

# **an analysis of caste-based discrimination in educational settings in india: bridging the theory and narratives**

Sphoorti

Despite legal provisions and policy commitments to diversity and inclusion, caste-based discrimination continues to shape educational experiences in India. While official frameworks advocate for equality, the lived realities of marginalized caste communities reveal a stark disconnect between policy ideals and everyday practice. Drawing from my own lived experiences as a teacher and researcher in the field of education, this paper systematically analyses different forms of caste discrimination in educational settings. This paper also introduces the concept of 'epistemic caste discrimination' to illustrate how dominant knowledge systems marginalize the perspectives and contributions of individuals belonging to Dalit communities. By bridging theoretical analysis with personal narratives, this study underscores the persistence of caste-based exclusion in academic spaces and calls for critical self-reflection and reimagining the ideals of education to annihilate the caste system and promote genuine equity.

Keywords: caste, discrimination, educational inequality, epistemic injustice, social exclusion

## **Introduction**

Caste-based discrimination forms the lived reality of many students belonging to marginalised caste identities from school to higher education levels. Even though many studies in the fields of history of education and sociology of education document the harsh reality of caste-based discrimination, this is not adequately addressed in teacher education, educational policy-making, and national curricular frameworks. The history of caste-based discrimination in educational settings and anti-caste social reform movements during the colonial period has been discussed among others by Zelliott (1970), Omvedt (1976), O'Hanlon (1985), and Constable (2000). There have also been several occasional papers (Holzwarth et al., 2006; Nambissan, 2009) undertaken by NGOs and special institutes such as the Indian Institute of Dalit Studies. However, there has been no active interest from policymakers in education, among educators, or by the state to address the issue of caste-based discrimination directly, despite the growing scholarship in the fields of history and sociology of education and on caste.

Drawing from my personal experiences as a woman belonging to marginalised caste in higher educational settings and professional experiences of one academic year in the field of school education as a teacher, in this paper, I first briefly outline the hierarchical social order based on the primordial identity of 'caste' in Indian society and the exclusion and discrimination based on this system of social stratification. In the next section, I discuss the overt forms of caste discrimination in educational settings, which usually garner media attention. The third section focuses on covert,

everyday forms of discrimination in educational spaces that rarely receive any attention and are often invisible, which culminates most of the time in overt forms of discrimination. I will also attempt to conceptualise ‘epistemic caste discrimination’ that arises from discriminatory epistemic injustice in the Indian caste context. Finally, I conclude by raising relevant questions and addressing the implications of caste discrimination on the broader goals of education and research.

## A Social System of ‘Graded’ Hierarchy

Hindu society is like a multi-storeyed tower with no staircase and no entrance.  
Everybody dies in the storey in which they are born.

– Dr. Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar (Mooknayak<sup>1</sup>, 1920)

‘Caste’ as a social identity is unique to India, although some of its manifestations are also seen in other South Asian societies. The caste system is one of the oldest forms of social stratification, in which individuals are divided into a ‘graded’ hierarchy based on their hereditary occupation (Ambedkar, 2019).

Hence, an individual’s caste is determined by birth and cannot be changed. The four main varnas are: Brahmins (knowledge creators and priests), Kshatriyas (warriors), Vaishyas (merchants), and Shudras (labourers/servants). A fifth group, the ‘untouchables’ (Pariahs/Panchamas/Antyajas), exists outside this system, forced into dehumanizing, stigmatized occupations like cleaning latrines and handling animal carcasses, who are ostracized socially and live on the margins.

Dr. B. R. Ambedkar, regarded as the Father of the Indian Constitution for taking up the major responsibility of drafting one of the most progressive constitutions in the world, also theorized the origin, genesis, and mechanism of the caste system in India (Ambedkar, 1916). He played a crucial role in uplifting the most marginalised groups (in terms of caste, gender, religion, and ethnicity) in India by spearheading several social movements, as he belonged to an ‘untouchable’ caste and faced immense discrimination. The Constitution of India is a progressive legal document that ensures the fundamental rights of the most disadvantaged groups. Similarly, several legal provisions in the Constitution prohibit any kind of discrimination against Dalits in India. For instance, Article 15 of the Constitution prohibits discrimination based on religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth. The dehumanising practice of untouchability is also prohibited by Article 17 of the Constitution. There are also several provisions for affirmative action or reservations for Dalits in employment, education, and politics. The former ‘untouchables’ are grouped under the category of Scheduled Castes in the Constitution of India. However, rejecting all the dehumanising caste names, the former ‘untouchables’ called themselves ‘Dalits’ during social and political movements to assert their rights and emancipation. Thus, the terms ex-untouchables/Dalits/Scheduled Castes are used interchangeably in this paper. Although the law’s approach to transforming society can be criticised as state imposition and a top-down approach, in the case of the regressive caste system, the framers of the Constitution did not see any other choice but to implement anti-untouchability and anti-discrimination laws rather than wait for a change of heart and awakening of societal conscience.

Despite several legal and constitutional provisions, the attitude of society towards Dalits has improved very little and is often discriminatory in everyday life, because the caste system in India gets its legitimacy for practice due to the scriptural sanctions of Hinduism (Thorat & Joshi, 2020).

As Altman (2020) describes, the right against discrimination and the right to religious liberty are enshrined in many domestic and international legal documents, but the two rights often seem to conflict with each other. Priestly Hindus often claim that they place their religious scriptures above the Constitution of India, and because the religious scriptures espouse the caste system and hierarchy, they practice it (Thorat & Joshi, 2020; Thorat, 2002; Stalin, 2019). This tension between regressive religious practices and constitutional law often becomes the site of legal and political controversies, especially those targeting affirmative action policies for Dalits. For instance, the never-ending public debates on reservation policies based on caste versus reservations based on economic backwardness normalise a casteist discourse on merit (Louis, 2003; Singh, 2023; Wankhede, 2023).

Historically, access to formal educational spaces has been limited to men of the first three castes (Tschurennev & Mhaskar, 2023, p. 4). Women of all castes, the labour/servant castes, and Dalits were banned from accessing formal education and were punished if they attempted any learning. Ironically, it was under British colonial rule that the doors of learning were opened to 'lower' castes, including Dalits. Missionaries played a significant role in the education of marginalised castes despite their overarching agenda of conversion to Christianity. Several social reformers, such as Jotiba Phule, Savitribai Phule, and Ambedkar, received education from missionary and colonial government schools. The initial spread of education among lower and 'untouchable' castes led to the opening of schools and indigenous educational initiatives from these groups themselves, where they could voice their oppression and chalk out their path of emancipation. Savitribai Phule and Jotiba Phule were the first ones to open schools for girls of all castes including 'untouchable' castes. Tharu & Lalita (2006, p. 214-216) published an essay written by a Dalit girl Muktabai, who studied in the school run by the Phule couple. The essay describes the caste oppression faced by members of her caste, which became significant evidence of a Dalit girl's act of resistance.

The initial spread of education to Dalits during the 19th century was met with severe resistance and hostility from elite English-educated Indians, who often belonged to 'upper' caste communities. They often lamented how the spread of education to lower sections of society led to a reduction in the number of washermen and the demand for higher wages (Mukherjee, 1977, p. 29), which disrupted the oppressive social fabric of the caste system. Education became a 'contested terrain' (Bhattacharya, 1998, p. 4-5) during the late-19th and early-20th centuries, the period of global mass education movements. The questions surrounding access, content, language, and financing of the education of Dalits were hotly debated. These debates were entrenched between the colonial hierarchy and the 'graded' hierarchy of Indian society.

It took 62 years after the independence of India to pass a justiciable law that ensures free and compulsory education for all children aged between 6 and 14 according to the Right to Education Act, 2009. In independent India, although the Constitution of India guarantees the equality of every individual through Article 14 and affirmative action for lower castes and Dalits in higher educational institutions, the deeply entrenched ideas of hierarchical social order have led to new forms of caste discrimination in educational spaces as well as the public sphere.

The entry of Dalits into educational spaces is a radical act of courage and transgression with a long history. Even at present, when the enrolment rate in elementary schools is shown as almost 100 percent on paper, there are still many 'out-of-school' children who belong to marginalised caste identities (Out-of-School Children in the Context of School Education in India, 2023). The struggle does not end for Dalits once they enter formal educational spaces; rather, it becomes more

intensified and an uphill task to survive even eight years of compulsory schooling, which is undeniably their legitimate right.

## *Overt forms of Discrimination in Educational Settings*

I had the opportunity to teach eighth graders the subject of science in a central government school as soon as I finished my teacher training. As the class teacher of these eighth graders, I oversaw all administrative work concerning this class. I had to maintain student records, which consisted of family background, parents' income, and occupation. The caste background of the students could be easily found either by last names or fee payments, as the school fee is exempted for students belonging to Dalit communities and single girl children. The earlier class teacher, who was also a science teacher, was handing over the duties to me on his last day. He took me to an eighth-grade class to formally introduce me to the students. He then suddenly pointed to three students who sat in the back to come to the front. He hit them without reason and made them sit separately on the floor. While thrashing them, he was warning me to be aware of these 'troubled' kids who are 'dumb.' The three children were crying, and he was forcing them to tell me their names. Since they were unable to speak up as they were crying, he again shouted at them, 'Do you need reservations (affirmative action) even to speak up?'

The whole episode was shocking, as I did not expect the casteist reality to strike me on the first day of my teaching job. This teacher was notorious for this kind of behaviour and had several unofficial complaints against him already. However, he was not the only bad apple. Several other senior teachers also treated the same kids badly in their respective classes, by making them sit separately, and calling them by additional name tags like 'Bullshit' X / 'Shithead' Y, which other kids imitated and made fun of them. Even in the staff rooms, the teachers called the kids by similar names. The teachers also blatantly called the Dalit students, the 'quota' kids which referred to the affirmative action policies and provisions as listed in the Constitution, but the general social perception is that Dalits being the free-loaders of these policies do not deserve (idea of merit) to be in educational spaces and their presence leads to inefficiency and encroaching the spaces of higher caste, deserving individuals.

When we look at the history of education in India, the blatant, on-the-face, discrimination against Dalits happened when they were denied entry into any kind of educational space, just because they are 'untouchables' or outcastes. This is exactly how Altman (2020) defined direct discrimination, by giving an example of Roma being denied entry into a restaurant. However, in the Indian context, even when Article 45 of the Constitution guarantees that it is a fundamental right of every child to have elementary education, the teachers, classmates, and administration directly discriminate against Dalit children intentionally most of the times. I define such intentional, direct, and constitutionally illegal forms of discrimination as **overt discrimination**. The perpetrator often knows that they are on the wrong side of the law but still has the entitlement to discriminate with full consciousness and intention, without caring for the consequences (Stalin, 2019; Thorat, 2002). Often, perpetrators do not face any consequences for their discriminatory actions.

Dalit girls are doubly discriminated against, both due to their gender and caste, and are often made to clean toilets and classrooms after school (Nambissan, 2009). The spatial segregation in the sitting arrangements and even during the mid-day meals has a long history, where Dalit students are often made to sit separately towards the back of the classroom or sometimes even outside the classroom, as explained by Constable (2000). Paik (2009) captures corporal punishment and its crippling and

unerasable psychological effects, such as isolation and inferiority complex, on the minds of Dalit girls. These overt forms of caste discrimination sometimes lead to violence and death, and become media sensations, causing selective public outrage but not enough to stir the societal conscience to annihilate the caste. The instance of a news report that reported the death of a 9-year-old Dalit boy, who was beaten by his teacher for drinking water from the pot (polluting it with his touch), is just one example of a very overt and violent form of caste discrimination (“Dalit boy beaten by teacher for drinking water from pot in Rajasthan, dies,” 2022). The recent Justice Chandru Committee report also cites rampant caste discrimination in Tamil Nadu schools, a state in southern India known for its progressive anti-caste government. The Justice Chandru Committee was formed after a Dalit brother and sister, both teenagers, were hacked mercilessly by their classmates who belonged to intermediate castes in the hierarchy, after they complained about the casteist bullying of these classmates (“The Failure of Hope”, 2023).<sup>2</sup>

The overt forms of discrimination in schools against Dalit children are one of the major reasons for school dropouts (NCF Position Paper on SC & ST ; Holzwarth et al., 2006). Dalit children must overcome innumerable instances of humiliation and overt discrimination in their school days to reach the doors of higher academic learning, which is the only way for Dalits to achieve social mobility and a life of dignity.

### *Covert forms of Caste Discrimination*

Most of the time, teachers resort to corporal and other overt forms of caste discrimination (Sangole, 2018). However, some teachers do not resort to such forms, but a kind of hidden yet intentional form of discrimination. For instance, if a Dalit student usually scores well compared to other ‘upper’ caste students, the teacher will deliberately lower the mark of the Dalit student so that they never top the class. Rawal and Kingdon (2010) explain in detail the effect of homophily in terms of caste, gender, and religion on the achievement scores of children. This invisibilized form of discrimination may seem harmless compared to overt discrimination. However, I argue that this kind of covert/hidden form of discrimination has a crippling psychological effect, leading to a severe inferiority complex and self-doubt. Sometimes, there exists an apparent indifference and gatekeeping from the side of teachers towards Dalit children, leading to a feeling of alienation, which again cripples the personality of learners. These seemingly small but intentional, everyday acts of covert discrimination and microaggressions sometimes culminate in the death of Dalit students by suicide. Several Dalit activists reject the term suicide and use the term ‘institutional murder’ (Sukumar, 2023), all in the name of the flawed concept of merit and who deserves to be in educational spaces. The news of the institutional murders of Dalit students also led to much public outrage but without much change in the policy and practice of educational settings. Sukumar (2023) traces these debates after the institutional murder of Rohit Vemula, a PhD student at the Central University of Hyderabad.

Moreover, the professorial posts in many of the higher-educational institutions are overrepresented by ‘upper’ caste persons compared to ‘lower’ caste persons and Dalits (Radhika, 2023). The underrepresentation of Dalits and ‘lower’ castes in higher educational spaces leads to the alienation of students belonging to these communities, leaving them with no solidarity networks or support from faculty. Ironically, we do not have official caste-wide data on school teachers in India. Science, Maths, and English teachers are usually from non-Dalit castes (Position Paper on Problems of SC ST Students , p.23). The crucial knowledge and skills of research are denied to Dalits, which questions their role as epistemic agents and their relationship with knowledge production. Covert

forms of discrimination rob them of their epistemic agency.

As Altman (2020) observes, indirect discrimination can sometimes be unintentional. However, I highly doubt the non-intentionality of these covert forms of discrimination in the Indian caste context, given the recent statistics that almost 30% of households in urban areas and 50% of households in rural areas practice untouchability (Rawat et al., 2024; Thorat & Joshi, 2020).

These covert forms of caste discrimination often manifest in research practices, raising the question of epistemic discrimination. Guru (2002) debated these epistemic issues under the larger debate of 'theoretical Brahmins and empirical Shudras.' Ever since Dalits could get an education, they have always voiced their oppression and the way of emancipation, for instance, in the essay of Muktabai, the writings of the Phule couple, Ambedkar, and other social reformers. Academicians who are Dalits in Indian academia have always emphasized that subalterns have always spoken in the Indian caste context. Has anyone ever listened?<sup>3</sup>

## A Case of Epistemic Caste Discrimination: Ambedkar Vs Gandhi

I borrow the concept of discriminatory epistemic injustice to define and conceptualise a covert form of discrimination in the caste context, namely, *epistemic caste discrimination*. Discriminatory epistemic injustice occurs because of prejudice against the identity of the person on whom injustice is inflicted (Nikolaidis, 2021). There are three forms of discriminatory epistemic injustice: testimonial, hermeneutical, and contributory. I want to examine the complete erasure of Ambedkar's contributions, ideas, and educational initiatives in the field of history of education, teacher education, and curriculum studies through the conceptual framework of the above three forms of discriminatory epistemic injustice.

Nikolaidis (2021) explains that testimonial injustice refers to cases where 'prejudice on the hearer's part causes him to give the speaker less credibility than he would otherwise have given.' Testimonial injustice dehumanizes a speaker by compromising their essential human capacity to provide knowledge and compromises a prejudiced listener's ability to receive important knowledge. Testimonial *injustice* raises the crucial question of whether Dalits can produce valid, worthwhile, and universal knowledge.

Although Dr. B.R. Ambedkar and his body of work span economics, law, history, philosophy, and education, and although he was also a contemporary and ideological rival of Gandhi, it is always Gandhi, who belonged to the upper caste, who is often mistakenly praised as the messiah of 'untouchables' (Ambedkar, 1946). The history of anti-caste thinkers like Ambedkar and Phule is preserved mainly due to the efforts of first-generation educated Dalits and the oral history of their ancestors. The exploration of these topics also became worthwhile research when Dalits gate-crashed the Brahminical educational spaces and found allies in scholars like Eleanour Zelliott, Gail Omvedt and Rosalind O'Hanlon.

Another instance from my research is that the popular and mainstream narrative in the history of education is that Gandhi's educational experiment of Basic Education is the only 'radical' alternative to the oppressive colonial educational imposition of the British. Rao (2020) also elaborates how Gandhian educational experiment is praised as an indigenous alternative despite its shortcomings. Often this claim is legitimised by comparing Gandhi's educational ideas to the ideas and pedagogy of John Dewey (Fields, 2006; Kumar, 2005; Link, 1962; Sadgopal, 2019). However, when one digs

deep into this claim, it is easy to see that while Dewey's educational ideas were progressive, Gandhi's ideas were conservative and reproduced the existing caste and gender structures (Paraskeva, 2023, p. 49). The Gandhian social order and pedagogy were also based on the existing social hierarchy of caste and gender, whereas Ambedkar's pedagogy called for the annihilation of the caste system. Moreover, Ambedkar was a student of John Dewey and Dewey's ideas had a profound influence on the educational ideas and initiatives of Ambedkar (Stroud, 2023). Ambedkar strived for common and desegregated schools for Dalits. However, this is the least explored topic in educational research, despite the vast available writings and speeches of Ambedkar. The teacher education curriculum does not mention any radical or emancipatory educational initiatives by anti-caste thinkers such as Jotiba Phule and Ambedkar. This is nothing but the complete denial of credit for valid knowledge production to the person because of the caste identity of the person, a grave testimonial injustice. Gandhi became well-known globally for his ideas, whereas Ambedkar remained embedded only in his community. Gandhi's pedagogy and ideas of education became significant parts of most of the educational policy documents and teacher education curriculum, whereas Ambedkar's ideas found no place, despite his vast scholarship.

Paraskeva (2023) calls this a curriculum 'epistemicide,' highlighting how praise for Gandhi and inclusivity for Gandhian pedagogies exemplifies eugenic abyssal reason. This one-dimensional matrix legitimises one perspective while erasing another. The celebration of Gandhi, he argues, comes at the cost of 'Ambedkaricide'- the complete erasure of the vast scholarship of Ambedkar (p. 52).

Fricker (2007, p. 155) defined hermeneutical injustice as the injustice of having some significant area of one's social experience obscured from collective understanding owing to structural identity prejudice in the collective hermeneutical resource. Dalits and 'lower' castes also experience *hermeneutical injustice* in higher educational spaces when they cannot express their lived experiences and research fluently and in flowery English with an American accent, akin to those with years of educational and caste capital. Dalits are often relegated to empirical social sciences, citing the lack of theorisation capability (reducing them to data collectors), and mocked for their inability to take up theory-building exercises (Guru, 2002).

I also argue that, in the Indian caste context, it is purposeful and intentional hermeneutical ignorance by epistemically privileged groups, as explained by Nikolaidis (2021), while defining the third kind of discriminatory injustice, *contributory injustice*. In cases of contributory injustice, the marginalized individual whose epistemic contribution is rejected is not obscure or lacking in understanding. The rejection of their contribution is epistemically unsubstantiated on all grounds and the result of an unwillingness by privileged individuals to acknowledge the faultiness of dominant epistemic resources (pp. 383-384). This form of injustice is also rampant in instances of the politics of citation, as often the epistemically privileged group of professors force the researchers and PhD students to not cite the professors belonging to marginalised caste backgrounds, openly ridiculing and discrediting the knowledge produced by them. This kind of epistemically bad practice by upper-caste Indian academia led to bad science and the regurgitation of a single, one-sided narrative and discourse as valid knowledge. Jal (2023) and Paraskeva (2023) explain that caste has been the most obnoxious absence in the academic field, akin to Freudian hysterical blindness and the deafening silence of Indian academia as pathological. Until recently, caste as an analytical unit was intentionally neglected and was discussed in terms of class or race. Paraskeva (2023, p. 57) emphasizes 'caste as caste' and calls for an in-depth, non-derivative, Critical Caste Curriculum Theory that champions the struggle against the epistemicidal nature of the field.

The epistemic caste discrimination arising from all kinds of (testimonial, hermeneutic, and contributory) discriminatory epistemic justice also raises the ontological question of the very 'entity' and the existence of Dalits as epistemic agents.

## Critical Self-Reflection as a Way Forward?

Education plays a significant role in socialisation of individuals and addressing social evils like casteism and caste discrimination. For instance, in Germany after the horrors of World War II, Adorno (2020) emphasises that every debate about the ideals of education is trivial and inconsequential compared to the single ideal that Auschwitz should never happen again. He states that this educational ideal does not need any further justification and that those asking for justification may lead to the monstrosity of Auschwitz again. Not making the mistake of conflating the horrors of the Holocaust with the horrors of casteism, I ask, why is it that the annihilation of caste and caste discrimination is not seen as an educational ideal that does not need justification in the Indian caste context? This is not a radical question, but the bare minimum expected of educators, when there is a constant assault on the existence of Dalits, be it in attacking affirmative action by making it obsolete or the constant threat to the constitutional laws that protect the Dalits from facing caste violence and untouchability. As Adorno (2020) further explains, the only education that has any sense at all is an education toward critical self-reflection, which is only possible when we turn our gaze to the perpetrators and not the victims. I argue that this is the need of the hour in the Indian context of caste discrimination. The gaze has always been upon the Dalits, and there is a dire need for change in the 'subject' of our investigation. No amount of news articles or research on institutional murders in educational spaces has stirred the public conscience or that of even epistemologically privileged intellectuals, who often take part in some form of discrimination. Hence, it is rather important to ask what mechanisms render such people to act or discriminate.. As Thorat (2002) rightfully asks, why do 'upper caste' individuals resort to violence when Dalits ask for their rightful share or representation? Why is the notion that caste discrimination is morally wrong not the norm or commonsensical knowledge despite the fact that inclusive education is discussed in all policy documents? Does this mean that our education system has failed to cultivate the much-needed critical self-reflection? These questions do not have simple and easy answers and require a radical overhauling of curriculum, pedagogy, and teaching and learning practices.

## Conclusion

In this paper, I have examined the 'overt' and 'covert' forms of caste discrimination faced by Dalits in educational settings, while also conceptualizing *epistemic caste discrimination* — a form of epistemic injustice that includes testimonial, hermeneutic, and contributory injustices within the caste system in India. By exploring the hierarchical privileging of Gandhi over Ambedkar, this paper highlights how education is deeply entangled with broader social structures and power dynamics, challenging the notion of educational ideals as neutral. It also sheds light on the ways in which knowledge production in Indian academia is shaped by caste-based exclusions. Furthermore, caste discrimination becomes even more complex when intersecting with other marginalized identities, such as gender, ethnicity, region, and language. Until discrimination is systematically addressed within educational spaces, its crippling effects on knowledge production and research will persist.



## References

Adorno, T. W. (2020). Education After Auschwitz. *Filosofiya Osvity. Philosophy of Education*, 25(2), 82–99.

<https://doi.org/10.31874/2309-1606-2019-25-2-4>

Altman, A. (2020). Discrimination. In E. N. Zalta (Ed.), *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Winter 2020). Metaphysics Research Lab, Stanford University.

<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2020/entries/discrimination/>

Ambedkar, B.R. (1916). *Castes in India: Their Mechanism, Genesis, and Origin*. Patrika Publications, Punjab.

<https://archive.org/details/castesinindia035140mbp/page/n3/mode/2up>

Ambedkar, B. R. (1946). *What Congress and Gandhi have Done to the Untouchables?* Thacker & Co. Ltd, Bombay.

Ambedkar, B. R. (with Dr. Ambedkar Foundation [New Delhi, India]). (2019). *Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar: Writings and speeches* (First edition, Vol. 3). Dr. Ambedkar Foundation, Ministry of Social Justice & Empowerment.

Bhattacharya, S. (Ed.). (1998). *The Contested Terrain: Perspectives on Education in India*. Orient Longman Limited.

Constable, P. (2000). Sitting on the school verandah: The ideology and the practice of “untouchable” educational protest in late nineteenth-century western India. *The Indian Economic and Social History Review*, 37(4), 383–421.

<https://doi.org/10.1177/001946460003700401>

*Dalit boy beaten by teacher for drinking water from pot in Rajasthan, dies*. (2022, August 13). India Today.

<https://www.indiatoday.in/india/story/dalit-student-beaten-to-death-teacher-rajasthan-jalore-for-drinking-pot-water-1987714-2022-08-13>

The Failure of Hope: The Hindu Editorial on the casteist attack in Nanguneri, Tamil Nadu. (2023, August 20). *The Hindu*.

<https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/editorial/the-failure-of-hope-the-hindu-editorial-on-the-casteist-attack-in-nanguneri-tamil-nadu/article67215897.ece>

Fields, Gregory. (2006). *Gandhi and Dewey: Education for Peace*.

[http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/9789401203302\\_023](http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/9789401203302_023)

Fricker, M. (2007). *Epistemic Injustice: Power and the Ethics of Knowing*. Oxford University Press.

<https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780198237907.001.0001>

Guru, G. (2002). How Egalitarian Are the Social Sciences in India? *Economic and Political Weekly*, 37(50), 5003–5009.

<http://www.jstor.org/stable/4412959>

- Holzwarth, S., Kanthy, S., & Tucci, R. (2006). *Untouchable in School: Experiences of Dalit Children in Schools in Gujarat*. UNICEF India & Indian Institute of Dalit Studies.  
[https://idsn.org/wpcontent/uploads/user\\_folder/pdf/New\\_files/India/Unicef\\_Report\\_CD\\_in\\_Education.pdf](https://idsn.org/wpcontent/uploads/user_folder/pdf/New_files/India/Unicef_Report_CD_in_Education.pdf)
- Jal, M. (2023). Epistemic Untouchability: The Deafening Silence of Indian Academics. In Paraskeva, J. M. (Ed.). (2023). *Critical Perspectives on the Denial of Caste in Educational Debate: Towards a Non-derivative Curriculum Reason* (pp. 188-239). (1st ed.). Routledge.  
<https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003155065>
- Kumar, K. (2005). *Political Agenda of Education: A Study of Colonialist and Nationalist Ideas*. (2nd ed.). Sage Publication.
- Link, E. P. (1962). John Dewey and Mohandas K. Gandhi as Educational Thinkers. *Comparative Education Review*, 5(3), 212–216.  
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/1187088>
- Louis, P. (2003). Scheduled Castes and Tribes: The Reservation Debate. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 38(25), 2475–2478.  
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/4413699>
- Mukherjee, S. N. (1977). *Calcutta: Myths and History*. Subarnarekha Calcutta.
- Nambissan, G. (2009). *Exclusion and Discrimination in Schools: Experiences of Dalit Children*. (Working Paper Series Vol 1 No 1). UNICEF & Indian Institute of Dalit Studies.  
<https://www.anti-caste.org/wp/wps0101.pdf>
- Nikolaidis, A. C. (2021). A Third Conception of Epistemic Injustice. *Studies in Philosophy and Education*, 40(4), 381–398.  
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s11217-021-09760-1>
- O'Hanlon, R. (1985). *Caste, Conflict, and Ideology: Mahatma Jotirao Phule and low caste protest in nineteenth-century western India*. Cambridge University Press.
- Omvedt, G. (1976). *Cultural Revolt in a Colonial Society*. Scientific Socialist Education Trust.
- Out-of-School Children in the Context of School Education in India (2023) | Education for All in India*. (2023, June 12).  
<https://educationforallinindia.com/addressing-out-of-school-children-india/>
- Paik, S. (2009). *Chhadi Lage Chham Chham, Vidya Yeyi Gham Gham* (The Harder the Stick Beats, the Faster the Flow of Knowledge): Dalit Women's Struggle for Education. *Indian Journal of Gender Studies*, 16(2), 175–204.  
<https://doi.org/10.1177/097152150901600202>
- Paraskeva, J. M. (Ed.). (2023). *Critical Perspectives on the Denial of Caste in Educational Debate: Towards a Non-derivative Curriculum Reason* (1st ed.). Routledge.  
<https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003155065>

- Radhika, R. (2023, July 24). *Only two SC, ST Vice Chancellors among 45 central universities in India: Education Ministry*. Careers360.  
<https://news.careers360.com/education-ministry-data-two-vc-sc-st-obc-recruitment-teaching-post-vacancy-45-central-university>
- Rao, P. V. (2020). Imperial Roots of Nationalist Education Model in India 1880-1947. In Caruso, M. & Maul, D. (Ed.). (2020). *Decolonization(s) and Education: New Politics and New Men*. Peter Lang.
- Rawal, S., & Kingdon, G. (2010). Akin to my Teacher: Does Caste, Religious or Gender Distance between Student and Teacher Matter? Some Evidence from India. *DoQSS Working Paper No. 10-18*.
- Rawat, R., Tirkey, N. N., & Ekka, K. T. (2024). Untouchability in India: Subaltern Questions. *Indian Journal of Population and Development*, 4(1), 47–60.
- Sadgopal, A. (2019). Nai Taleem: Gandhi's Challenge to Hegemony. *Social Scientist*, 47(5/6), 9–30.  
<https://www.jstor.org/stable/26786185>
- Sangole, M. (2018). Inequalities in Higher Education: Narrations of Dalit students in Mumbai. *Ideas, Peoples and Inclusive Education in India*. National Coalition for Education, India.  
<http://nceindia.org.in/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/2018-Ideas-Peoples-and-Inclusive-Education-in-India.pdf>
- Stalin, K. (2019). *India Untouched: Stories of a People Apart*.  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fvke6ycgkL4>
- Stroud, S. (2023). *The Evolution of Pragmatism in India: Ambedkar, Dewey, and the Rhetoric of Reconstruction*. The University of Chicago Press.  
<https://doi.org/10.7208/chicago/9780226823898.001.0001>
- Sukumar, N. (2023). *Caste Discrimination and Exclusion in Indian Universities: A Critical Reflection*. Routledge NY.  
<https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003095293>
- Tharu, S. & Lalitha. K. (Ed). (2006). *Women writing in India: Vol I 600 B.C. the Early Twentieth Century*. Delhi [U.A.] Oxford Univ. Press.
- Thorat, S. (2002). Oppression and Denial: Dalit Discrimination in the 1990s. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 37(6), 572–578.  
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/4411720>
- Thorat, A., & Joshi, O. (2020). The Continuing Practice of Untouchability in India. *Economic & Political Weekly*, 55 (2), 36–45.  
<https://www.epw.in/journal/2020/2/special-articles/continuing-practice-untouchability-india.html>
- Tschurenev, J., & Mhaskar, S. (2023). “Wake up for education”: Colonialism, social transformation, and the beginnings of the anti-caste movement in India. *Paedagogica Historica*, 59(4), 630–648.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/00309230.2021.1920986>

Wankhede, H. (2023). Does EWS Reservation Redraft the Principles of Social Justice? *Economic and Political Weekly*, 58(8).

<https://www.epw.in/journal/2023/8/commentary/does-ews-reservation-redraft-principles-social.html>

Zelliot, E. (1970). Mahar and Non-Brahman Movements in Maharashtra. *The Indian Economic & Social History Review*, 7(3), 397–415.

<https://doi.org/10.1177/001946467000700304>

## Recommended Citation

Sphoorti (2025). An Analysis of Caste-based Discrimination in Educational Settings in India: Bridging the Theory and Narratives. *On Education. Journal for Research and Debate*, 8(21).

[https://doi.org/10.17899/on\\_ed.2025.21.5](https://doi.org/10.17899/on_ed.2025.21.5)

Do you want to comment on this article? Please send your reply to [editors@oneducation.net](mailto:editors@oneducation.net). Replies will be processed like invited contributions. This means they will be assessed according to standard criteria of quality, relevance, and civility. Please make sure to follow editorial policies and formatting [guidelines](#).

### Sphoorti

Sphoorti is a Senior Research Fellow at the Zakir Husain Centre for Educational Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, India. Her research focuses on the history and philosophy of education. A trained teacher and teacher educator specializing in science education, she was awarded the Academic Accelerator Fellowship by SCRIPTS, Freie Universität Berlin, for the 2023–2024 academic year.

1. The above quote is an excerpt from the first issue of the fortnightly newspaper Mooknayak (Leader of the Voiceless) started by Ambedkar in the year 1920 as reprinted in <https://www.thehindu.com/todays-paper/tp-features/tp-sundaymagazine/in-a-tower-without-a-staircase/article30717319.ece>
2. <https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/editorial/the-failure-of-hope-the-hindu-editorial-on-the-casteist-attack-in-nanguneri-tamil-nadu/article67215897.ece>
3. This question is often raised in the classes of Prof. Vivek Kumar whenever he teaches regarding the Sociology of Subalterns.