. Therefore, the subjected people are asking 'whose history' it is? It is the history from above, alleged the authors of this volume. Of late History writings of the privileged are under attack and therefore the writings of history from below has acquired a greater significance in academic world. The major contestation of this start is to give up old way of doing history. Give up elitist historiography and rewrite the same taking into account the historical contribution of the masses for the making of the nation from historical lens.

It is against this backdrop we need to place this volume. As mentioned above, this edited work has ten essays on major theme such as identity, Dalit history, Dalit folk culture, social exclusion (exclusion in education), popular culture and Social mobility, Adi-Dravida politics, leather artisans and reservation politics / sub-classification. The authors have projected the unsung heroes as the dignified actor and visionary who made the meaningful contribution from time to time in the history of the land. Consequently, the writers have exposed the efforts of the mainstream gate keepers of knowledge, on the one hand, and underlined the knowledge production on the part of the Dalits on the other. Counter narratives are developed on the lived experiences of the people, I believe this is the strongest point of the book. To prove the point, the authors have studied and explored the history of the Dalits in different-regions of the community.

All in all, it is a sincere attempt to question the history writings project undertaken by the upper caste, undermining the contribution of the 'other' in India. A common thread of Identity, counter narratives and politics run through the volume. While appreciating the work under discussion it has certain shortcomings. Dalit experiences from three regions-Maharashtra, Uttar Pradesh and Punjab - did not find a place in the volume, without the same the work remained incomplete.

However, it is a pioneering contribution to the emerging field of identity, conflict and counter narratives as far as Dalit historiography is concerned.

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Book Review: Sociology of Health in a Dalit Community: Axes of Exclusion of Hadis

Author: Mohamed Fazil

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K.M. Ziyauddin, *Sociology of Health in a Dalit Community: Axes of Exclusion of Hadis.* Newcastle, UK: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2024, 117 pp., €39.99 (hardcover), ISBN: 978-1-4438-4003-3**.**

--Mohamed Fazil

Considered "untouchables" and engaged in "polluted jobs" such as manual scavenging, sweeping, rag picking, and filthy occupations and menial work, Dalits have historically been excluded and denied access to many of the public services, including healthcare (Guru, 2000). K.M. Ziyauddin's (2024) book *Sociology of Health in a Dalit Community: Axes of Exclusion of Hadis* delves into the socio-historical account of the health conditions of Dalits in India correlated with their caste-based occupations and socio-cultural transactions. The study is explorative, based on the primary data collected from the households of the *Hadi* community in Chas, a township in the Bokaro district of Jharkhand State. *Hadi* is said to be a subcaste of Mehtar. Mehtar is among the listed SC Castes in the census of India, residing in Jharkhand, West Bengal, and Odisha's coal-mining regions. They are engaged in manual scavenging, sweeping, carrying night soil on their heads, and cleaning toilets in the houses of the upper-caste people in the city. The author has also collected data from members of other tribal groups in this settlement, including Bauri and Shakara Cooli, and used it as a reference point.

Drawing insights from multiple social science disciplines such as sociology, history, anthropology, and social exclusion, the author explores the lived experiences of the members of *Hadi*s and delineates how their caste-based identity and occupation have led to further exclusion in accessing health services and maintaining health. The author tries to correlate the socio-economic disadvantages of *Hadis* with their health condition. For instance, he portrays how their poverty has led to a poor diet system and thereby to malnutrition, especially among women and children. Similarly, he illustrates how they have been exposed to vulnerability and morbidity caused by risky and polluting occupations like pulling rickshaws, bare-handed garbage collection, and manual scavenging. The author states that *Hadis* fall prey to many recurring diseases like fever, headache, cold, and cough. They also suffer from episodic diseases and even from too many life-threatening diseases.

The study is the first attempt to track the health and related accessibility questions and how the Dalit community experiences occupational association-based unequal treatment. The data appears slightly not updated because the studied population is reported to be only forty-eight households (as per the 2011 census), and a lot must have changed in the last decade. The author's book could have addressed this aspect.

Based on the author's intensive fieldwork conducted in 2001 as part of his M.Phil. course and intermittently in the upcoming years until 2024, this book vividly portrays the interplay of caste-based occupations, systematic exclusion, and questions of access to public healthcare services. It also

discusses the intersectionality of gender, caste, class, and education. Thus, he locates the health concerns of this particular community in a larger canvas.

The book, consisting of five chapters, explores the sociology of health and healthcare among Dalits in India, with a special emphasis on the Hadi community in Jharkhand. The author has successfully brought into the limelight the discriminatory experiences faced by Dalits, especially in the health sector, and tries to elaborate on different aspects and possible reasons. He traces the trajectory of the systemic exclusion of Dalits based on caste, occupation, customs, rites, and social interactions from accessing public health services, which the upper caste has historically dominated.

The preface outlines a general background to the study, including the author's motivation and rationale for conducting his fieldwork in this particular tribal belt in Jharkhand. Likewise, he also refers to the historical and social factors that have led to the exclusion of the Dalit community from public health services. The first chapter, "Sociology of Health and Social Exclusion", provides a thorough explanation of how Dalits were mistreated for centuries, deprived of jobs, education, and health care, which subsequently impacted their social development index. Using a socio-historical lens, the author gives a picture of how menial and so-called polluted jobs were reserved for Dalit communities and how these factors led to the multiple layers of discrimination. The chapter also discusses inequality based on caste practices and class divisions. Additionally, it examines the origins of India's caste system and the epistemological development of the nomenclatures associated with Dalits and Dalit identity.

The second chapter, *Socio-Historical Accounts of Dalits with Special Reference to Hadi Caste*, gives a socio-historical overview of Dalits and explains the development of the discriminatory practices, such as untouchability, to which they have been systematically subjected. The author has discussed some relevant conceptual and historical aspects of Dalits, including the history of atrocities against Dalits, the development of caste-based occupations, the evolution of the term "Dalit" and its sociopolitical and historical connotations, constitutional measures about Dalits, the recommendations of various committees and commissions formed by various state and central governments, and Dalit movements in different phases of history.

Titled as *The Socio-Demographic and Economic Profile of Hadis,* the third chapter deals with the household profile of the respondents from the Hadi community. The author enumerates the total respondents and presents data based on various variables, including gender, occupation, income, the type of house (Katcha/Pucca, owned/rented), and the availability of basic amenities, including drinking water and electricity. He also covers the economic profile of these people. He provides a general introduction to the study area, the city of Bokaro in Jharkhand, its climate, and the demographic distribution of the population based on caste, class, and religion. He elaborates on the status of the community members based on the factors affecting the social development

index, including education and health. The data of the study reveal a concerning condition, especially that of women, who are disadvantaged in multiple ways. Most of the women remain illiterate. It is quite shocking to know that out of 160 members, 55 persons are completely illiterate. Through this broad and vivid explanation, the author reminds the readers that the health issues Dalits face are multidimensional and multifaceted.

The fourth chapter, titled *Linkages between Health and Social Exclusion among Hadis — The Axes of Denial*, explores the correlation between health and social exclusion among Hadis. The author elaborates on various health problems they face and tries to find how they relate to the dirty and "polluted jobs" they are engaged in. The author counts tuberculosis, chickenpox, and some respiratory infectious diseases among the important health issues that the community faced and lived with in the past. He argues that these diseases are caused by the possible exposure of the members of the community to the infectious virus in the polluted job setting. The fifth and final chapter is about the best practices, findings, and conclusions. The author alludes to how the deplorable socio-economic condition of the Hadi community prevented them from focusing on attaining their basic prerequisites for a standard living, including education and health. His argument is based on the premise that the primary cause of this community's lagging in health and other sectors is a lack of ownership of agricultural land and other resources. Another reason is the lack of awareness and the problem of political representation. The selected study area doesn't have the minimum required number of Primary Health Centers (PHCs), subcenters, community health centers, general hospitals and medical centers. This chapter also elaborates on the findings of the study along with some of the policy recommendations and scope for further studies.

What makes this write up worth reading is its use of multiple lenses to look into the health concerns of the specific community chosen for the study. The author delves deeply into diverse aspects of the topic. Thus, instead of focusing on the immediate cause, he has gone deep into the socio-historical, cultural, economic, and demographic factors contributing to Hadi's exclusion from the health and healthcare services that the mainstream sections have access to. Another specialty of the study is that the author has used as many tools and methods to collect as much data as possible. His use of interview schedules, in-depth interviews, focus group discussions (FGDs), and case studies makes the data enriching and engaging. The data from government officials, including the deputy commissioner, health officers, and the civil surgeon, make the study more reliable and interesting.

The study's limitation is that it doesn't address the community's social mobility and changes during the study period. Those who are interested can address this issue and conduct novel studies based on the new changes in the field.

Overall, this book, with its interdisciplinary nature, can be helpful for researchers and students engaged in studying and researching related to health, marginalisation, and caste in a variety of disciplines, including history, anthropology, social exclusion, public health, social work, sociology, and

many other social science fields. It sheds light on new thoughts and postulations about the health concerns pertaining to Dalits of India, not exclusively limited to a particular field of study.

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