



RESEARCH REPORT | MARCH 2023

FACING CASTE

Engaging with the Privileged

Principal Investigator: Sujata Noronha
Co-Investigator: Beena Choksi

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Credits

Editing: IIHS Word Lab

Design: Sathishkumar | Reviewed by: Prachi Prabhu and Padma Venkataraman | IIHS Communications and Design

Image credits

Cover image: Alia Sinha

Contact

sujata@bookwormgoa.in

beena.choksi@gmail.com

TESF India Website: <https://www.tesfindia.iihs.co.in/>

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ABSTRACT

The caste system in India and the structural inequalities perpetuated by casteism are significant challenge to creating a just society. The problem is exacerbated because the education system, including libraries and school curricula, does not fully acknowledge and confront this complex issue. Historically, libraries have emerged as safe spaces for collective conversations, diverse collections, and dialogue around sensitive subjects.

This project worked closely with a selective sample of seven library educators—most of them with caste privilege— to: a) examine their knowledge, attitudes, and practices on caste issues by reading caste literature, with reflective discussions, and introspective journaling; and b) develop their preparedness to conceptualise, design, and pilot a library unit on caste with children from privileged backgrounds.

The project explored three questions:

- How does one engage in discussions on caste and social justice with children from privileged backgrounds?
- How do the participating children respond to the materials and discussions?
- How can having a module on caste and social justice as part of the school curriculum impact the way children respond to situations of inequality?

Conceptual clarity, emotional integrity, and pedagogical preparedness of the library educator had a bearing on how children were engaged in discussions on caste. Children's responses to caste-themed stories and library activities showed a readiness to engage with the topic. Their questions about caste and caste practices were uninhibited and revealed a close and critical observation of their home environment and surroundings. Developing children's literature from the perspectives of both caste oppression and caste privilege will enable open conversations in library spaces. Introducing or institutionalising a caste themed unit in school curriculum within the larger issue of social equality that the Indian Constitution is committed to will enable us to move along the trajectory of education as a social leveller.

INTRODUCTION

Modern India continues to be rigidly stratified by the caste system that is more than 2000 years old (Ghose, 2013). Its stranglehold makes it the predominant structure of oppression and discrimination of the country's majority Bahujan population (70 per cent) by the minority upper caste population—30 per cent which includes 4 per cent Brahmins (Sahgal et al., 2021). "Crucially, there is no recognition the problem is 'us'—the minority upper castes, who control virtually the whole society" (Mannathukarren, 2016). The consequence is that a significant proportion of the upper caste "educated" citizenry sees caste as irrelevant in their lives and themselves "casteless."

For children from privileged backgrounds witnessing or participating in casteist situations, an age-old bias is reinforced, taking them further and further away from social justice. If we really intend to leave no child behind, it is our responsibility as educators to work with children to examine the history of the caste system and its manifestations in our society today, to engage with them through reflection on our embedded biases and build the awareness, sensibilities, and dispositions required to create a more compassionate and ethical world.

RESEARCH CONTEXT

Since Independence, caste has been dealt with in school classrooms and textbooks in a largely predictable manner and mostly in passing—"a single chapter on the caste system, a reference to untouchability, or a mere mention while learning about the Constitution of India." B.R. Ambedkar's identity has been reduced to the epithet "Father of the Constitution" as a result of which his lifelong struggle as a Dalit and for the anti-caste movement has been made insignificant, if not erased altogether, for most school students.

The National Curriculum Framework (2005) tried by way of content and pedagogy to address the short shrift made of the issue of caste. Kirasur (2021), however, is critical of the attempt and cites instances from the History and Political Science NCERT textbooks that "implicitly and explicitly" uphold caste hierarchy. Mittal (2020), in her 2015–16 study, analysed the NCERT Social Science textbooks for classes 6–10 for their content on caste-based inequalities and examined how students in a government-aided school in Delhi engaged with it. The findings of a questionnaire administered to 86 students of class 9 to understand their opinion about caste-based discrimination revealed that 44.19 per cent of the students denied its prevalence, 17.44 per cent mixed caste with religion-based discrimination, and 5.88 per cent equated caste with class-based discrimination. Barely a quarter of the sample accepted that caste-discrimination still exists. An important point that Mittal makes is that students create a hierarchy of subjects and "civics is not their choice of subject" (p.106). How and where else can students be introduced to caste in ways that will engage their interest, provoke them to think critically, and sensitise them towards social justice?

When a participant of the Library Educators Course (LEC)¹ expressed interest in exploring the theme of caste for her project, it triggered in Noronha (2022) the realisation that “exploration of the caste system and its multiple dimensions of discrimination and privilege in our lives on every level of existence was unexplored in the space of the library.” Historically, social justice is a core mission of libraries and is reflected in various aspects of library practice, usually starting with a diverse collection of books which includes voices and experiences of marginalised populations. The power of stories to introduce new ideas, persuade adoption of or action on an idea, and create moments of reflection are well known. Stories are referred to as “psychologically privileged” by cognitive scientist Willingham because the mind treats stories differently than other types of material. Over the last decade, a small number of caste-themed fiction and nonfiction stories have trickled into the ecosystem of Indian children’s literature, making it possible for library educators to use them to think and talk about caste not abstractly but as a lived reality.

Rationale

The caste system in India and the structural inequalities perpetuated by this ancient hierarchy that rules “modern” India, is one of our greatest challenges. Records of atrocities under the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act 1989 show that crime rates against Dalits have increased by 6 per cent between 2009 and 2018 (National Dalit Movement for Justice, 2020), with numerous instances of discriminatory practices occurring in schools. While the Right to Education (RTE) Act has initiated affirmative action measures for historically disadvantaged groups to obtain access to private school education, the actual experience of being in school with children and teachers from privileged backgrounds has often been exclusionary (National Commission for Protection of Child Rights, 2018). The dominant discourse among privileged caste groups, especially in urban areas, is that caste is a thing of the past. This narrative is also propagated in schools and colleges. Yet, caste continues to operate in our everyday world to the point of being deeply institutionalised (Jodhka, 2016).

In thinking about education as a political project that includes the potentially transformative space of the library, we find ourselves turning towards Paulo Freire, the Brazilian educational philosopher who argued for critical consciousness as a way of empowerment. Freire defines critical consciousness as the ability to recognise oppressive social forces shaping society and to take action against them. As library educators we find great resonance with his theorisation of the idea that “we read the word to read the world”. We therefore attempt to use literature to first face our caste-based thinking and then strengthen our pedagogy to bring up this “risky” topic with young people in libraries.

Aims and Objectives

The aims of the research project are to:

- examine through a participatory lens one’s own knowledge, attitudes, and practices on caste issues; and
- develop preparedness of library educators to pilot a library unit on caste with children.

¹ The Library Educators Course is a professional development programme offered by Bookworm Trust since 2017 in partnership with Parag of Tata Trust until 2021 and thereafter in partnership with Tata Institute of Social Sciences.

The two key objectives of the research project are for the project participants to:

- engage with diverse literature on the subject of caste, and through discussions face their own positions on caste issues as a group of educators; and
- design and transact a library unit for children on caste.

Research Methodology

To achieve these objectives, the project was framed around the following research questions:

- How does one engage in discussions on caste and social justice with children from privileged backgrounds?
- How do the participating children respond to the materials and discussions?
- How can having a module on caste and social justice as part of the school curriculum impact the way children respond to situations of inequality?

The project was rooted in the principles of participatory research and reflective practice. At the outset, as investigators, we acknowledged our positionality as women from privileged castes who did not have lived experience of caste-based discrimination perpetuated against them. We committed to reflexivity and bringing together a group of research participants that represent diversity of backgrounds and experience.

Sampling

To arrive at a purposive sample of 8-10 participants, we approached 15 library educators individually with personal email invitations followed by a phone conversation to present and discuss details about the research project. Five expressed their inability to commit to a year-long engagement with the project.

Although we sought gender, caste, and class diversity in the sample, the final sample of 10 was all female; 8 from privileged backgrounds, 1 from an economically disadvantaged background, and 1 from a socially and economically disadvantaged background. Geographically they were spread across the states of Andhra Pradesh (1), Jharkhand (1), Karnataka (3), Maharashtra (3), and West Bengal (2). Each was interested to examine for themselves the social reality of caste and explore ways of engaging in continued dialogue for social justice through literature and library spaces.

Of the 10, 3 were school library educators (2 elite private schools, 1 government-aided private school, and 1 low-cost private school), 4 were associated with libraries set up in under-resourced communities (3 urban and 1 rural), 1 ran a library for children in an upper middle class community, and 1 held a library programme in a child welfare institution.

Of the 10 who had agreed to participate in this project, 3 dropped out during the course of the project—1 in the first phase of the project due to a personal crisis, and 2 in the second phase of the project on account of health reasons that made it difficult for them to cope with the rigour of the project. All 3 dropouts were from privileged backgrounds.

Data Collection

In the absence of contextually relevant tools to gather data that would address the 3 research questions, the investigators designed the following tools, exercises, and activities to collect qualitative data. The nature of data collected was reflective, reflexive, and experiential.

Note of Interest

At the outset, each participant was asked to write a note to describe why they chose to be a part of the Facing Caste project.

Survey Forms

Two tools were designed to gather baseline and endline data. (See Appendix A for details). Tool 1 drew upon the Knowledge, Attitude, and Practice (KAP) model and was designed as a 12-item survey to assess the caste-related knowledge, attitudes, and practices of the participants. Tool 2 was a response-form for a task designed to assess the preparedness (personal and pedagogical) of the participants to discuss caste with a group of children. Both tools were piloted and revised before finalising them for administering to the participants for the baseline measure. Tool 2 was modified for the endline measure to encompass a wider scope of pedagogical preparedness and capture the more elaborate planning and implementation of the library unit. To understand certain responses in depth and encourage a dialogue to capture complexity and nuances, clarificatory conversations were pursued over email and/or a phone or zoom call with select participants. Each participant carried out the exercise at the field site that they were associated with, with one or more groups of children.

Journaling

The participants were asked to express their feelings, observations, concerns, experiences, and insights about caste through written journaling (Appendix B) and visual journaling (Appendix C). The written journal contained textual records of responses triggered in the participants by readings and group discussions and the visual journal contained drawings and markings in response to prompts provided in the visual journaling workshop.

Thematic Discussions

The content for facing caste was structured around four sub-themes in the form of readings and interactions with resource persons. The four sub-themes were Caste Matters (resource person: Satish Deshpande), Caste and Childhood (resource person: V. Geetha), Caste and Purity/Pollution (resource group: South Asian Sanitation Labour Network), and Caste and Meritocracy (resource person: Nidhin Donald). The participants discussed the subject matter and exchanged ideas on Moodle.

Collection of Caste-themed Children's Literature

Access was given to a collection of children's books over Moodle for participants to read and use in their field exercise and field project (Appendix D for the book titles).

Field Project Summary

A form was created to capture the participants' library unit planning, observations of children, and reflection on their role as a library educators.

Reading Circle and Writing Workshop

The Reading Circle and Writing Workshop were not planned at the start of the project and were made optional for the participants when offered. The Reading Circle was held in the first half of the project period and the book selected was *Coming Out as Dalit* by Yashica Dutt. Over a period of six weeks, the readers met fortnightly to discuss two or three chapters at a time (Noronha, 2021). The Writing Workshop ran during the second half of the project period over three days, two hours each day. The workshop was inspired by Deshpande's (2013) idea of the absence of biographies of the upper caste identity. The participants read Abhangs written by the Mahar saint-poet Chokhamela and were asked to write an imagined account of an interaction with him by relating to events in his life.

DISCUSSION ON FINDINGS

The findings will be discussed primarily with respect to data gathered from seven participants who stayed for the entire duration of the project.

Research Q1. How does one engage in discussions on caste and social justice with children from privileged backgrounds?

To engage in discussions on caste and social justice with children from privileged backgrounds, a library educator needs to develop her i) conceptual clarity, ii) emotional integrity, and iii) pedagogical preparedness. We began with the premise that the first two will likely have a bearing on the third. Conceptual clarity refers to willingness and orientation to grapple with and grasp the complexities of caste as a concept and social practice. Emotional integrity lies in developing insight into and acknowledging one's own caste-blindness, caste-bias, and caste privilege. Pedagogical preparedness is making the effort and developing capacity to engage critically with the caste-themed material and activities to be used with children, including being alert and mindful of children's verbal and nonverbal responses to them.

Conceptual Clarity: The first nine items on the KAP survey addressed caste-related concepts. There were shifts between baseline and endline responses to some of these items in both directions, across participants. The item that we expected no ambiguity about was that caste was an ascriptive identity and yet only two of seven participants were in full agreement about it at the start and end of the project. Of the remaining five, three began to understand more clearly and moved from partial to full agreement. Two shifted from full agreement/disagreement to full disagreement/agreement respectively. Coincidentally, both framed their understanding of caste in terms of a social construct and therefore not ascriptive, to justify their disagreement.

The ambiguity in participants' understanding was at times a result of interpreting terms in the survey item differently and/or reconciling it with what has been read. For instance, with respect to the statement about purity/pollution being inherent to the caste system, while two participants shifted from a partial and full disagreement to full agreement with it, one participant backtracked from full agreement to partial agreement citing Ambedkar's view that the "idea of pollution...is by no means a peculiarity of Caste as such" and "is a characteristic of Caste only in so far as Caste has a religious flavour." It serves well to remember that Ambedkar acknowledged that caste is not merely a theoretical problem. As a practical problem, the basis for most casteist practices and atrocities including the prevalence of manual scavenging is the twin notion of purity/pollution, an inherently irrational feature of the caste system. Moreover, in the very limited children's literature available on the theme of caste, it is this feature symbolised through smell and uncleanness that becomes the pivot for the plot thereby reducing caste-based oppression to one aspect of its horrific nature invisibilising the inherent, non-rational basis of the caste system. Writers appear to resolve this problem with heroic acts on the part of the "unclean" character without questioning the irrationality of the caste-based notion of purity/pollution, thereby reproducing the immutability of caste. It is worthwhile noting that the majority of questions raised by children on caste had to do with "untouchability", the basis of which is the notion of pollution/purity.

The unexpected shifts indicate that the subject of caste continues to be complex, ambiguous, and defies easy or uniform interpretation. The words of B. R. Ambedkar in his 1916 seminal paper "Castes in India: Their Mechanism, Genesis and Development" are a humble reminder: "I need hardly remind you of the complexity of the subject I intend to handle. Subtler minds and abler pens than mine have been brought to the task of unravelling the mysteries of Caste; but unfortunately, it still remains in the domain of the 'unexplained,' not to say of the 'un understood'". He goes on to say, "I am quite alive to the complex intricacies of a hoary institution like Caste, but I am not so pessimistic as to relegate it to the region of the unknowable, for I believe it can be known." Since then, there have been innumerable scholarly attempts to "know" caste and its manifestations.

More scholarly readings and discussions than were possible during the project period are necessary for a firmer grasp on the conceptual complexities of caste. However, readings and thematic discussions also enabled participants to discover new and contemporary concepts and ideas related to caste. The concept of endogamy as "the only characteristic that is peculiar to caste" and its role in the genesis and maintenance of the caste system was a revelation for most participants and mentioned in the discussions over Moodle. Reading Deshpande (2013) and engaging with him in an online discussion introduced the modern concept of "castelessness" which many of the participants recognised as applicable to themselves since they belonged to that section of society that "having encashed its traditional caste-capital and converted it into modern forms of capital like property, higher educational credentials, and strongholds in lucrative professions...believes itself to be caste-less today" (p.32). A participant's misconception about the position of Shudras in the varna system was shared in her journal entry: *"The main shift Facing Caste has brought in me was something that I didn't anticipate. I recently learned that Shudras too are savarnas. And perhaps the experiences of the Shudras (though they may be the oppressed castes can't really be equated to that of Dalits. I think I used to feel that I could 'empathise' and 'understand' the experiences because I thought I too belonged to an oppressed caste. But now I'm questioning that very belief that made me operate and present myself in a certain way".²*

² Ambedkar (1946) offers an analysis of the place of Shudras in the varna system and how they differ from Dalits.

The field project summary of a participant revealed that conceptual clarity assumes greater significance while working with older children (16–18-year-olds) who ask more macro questions and seek rational explanations such as the origin of caste and “what the Constitution has to say about caste.” Younger students did not lack questions, but their questions revealed a more emotive element and micro-observations about the world they inhabit. See Appendix E for a subset of questions by younger students.

Emotional Integrity: As the above misconception about Shudras indicates, conceptual clarity can play a part in bolstering emotional integrity. Of the 12 items on the survey, two directly addressed emotional integrity by questioning participants about awareness of personal casteist practices and observation of such practices in their homes. It appeared to be easier to acknowledge casteist practices in their homes; only one participant was “not sure” at the start of the project but shifted to “yes” by the end of the project. With respect to being aware of personal casteist practices, the same participant was “not sure” about it and stayed with that position even at the end of the project but qualified it by saying “yes but need to be more aware.” Two other participants showed a shift in their response; one surprisingly from “yes” to “not sure”, explaining “it’s important to acknowledge that you may be more casteist than you think you are. I have learnt and been shocked at different points in my life that something within me indeed was casteist when I’ve believed that I cannot be casteist” and the other shifted from “not sure” (*have not thought about it*) to “yes” (*I was not fully aware before FC project happened what is casteist and what is not. At least now I can recognise that and I am beginning to understand it in terms of certain casteist words in colloquial language*). These tentative shifts in awareness of casteist practices are indicative of a gradually developing awareness of the “discourse” on Dalits.

The tentativeness of the two participants who even at the end of the project opted for “not sure” suggests that casteist practices can be deeply embedded and do not surface immediately or without ambivalence. The process of developing emotional integrity is gradual and deliberate. This is a consideration to keep in mind when working with children of privilege to face caste; for them too, recognising or acknowledging casteist practices that implicate them or their family members can take time and cannot be hurried if the goal is to develop emotional integrity in them as well.

Deshpande(2013)andV.Geethaindiscussingcaste³,offerednewwaysofexaminingit.Deshpandecommentson thehypervisibilisingofcaste-baseddisadvantageorvulnerabilityvis-avisinvisibilisingcaste-basedprivilegesor advantage.Thiscompelledtheparticipantstoturntheirgazeinwardsandre-examinetheirunderstandingofand relationship with caste. One journal entry read: “At this juncture, I have been able to start to look into my own experiences in relation to the ecosystem that I am in....I do realise that I have grown up in the casteless bubble and I am intrigued to delve deeper to know the why. I hope for more dialogue on experiences to open up to the various hidden forms of oppression and privilege which I might not recognise.” V. Geetha’s view that childhoods where caste is a shaping influence and is linked to artisanal work, labour, skill, need to be valorised and respected, offered a novel perspective about caste that is enabling rather than disabling and recognition and appreciation of diverse childhoods. Although there is not sufficient data to demonstrate that these perspectives directly contributed to the development of emotional integrity in the participants during the course of the project, they were received with openness and thoughtfulness and can influence their facing up to caste privilege and use of books that represent diverse childhoods in the future.

³ In her paper “Childhood in the neoliberal age: Some thoughts for adults”, provided for the purpose of an online discussion.

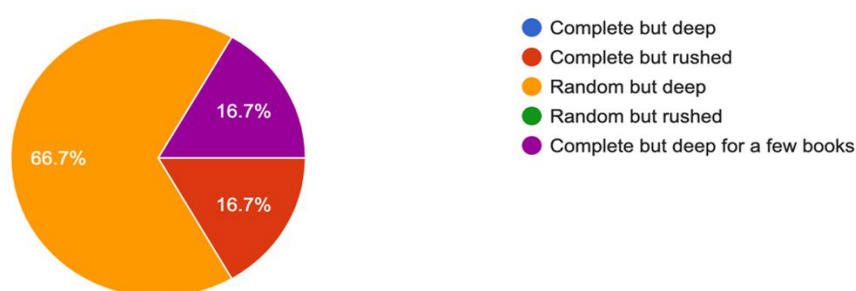
Pedagogical Preparedness: To gauge their overall comfort level at the start of the project, an item in the baseline survey asked whether they felt prepared to introduce children to stories about caste. While two participants indicated that they did not feel prepared, two were unsure, and three felt prepared. The endline survey showed that one of each from the pairs that had not felt prepared or had felt unsure, had not shifted from their baseline positions. However, both specified needing more preparation and practice which may be interpreted as preparedness being understood as evolving, as a process.

More specifically, we gauged the preparedness of the participants in terms of in-depth engagement with caste-themed texts and understanding of library activities that would be part of the library unit. Most of the library activities were familiar to the participants, having encountered them in the Library Educators Course. A central feature of preparedness was with respect to the texts and their use, starting with being familiar with the collection. A collection of stories was made available to the participants for use in the field exercise, and the baseline measure for preparedness focused on their familiarity with the collection. After completing the field exercise, five out of six participants indicated that they were familiar with the stories in the collection. Only one participant found almost all of them unfamiliar which suggested that she would need to familiarise herself with them prior to the field project.

Following the field project, the endline measure required participants to indicate their preparedness with respect to a) engagement with the collection of books (Figure 1); and b) the book display activity (Figure 2). The responses are presented diagrammatically below.

Figure 1: Engagement with the book collection

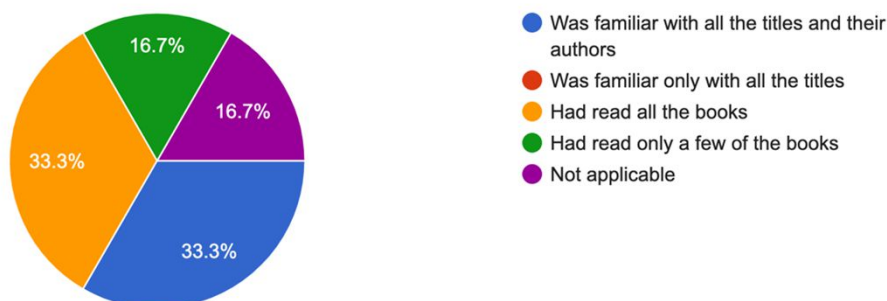
6 responses



age with all the books deeply and for the four who did engage deeply, it was with select titles only. Of the participants, two claimed time constraints and one stated the intention of narrowing focus to only those books she intended to use with the children. When planning a library unit around a specific theme, it is meaningful to read as many books as possible on that theme so that there is multiperspectival understanding of it to cater to different reading interests of children. Although four out of six participants claimed to have done deep reading, notwithstanding that it was for random titles, the experience of the investigators who discussed stories with the participants suggested that their reading lacked depth and detail, and nuances needed to be spelt out. For instance, a participant acknowledged and expressed surprise after doing her field exercise that she had missed an obvious detail about the book she had used, until it had been pointed out to her by one of the investigators.

Figure 2: Familiarity with the books displayed

6 responses



No more than 25 books were put on display by any participant, making it possible for them to have read all books and be familiar with all the titles and authors. This would have ensured that when children came to browse or borrow, the library educator was in a position to discuss the books and recommend titles to children. Of the five participants who had put up a book display, only two had read all the books, and so it can be assumed that they were also familiar with the titles and the authors.

When asked about their preparation for read-alouds and book talks, two of six participants described it as "good". However, for one, it had more to do with the logistics of when and where, and for the other, it had more to do with supplementing it with audio-visual resources. Another two said the planning was going well in terms of how they would transact the activity. Of the remaining two, one said it was satisfactory, and the other described it as challenging. Two participants acknowledged the importance of practice as part of preparedness and said they were unable to do enough of it.

The endline measure also sought to make an overall assessment of participants' preparedness by asking them to complete the statement, "I need to be better prepared about...." Of six, three participants responded from the instrumental point of view of having access to more books and other resources. One participant felt her preparedness depended on a better understanding of caste, thereby giving importance to conceptual clarity. Only two of participants had a more thoughtful approach to preparedness: *"I think I need to plan, select collection and other resources, observe, reflect and infer much more than what I did this time. My session preparation to implementation was rushed. Therefore, I need to put in more time and prepare every aspect of the unit/sessions with much more understanding and reflection."* The second participant wrote being better prepared meant, *"Reading of texts, planning closure, or tying up of the sessions and time management. Lastly, reaching out to others for support and help without any hesitation."*

Along with preparedness, the endline measure also sought to assess the participants' confidence on seven dimensions. The first was whether they felt confident about overall planning for the sessions they had conducted. While five participants indicated feeling only "somewhat" confident, two responded with "yes." One of these two was the one who had earlier responded thoughtfully to the statement "I need to be better prepared about...."

It may be worth exploring the relationship between preparedness and confidence—what kind of preparation contributes to feeling confident about the sessions.

Research Q 2: How do the participating children respond to materials and discussions?

At the start of the research project, the participants were required to carry out a field exercise of using a caste-themed story with a group of children (mostly underprivileged) at their site of work. Majority of the participants said they felt ambivalent or anxious when they read the task assigned to them, but after carrying it out, some were surprised by how the children responded. *"...the group is ready to engage further with texts, which was my first apprehension," wrote one participant in her response form. Another wrote, "It is quite interesting to see how the children discussed about various ways in which they could see and they experienced othering amongst and around them...I was really not expecting children to discuss about the different layers in which oppression and discrimination occurs."*

The responses of disadvantaged children showed that they were able to discuss oppression, which is a lived reality for them. Our growing awareness to recognise our positions of privilege and what that embodies led us as investigators to become more attentive to reproducing oppressive ways of being despite good intentions. A conscious decision was therefore made by the investigators to switch the target group from disadvantaged to privileged children for the field project, and the rationale for it was discussed with each participant individually. Two participants, both privileged, expressed strong reservations about having to work with privileged children. One insisted that her participation in the project was based on the initial project design to engage with children at their own site of work, which in her case was a library space in a rural site. The second participant was emphatic about having no prior experience of working with privileged children. The investigators encouraged them to consider the proposal and gave them the option not to if the discomfort experienced was too strong to overcome. Subsequently one of these two dropped out of the project for health reasons. The group of children the participants finally worked with for the field project were privileged (defined by school type and socio-economic positions).

During the three-day contact workshop in Goa, the participants discussed the design of a library unit on caste by exploring the use of a variety of activities. For the field project, the activities that were selected by a participant to constitute her library unit were two or more of the following:

- Story read-aloud
- Book display
- Book browsing and borrowing
- Book talk
- Guided drawing using a poem or story
- A game on privilege
- Song

Of the seven participants, six were able to confirm project sites and approached the work with mixed emotions. One participant did not receive confirmation from either of the alternate schools that were approached—while one ignored all attempts made by her for a conversation about the project, the other categorically refused discussion on caste with its students. In the six library sites across four states,

children remained curious, open, and engaged. For the purpose of analysis, we have grouped the participating children into three categories:

Group 1: Junior school children—Ages 6-9 (1 site)

Group 2: Middle school children—Ages 11-13 (3 sites)

Group 3: Senior school children—Ages 15-17 (2 sites)

What was common for all three categories of children was

- Interaction with a Library Educator.
- The ambience of a library (access to a collection with the possibility to borrow, browse books).
- Introduction to book talks and themed book display.
- The ambience of a safe space (created in sites that were new, by the library educator spending time with the children and establishing a rapport with them before beginning with the Unit).
 - A minimum of three library sessions transacted by the library educator (the maximum was six sessions).
 - A transactional approach to the topic using texts as talking points.

Children's Response to Texts

Given that the participants are all Library Educators, texts were a common media used in the project. All participants used story texts across age groups. The most common strategy was read alouds and book talks with four out of six using it (fiction and non-fiction). One of the six used independent reading of selected texts (fiction, non-fiction, and poetry) with senior children, and another of them used interactive displays as the trigger for facing caste in the library.

The central strategy was to use stories to ignite conversations and discussions. The intent was to provoke children to think and question, not to offer answers or solutions. "The Why Why Girl" by Mahashweta Devi, illustrated by Kanak Sashi and published by Tulika was used in three of six sites and enabled students to become open to raising questions irrespective of the context of their own immediate environment. This was found to be specially triggering when students were asked to raise their own questions about caste. For a list of questions raised, see Appendix E.

Bhimrao Ambedkar "The Boy Who Asked Why" by Sowmya Rajendran, illustrated by Satwick Gade and published by Tulika was read aloud in two of six groups as a biopic to enable a lived experience of casteism. Children received the story with a natural curiosity and openness, and in the case of the junior children, there was some confusion as to why hierarchies are present. This encouraged furthering conversations and the beginning of critical thinking as children grappled with a freshly seen reality.

However, the youngest age group also had conceptual difficulties in separating class from caste, and it appears that larger narratives from the domestic and school discourse around merit, class, and labour add to very early notions about poverty. In the small sample, there was unanimous agreement that being poor was the cause of destitution and homelessness. It seemed wise to leave this understanding as is with the hope that there will be continued conversations with children of privilege at a later stage.

The middle-school groups (three of six) used *Clear Sky* by Ambai, a story narrated through the voice of a young upper caste protagonist who asks her mother “Who made caste?”. When the same question was posed to the children, it provoked many remarkable responses which can be gradually built on for rich discussion and arguments (see Appendix F). Across sites, children demonstrated their capacity to grapple with questions that adults often imagine are beyond their scope. The Library Educators too were taken by surprise by some of the uninhibited and critical responses of children. In one library session, the Library Educator reported that as the plot thickened in the read-aloud, students who were seated at the end of the room moved closer to the Library Educator who was reading the book, and in some cases their body language changed to show their deepening interest in the story. Recognising that children respond in many ways, including non-verbally, was helpful to this Library Educator on her journey.

Children's Response to The Privilege Game

The Privilege Game was introduced to older students in two of two senior groups. The game is a work in progress building on the ideas of culturally responsive teaching based on the understanding that games serve as tools to make privileges, positionings, and experiences visible in groups that are homogenised by school labels of grades or classes.

Using a socio-dramatic technique and built on the more traditional game structure of The Line Up, where participants organise themselves on the bases of metrics such as height and date of birth, the Privilege Game asks participants to take on a social category (pre-determined) which has embodied privilege of caste, class, language, family type, and so on. Based on prompts read out, players move forward or remain where they are. In the act of playing the game, it becomes hypervisible who gets to move and who finds it harder to move. The statements read out, with wild cards to demonstrate how “chance” plays a role in our caste location was only possible at a very preliminary level in this project. The game was designed based on the transformative work of Augusto Boal. For more details, see Appendix G. However, notes from Participants enabled us to learn the following:

- Authoring and owning each Educator's place in society is as important as enabling students to find to maximise game potential.
- The game enables us to name the issue of caste, and this becomes a pivotal step in the journey of facing caste.
- To be mindful and perhaps even better trained in not allowing a disintegration without suitable support systems
- To capture experiences from play in writing from each player to understand more deeply what resonated, what stayed, and what questions were provoked should become an essential step in the game design.

Children's Response to Guided Drawing

It has long been known that drawing offers a multi-modal opportunity for expression and introspection as a response to literature or experiences. Based on this understanding, a strategy that brings art experiences and literature together called Guided Drawing (more about this in the Module segment) was used by three of six participants in their field work.

The use of Guided Drawing enabled the participants to get to know their students more intimately, a requirement for a short pilot like the Facing Caste project. Younger students seemed more comfortable expressing themselves through drawing than the senior group. It was particularly well suited for working with large groups of children since it revealed their collective comprehension and interpretation of the shared text and also powerfully indicated the social status of each child. This approach demands further inquiry and time which was not possible in the scope of this project.

The learnings from this activity, although tentative, were that in drawing, children across age groups represented inner worlds that were not articulated in words. In talking about their drawings, the child's feelings and thoughts became easier to articulate. The Guided Drawing activities confirm that it is a robust pedagogical tool that be used effectively to begin conversations around inequality and caste.

Learnings from Conversations and Student Behaviours

Senior Group: Two of six sites were with senior students from very privileged backgrounds. Across both sites, the topic of caste was explicitly opened up for the first time despite the schools having “alternate” spaces tags. This leads us to the harsh reality that facing caste is invisibilised more in elite spaces. Students reinforce this by not knowing their caste locations, appearing to be acknowledging casteism for the first time, and in one case finding the topic “intense”. However, the very limited sample does not enable us to read too much into these preliminary findings, but it does reveal that unless the topic is made visible in the library—through displays, book talks, conversations, and some triggering activities—none of the texts in the collection on the theme are borrowed or even acknowledged when present in the collection. Students were also able to specify the kinds of books they would like to read on this topic, explicitly asking for more biopics, or graphic versions—more narrative fiction versus academic textbooks (which were more dominant in one site).

Middle Group: Three of six sites worked with this age range and our preliminary findings are mixed as groups were fairly large across each site not allowing the intimacy of recording observations and conversations with children. However, across all three sites, students responded most positively to read-alouds, book displays, and interactive activities, thereby demonstrating to us that these are good strategies of engagement even with “risky” themes like caste.

Junior Group: One of six was a mixed group, pull out site where the parents lacked clarity on why engagement with this topic was necessary. They were more focussed on the output of drawing, writing, and “correct” answers as indicators of the quality of the sessions.

Research Q3: How can having a module on caste and social justice as part of the school curriculum impact the way children respond to situations of inequality?

Through Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), governments around the world have made a commitment to act on issues of inequality. These goals are inter-connected and have agency in policy and practice to ensure that we move towards a more equal society. Undoubtedly, we must begin with children, knowing how attitudes and practices get internalised from a very early age at home, in society, and in school, and our field pilots proved this. Children as young as 8–9 years are able to articulate

"unfair" practices they witness or experience and raise questions around them. Younger children witness inequality and rationalise it based on "stories" told within their own intimate circles. We have also seen how as children grow older, the articulation may become more covert and insidious, and how privilege becomes the mask of invisibilising our reality of "swimming in a casteist society". By doing so, one of the strongest perpetrator groups of casteism—the privileged—is not held accountable.

Children rationalise as naturally as they breathe in a conducive environment. We saw that children in the middle group who had recently been exposed to social studies content bring ideas from that subject to bear on their justifications for why discriminations and divisions exist. Others brought home experiences observing practices of family members, and some shared from direct experiences in school when the group was mixed that discriminatory practices exist and are reproduced, but rarely questioned. These are strong, compelling reasons along with our other findings to establish a child's readiness to engage with inequality, the roots of which are the caste system in India.

In order to nurture critical thinking around a deeply entrenched system like that of caste in India with children, as educators we need to acknowledge casteism beyond practice. From an education point of view, it compels us to acknowledge casteism in the construction of knowledge itself. This acknowledgement has serious ramifications on what knowledge is introduced to children, who produces it, by whom, where, and how it is delivered. This has pedagogical and epistemic implications that compound our way ahead but must be seriously engineered to move towards a more just society.

Introducing or institutionalising a caste-themed unit in school curriculum within the larger issue of social equality that the Indian Constitution is committed to will enable us to move along the trajectory of education as a social leveller. Bhattacharya (2017) cites educationist Krishna Kumar, "If social inequalities are entrenched in a society and are institutionalised in some of its most powerful formations, then our expectations from education will need to be backed by very strong and sustained effort if we wish to persist in our hope that it will act as a leveller". Education also reproduces inequality and myths of merit and hard work continue to dominate the discourse, enabled by the hard at work privileged few who use the system to entrench their own positions of benefit unequally across the geography of India. So, the matter is not merely about including a unit or module because we understand better now that children are ready, but about the need for education to become "a means to interrogate domination and exploitation" (Batra, 2021, p. 415).

THE WAY FORWARD

We propose three ways forward which have emerged from our reflections and deliberations on readings, project activities, and the field projects.

Developing Diverse Caste-themed Material

a) Startled by the low number of books for children in English from Indian publishing houses on the topic of caste, we carried out a short survey of 46 creators including editors (16), authors (14), illustrators (9), translators (4), and funders of children's literature (3). We received 35 responses, indicating a keenness to engage with this "risky" topic. None of the alternate (Bahujan) publishers we wrote to responded to the survey. We speculate the reason for the lack of response is wariness and weariness of representation and appropriation of their stories by the savarnas.

A comment by one of the respondents captures what ails the production of more caste-themed books: "The children's book ecosystem in India is dominated by upper-caste individuals, individuals with privilege. This includes writers, illustrators, publishers, editors, and book buyers. They have their prejudices, feel children need to be protected. Publishers do not seek out voices from marginalised communities."

We noted that it is the lens of discrimination with which most mainstream publishers view matters of caste. This skewed idea of representation that fails to recognise and respect the fullness of childhood and its representation in society by merely representing children who experience caste-based oppression reproduces existing hierarchies by not questioning them or not representing children in diverse contexts. We believe this needs to change. There needs to be a concerted effort by members of the children's book ecosystem to produce authentic caste-themed stories for children, from the perspectives of both discrimination and privilege.

b) Dalit childhoods—recognising the immense richness of Dalit literature that does not find place on library shelves for many reasons, and our reading of many fine voices and telling experiences coupled with the absence of representation in "own" voices of childhood stories in India, we are proposing an anthology or a series of short biopics on childhoods. We propose that relevant childhood narratives are extracted from Dalit autobiographies and presented in short chapter books or as excerpts to honour lived experiences and make visible the many contours of childhood in India. We believe that children will respond with openness to these stories and come to know diversity as the very fabric of life and respect various lived experiences rather than objectifying them.

c) A Subaltern Library Calendar—A revelation to all of us in the project was the void in our knowledge of anti-caste activists and significant events in the subaltern space of anti-caste movements. We are in the process of developing and designing a calendar as an open resource for sharing across library communities, to make visible what our curriculum, textbooks, and "mainstream" literature does not. The attempt is also to find indigenous days to observe in recognition of the path-breaking struggles of anti-caste activists.

Strengthening Pedagogical Training Component of the Library Educators Course

The Library Educators Course (LEC) which was a basis for our participant selection showed us the grim reality of being unprepared not only in terms of activating readiness for critical or risky topics, but also in terms of pedagogical skills of lesson planning, preparation, activating prior knowledge, and integrating knowledge. This became evident when participants struggled to select stories, plan lessons, and independently engage in critical reflection of their sessions. We have taken note of this and will consider ways of strengthening this component of the course which can also find a place in pre-service and in-service teacher preparation courses.

Visibilising Caste

The claims to castelessness by upper caste subjects have invisibilised caste to the point that it is not spoken about, and if it is spoken about, it's with a view to render "their caste identities as incidental or irrelevant to the claim" (Deshpande, 2013, p.39).

The reading circle activity in which "Coming Out as Dalit" by Yashica Dutt was read during the project period is an example of how caste can be visibilised for those who are outside the reading circle. Those who participated in the activity spoke about the book to their mostly privileged family and friends. It was surprising and gratifying to see how sharing the book reading experience awakened interest in those outside the circle and started conversations about caste which were unlikely to happen otherwise. Reading circles and reading clubs which include Dalit literature in their choices can cause a ripple effect. When conversations that point to caste-privilege reach a critical mass of "casteless" people, the seeds of facing caste may take root.

Passive or interactive library displays of caste-themed books and artefacts is a powerful way to draw attention to and begin conversations about caste for adults and children. We saw this with the adult participants of LEC 2021-22 in March 2022. In the focus group discussion that followed, some words used to describe the topic on display or engagement with it were "sensitive," "dangerous," "discomfort," "need courage." Video clips that were a part of the display and available for solitary viewing, made an impact. Poems by Dalit poets were received and discussed with discomfort and hostility. The feedback was not discouraging. Caste had been successfully visibilised.

CONCLUSION

When adults fall back, there are children to take the lead. Children's responses to caste in the Facing Caste project have provided ample and humbling evidence that children are ready to think and talk about caste with curiosity and an open mind—if and when adults around them are ready to. But facing caste is no child's play. It places an enormous demand on adults to first be willing to recognise and then acknowledge the elephant in the room if they are to commit to the creation of a socially just society. Seven Library Educators committed to this vision and showed readiness to face caste personally and discover the scope of "preparedness" to engage in conversations about caste with children in the library space.

The Facing Caste project is a step in this direction, and in our 12-month journey we have seen some signs that are encouraging but are nowhere near enough if we believe that this centuries-old system of oppression has to be dismantled and caste as a determinant of opportunity be rendered irrelevant (Deshpande, 2013). For the six education sites that were willing to let the project participants talk to their students about caste through library activities, there were seven that either flatly refused or went silent. We are almost certain that if the request had been couched in terms of talking to children about "differences," "diversity," or "discrimination", the doors would have opened. It spoke volumes that one participant who belongs to an oppressed group did not manage to secure a site for her field project at all. Story books on the theme of caste, although woefully limited, are available but remain mostly out of sight,—and therefore out of mind and use. For all the outward expression of sympathy and support for the oppressed by well-meaning individuals, introspection of their caste-privilege is absent. Deshpande (2013) writes, "we will not understand the question of caste until we understand the 'naturalisation' of upper castes as the legitimate inheritors of modernity" (p. 33). Recognising that the asymmetrical division of a casteless minority and an oppressed majority is moving towards a status quo, our intention in this research project was to examine what it takes to face caste.

The Indian education system and school curricula do little to acknowledge caste inequities. "As centres of learning, schools are as much about what they don't formally teach, as what they do" (Naraharisetty, 2021). In this scenario, we reckon library spaces to be the last bastions for open conversations about caste with young people—marginalised and privileged.

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APPENDIX A

In the absence of any identifiable indigenous tools to i) evaluate shifts in the knowledge, attitude, and practices with regard to caste and ii) preparedness of library educators to use caste-themed stories with children, we developed two tools that were specific to this research project.

Tool 1

A Knowledge, Attitude, and Practices (KAP) survey (Andrade et al., 2020) was designed for this project to elicit what is known (knowledge), believed (attitude), and done (practiced) in the context of the topic of interest, i.e., caste. A total of 12 items (Knowledge-5, Attitude-4, Practice-3) were constructed with a close-ended measurement scale of Agree/ Partially Agree/ Partially Disagree/ Disagree for the Knowledge and Attitude items and Yes/No/Not sure for the Practice items.

Each item carried space for elaboration by the respondent as well. The survey was self-administered at the start and end of the project to gather baseline-endline data.

1. An individual's caste is determined by birth.

Fully Agree

Partially Agree

Partially Disagree

Fully Disagree

2. The varna system is another term for the caste system.

Fully Agree

Partially Agree

Partially Disagree

Fully Disagree

3. An individual's caste identity and class identity are unrelated.

Fully Agree

Partially Agree

Partially Disagree

Fully Disagree

4. The concept of purity/pollution is inherent to the caste system.

Fully Agree

Partially Agree

Partially Disagree

Fully Disagree

5. Caste has its roots in religion.

Fully Agree

Partially Agree

Partially Disagree

Fully Disagree

6. Caste supremacy / caste privilege works to favour upper castes.

Fully Agree

Partially Agree

Partially Disagree

Fully Disagree

7. Caste discrimination is not a daily occurrence in the lives of children.

Fully Agree

Partially Agree

Partially Disagree

Fully Disagree

8. Dalit literature is a form of propaganda for the lower castes.

Fully Agree

Partially Agree

Partially Disagree

Fully Disagree

9. The quota provision is the only just way to address caste discrimination.

Fully Agree

Partially Agree

Partially Disagree

Fully Disagree

10. I have observed some form of casteism at home.

Yes

Not Sure

No

11. In my work with children, I feel prepared to introduce children to stories that are about casteism.

Yes

Not Sure

No

12. I am aware of behaviours/attitudes of mine that are casteist.

Yes

Not Sure

No

Tool 2

- i) To evaluate the preparedness of the participants to use a caste-themed story with children, the response of participants to an exploratory field exercise assigned to them prior to immersion in the project served as the baseline measure. The task entailed the following steps:

STEP 1

Select a text from a list of recommended texts or from your own collection to share with a group of children/ young adults.

STEP 2

Write an email to the investigators sharing in a few sentences the reason for the text selection.

STEP 3

Prepare and share the text with children. Jot down the experience/learnings/reflections which may be used for completing step 4.

STEP 4

Fill a form to capture the experience of this exploration.

Response Form

1. On reading the task assigned, what did you feel?

Excited

Ambivalent

Anxious

2. On a scale of 1–3, where 1 is excited and 3 is anxious, how do you feel now?

Excited

Ambivalent

Anxious

Please Elaborate

3. When you browsed through the pre-selected texts, was the collection

Very Familiar

Familiar

Almost all Unfamiliar

Anything you want to share further here

4. What was the first/ initial guiding principle you applied when you selected your book?

Interest in the text itself

Match between children and text

Language of the text

Open choice

Other:

5. After you shared your selection with us, you received a short response. Was this response

Helpful

Irrelevant

Inhibiting

Other:

6. On a scale of 1–5 where 1 is least prepared and 5 is over prepared, rate your preparation intensity.

7. In using this text, did anything surprise you with respect to yourself?

8. In using this text, did anything surprise you with respect to the children?

9. Did you do anything different from planned? What and why? What are your afterthoughts?

10. Anything else you would like to share about this task

ii) To evaluate the preparedness of the participants to transact a Library Unit on the theme of Caste with children for the field project, the response form for Tool 2 was modified.

Response Form

1. This is how I felt preparing for the field project (between the contact workshop and my first session).

Reluctant

Frustrated

Confused

Diffident

Confident

Challenged

Excited

Other

2. The collection of texts on caste that I had access to for the field project was:

Sufficient

Not Sufficient

Diverse

Not Diverse Enough

Challenging

Other

3. My engagement with the entire collection (made available online and selected by me at the workshop) was:

Complete but deep

Complete but rushed

Random but deep

Random but rushed

Other

4. I would describe my preparation for read aloud/book talks as: (please elaborate)

5. For the book display I:

Was familiar with all the titles and their authors

Was familiar only with all the titles

Had read all the books

Had read only a few of the books

Not applicable

6. With respect to the sessions I conducted, I was confident about: (select Yes/Somewhat/No)

My overall planning

My reading of the texts

My observation of the children

My facilitation skills

My ability to independently think of activities

My ability to reflect post-session

My ability to draw inferences

7. The library as a space to introduce and discuss caste with children is:

Essential

Preferable

Not essential

8. If I had to independently plan and implement another library unit on Caste:

I am confident about ____

I need to be better prepared about ____

9. Having participated in the Facing Caste project as a library educator, I would now ____

10. Any other thoughts/insights you would like to share:

APPENDIX B

Excerpts from Written Journal Entries

After reading the paper Castes in India by Dr. Ambedkar, listening to the audio summary.... listening to Professor Deshpande and reading the posts in the discussion forum I realise the "Complexity of the subject." Also, I realise that I had been only talking about how others discriminate on grounds of caste but even I have been a part of it throughout. I feel a little overwhelmed as of now and feel the need to spend more time on the readings and listen to conversations we have.

The main shift Facing Caste has brought in me was something that I didn't anticipate. I recently learnt that Shudras too are savarnas. And perhaps the experiences of the Shudras (though they may be the oppressed castes) can't really be equated to that of Dalits. I think I used to feel that I could empathise and 'understand' the experiences because I thought I too belonged to an oppressed caste. But now I'm questioning that very belief that made me operate and present myself in a certain way.

The readings or discussion around the readings have forced me to look at my relationships with fellow beings with some kind of an enquiry.

Through this project caste has become deeply personal in a way it hasn't been before. Intellectually I accepted that I was a part of caste but have never felt it so viscerally and that has been the biggest privilege and shift for me in my journey thus far. I am still completely shaken by how we as a society both propagated castelessness while simultaneously strengthening it.

The way we look at caste is so distorted that there is so much of unlearning that is needed. Processing all of it last month has been overwhelming at times but also gave me a lot of food for thought.

I have also recently grown a habit of checking the surnames and then know what caste it belongs to. I don't know if it is a healthy habit but I feel it is important to be aware of our histories of privilege. I was someone who would choose to drop my surname; I would just say my first name in introductions. But now I take a step back and rethink.

This reading has made me even more reflective about what life chances my caste identity at birth has given me in life. I continue to take some of these life chances for granted as I do not live with the fear of anyone snatching this away from me. But this reading and what I heard in the webinar tells me how much more I can do and need to do in this journey of resistance.

On 13th April, I overheard one of my co-workers talking to another co-worker about not having 14th April as a holiday. One of them clearly expressed how much he hates Ambedkar. Who were they? Men from upper caste.

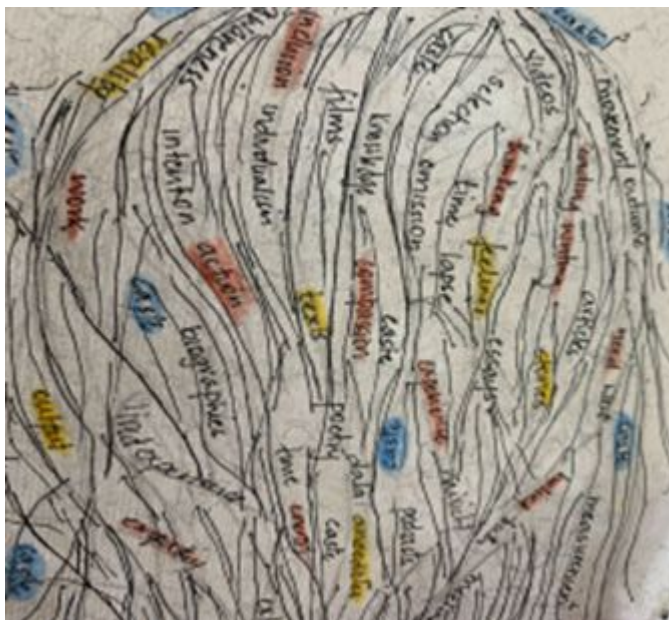
APPENDIX C

Examples of Visual Journaling

Feelings about Facing Caste

Exercise 1

First, for five minutes fill the page with free lines/ marks and allow yourself to reflect on what has brought you here (to this study). Now annotate the image with three things: where do you see caste play out, what are your reasons for engaging with the study, and what ways could you respond to it. Find a colour for each of these aspects and highlight the ones that stand out for you.



Exercise 2

Think of how you are feeling at the end of this session. Make a gesture with your non-dominant hand that you associate with this feeling. Now sketch this gesture. Annotate it with what all you are feeling at this moment.



Visual response to the poem Fire by Meena Kandasamy



Black satanic fumes
 shroud the blank blue skies
 in puffing jet black soot;
 few flashy cameras record
 glimpses of destruction
 (for tomorrow's papers)
 Our huts are burning—
 Regular huts in proper rows.
 Dry thatches (conspirators-in-crime)
 feed the flames as we rush out
 shrieking-crying-moaning
 open mouthed hysterical curses
 and as if in an answer—
 when the blazing work is done
 Fire engines arrive...
 Deliberately late.
 These feverish cries continue
 in the same shrilly pitch
 echo, echo, echo and
 finally reach...
 Up there.
 Reverberate and sound as loud
 as snail shells crackling under nailed boots
 and perhaps as distinct and defenseless.
 This double catastrophe projected in sights
 and shrieks evokes...
 No response.
 Those above are (mostly):
 indifferent bastards.

APPENDIX D

Collection of Children's Books

Title	Author	Illustrator	Publisher
The Sackcloth Man	Jayasree Kalathil	Rakhi Peswani	DC books
Sabri's Colors	Rinchin	Shailjia Jain	Tulika Books
Ju's Story	Paul Zacharia	Asma Menon	Tulika Books
Kali wants to Dance	Aparna Karthikeyan	Somesh Kumar	Pratham Books
Spirits from History	Shefali Jha, Rekharaj	Chinnan, K.P. Reji	DC books
Earth rests on a Tortoise	Ruby Hebrom	Boski Jain	Adivaani
Head Curry	Mohammed khadeer Babu	Gulammohammed	DC books
I will Save my Land	Rinchin	Sagar Kolwankar	Tulika Books
Kali and the Rat Snake	Zai Whitaker	Srividya Natarajan	Tulika Books
Putul and the dolphins	Mariam karim-Ahlawat	Proiti Roy	Tulika Books
The two named boy and other stories	P.Y. balan, Sara, S.sanjeev	Sathyanand, Koonal, Lavanya	DC books
Only fools go to School	Chatura Rao	Proiti Roy	Pratham Books
A Kite called Korika	Sharada Kolluru	K.P. Muraleedharan	Tulika Books
Tataki wins again & Braveheart badeyya	Gogu Shyamala	Puja Vaish, Rashmi Mala	DC books
Untold school stories	Mohammed khadeer Babu, Nuaiman, Jooaka Subhadra	Suresh B.V, Chitra K.S, Saumya Ananthakrishna	DC books
Under the neem tree	P. Anuradha	A.V. Ilango	Tulika Books
Who will be Ninghthou	Indira Mukherjee	A.V. Ilango	Tulika Books
Payal is Lost	various authors	Kanak Shashi	Muskaan & Eklavya
Race of the Rivers	Esther Syiem	Benedict Hynniewta	Tulika Books
Going to school alone	Simran Uikey	Kruttika Susarla	Muskaan
Somaru Misses home	Shivani Taneja	Ubitha Leela Unni	Muskaan

Girls also want azadi	Kamla Bhasin	Shrujana Shridhar	Pratham Books
Pongal	Bama	Karen Haddock	Muskaan
The why-why girl	Mahasweta Devi	Kanyika kini	Tulika books
Vidroh ki chap chap	Rinchin	Lokesh Khodke	Muskaan
Sadiq wants to Stitch	Mamta Nainy	Niloufer Wadia	Karadi Tales
My name is Gulab	Sagar Kolwankar	Sagar Kolwankar	Tulika books
Moon in the Pot	Gopini Karunakar	Nilima Sheikh	DC books
We come from the Geese	Ruby Hembrom	Boski Jain	Adivaani
Anand	Rajiv Eipe	Rajiv Eipe	Pratham Books
Jamlo Walks	Samina Mishra	Tarique Aziz	Puffin Books
Mother	Kancha Ilaiah	Lokesh Khodke & She-falee Jain	DC books
B.R. Ambedkar: A Life in Books	Yogesh Maitreya	Nidhin shobhana	Pratham Books
We the Children of India	Leila Seth	Bindia Thapar	Puffin Books
I have Rights Too!	Aide et Action with heidi gremm	Oliver Marboeuf	Aide et Action
Turning the pot, tilling the land	Kancha Ilaiah	Durgabai Vyam	Navayana
Disaibun Hul	Ruby Hembram	Saheb Ram Tudu	Adivaani
The Boy who Asked Why	Sowmya Rajendran	Satwik Gade	Tulika books
Ponni, the Flower Seller	Sirish Rao		Tara Publishing
Babu the Waiter	Sirish Rao		Tara Publishing
A Sari for Ammi	Mamta Nainy	Sandhya Prabhat	Tulika books

APPENDIX E

Questions asked by 11–12-year-olds of a private school in Jharkhand following the read-aloud of “The Boy Who Asked Why?” by Sowmya Rajendran

- Why caste system is there?
- Why lower caste people are alone?
- Why can't we touch people who sweep on the road?
- Why do people of low caste sit on the ground and upper caste people sit on chair?
- Why people are not playing with lower caste people?
- Why does upper caste people not talk with lower caste people?
- The people who sit out of the temple why do upper caste people say them untouchable?
- We all are equal then why people do caste?
- Why caste system is there? Why Why Why?
- Why children of low caste are chosen for child labour although it is criminal?
- Why who are cleaning the dust of office they are untouchable?
- Why everyone say caste caste?

Questions asked by 12–13-year-olds of a private school in Maharashtra following 4 sessions:

- Why did caste come into being?
- Once my mother gave the helper tea, she sat on the floor and drank tea, why?
Why do most people give stale food to those who work in their houses?
- Why do most people marry girls/boys from their own caste?
- Why are there still people today who believe in caste?
- Why don't I face caste discrimination?
- Why do we look down on people who are the most imp?
Eg. Maid, watchmen, carpenters, road cleaner
- Why do people follow caste even when they know why not to follow it?
- Why is stale, leftover food given to those who come to clean our house or watchmen?
Why is caste still asked in forms?
- Why is caste, discrimination still practised?
- Is it important to follow caste discrimination?
- Our country is so developed then why should follow caste still?
- When the cook is done cooking why does (s)/he sit in a corner and eat?
- Who we are friends with? Do we know their caste?
- Is caste discrimination practised the most in India or is it practised even more somewhere outside India?
- Why are those who are dark(black) lower caste taught less?
- The people who are doing the most important work, why are they lower caste?

APPENDIX F

Story: "Clear Sky" by Ambai

The question posed by the young protagonist to her mother was posed by the library educator to the children.

Q: Who decided who is lower caste and who is upper caste? And why?

Responses

1) I think Brahmins created upper caste and lower caste because in the earlier days, only those who were born as Brahmins were allowed an education. Thus, some Brahmins did not tell what is written in the text (*granth*) and said what they liked. For example, those who are *chambhar* (those who work with leather/ who make shoes) will marry only those are *chambhars*, this is what is written in the text. As it kept happening, people got used to it and even today, some people follow it.

2) This discrimination has been decided by society. Those who pick up trash, they would smell, therefore, others started treating them as dirty and untouchable. Brahmins started all of this, and society, that is we, accepted it. Therefore, we decided what is upper caste and lower caste.

3) So maybe belief like this were created by upper caste people. To maintain their high position. Upper caste—who are able to think well—not necessary. Our caste is defined by our thoughts, not caste. Even a king with bad cruel thoughts, is of Shudra caste. And a poor but kind, with good personality and good thoughts is of upper caste or maybe better than that. Choose whom you want to be.

4) Caste and discrimination has been there since old times. When there was caste, the people then must have slowly started it. Learning from them, it must have influenced the children. Children watch the adults and learn. Caste came in the old times. Those who had respect in the village, they must have decided the caste. Upper means Brahmins, Marathas, etc. These people created the caste.

5) I feel that kings in the olden times must have started the discrimination. Kings must have been upper caste or rich. Just like that, upper caste people must have started. These people must have been from upper Kshatriya caste. All these people had big, good, proper work. That's why they must have started discriminating against those who did lower caste work. I feel the reason for this, those having high status based on looks and way of living, felt that there should not be anyone who were higher than them.

6) This discrimination was done by humans. Those who clean, make shoes, they are considered untouchable (lower caste people). Those who are pandit, educated, they are considered to be upper caste. This discrimination must have been by upper caste people, I think.

7) I feel Brahmins created caste so that they themselves get more importance and all others should obey them. It might be so that they get respect and power. They created their position and created caste. And society accepted it. That understanding spread in society and stayed for a long time.

APPENDIX G

Privilege Game Description

This game was designed for 12 players at a time, with one facilitator or "Comptroller and Auditor General" (CAG). The age group for this game is 14 and above. There are three sets of texts in the game: character cards, prompts, and wild cards gameplay. Each player is given a character card, which describe clear indications of social, economic and caste locations of their characters. The character cards were meant to depict a cross-section of society.

Players start out standing in a line at one end of the room. The aim is to reach a point at the other end of the room (or about 25 feet away). The ones to reach the other end first have "won". The CAG begins the game by calling out a prompt. Each prompt describes an event or situation that allows for the character to "get ahead in life" by taking a certain number of steps. However, it is up to the players to interpret their character cards and see if their particular context allows for this.

For example, a prompt would be something like, 'If you were able to easily adapt your schedule to Covid regulations and access high speed Wi-Fi, take three steps forward.' But only about four players would be able to move forward. Some may even move backwards.

Wild cards: The wild cards slightly even the heavily skewed odds. After two prompts are called out, one character at a time is asked to choose a wildcard (without knowing what it is). By the end of the game, hopefully all the characters have experienced one wildcard. These heighten the gameplay by throwing in completely random events and prompts. These can range from winning the lottery to facing severe floods to falling in love to alien abduction, and they could make the character move forward or backwards. Some wildcards can allow you to determine another character taking steps ahead, or back. Out of the 12 character cards developed, only 3–4 have significant caste-privileged locations. And very soon in the game it becomes clear who these characters are since they end up far ahead of the other characters. This happens despite the wildcards and indicates the depth and impermeability of caste as a marker of privilege (and the opposite as well).

Important Notes on Gameplay

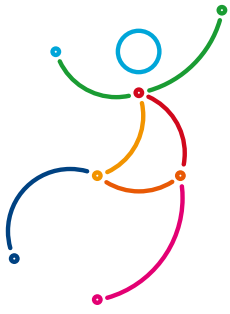
This game was designed to be unfair, something that also becomes apparent about midway through. It is advised that the characters are all shared with the larger group before starting, and that the game is played collaboratively despite the highly competitive structure. This also reveals early on, the disparities the players are working with.

The collaboration would lie in collectively interpreting each character, and how much they benefit from the prompts in play. There should be an emphasis on encouraging discussion and clarifications if someone is uncertain about how to interpret their character card.

Possible Variations

1. With a Jury: This has been played in one pilot version of the game. A jury is a separate group of interpreters who together weigh in on what each player can do. They discuss the way the prompts will influence the characters.
2. With a Preparatory Session: The whole group spends some time getting to know the 12 characters. If the group size is larger than 12, they can divide into groups. This could allow for more dramatic methods where the group finds names, types of walks for them, and also evolve relationships with the characters.
3. The Children's Book Variation: This would need to be developed as a long term project, where the character cards have characters from children's books (ideally those that are in the collection already), and the prompts are designed to reflect how structures of privilege, especially caste, affect children's life-worlds.

This game has been designed by Alia Sinha and the Facing Caste project participants in a workshop in Goa in May 2022.



TE|SF

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