

# Facing Caste : Engaging with Self & Texts - Workshop report

May 25, 26, 27 - 2023



Facilitators: Nidhin Donald and Asha Singh

## **Executive Summary**

The Facing Caste : Engaging with texts & self workshop emerged out of findings realised in the [Facing Caste : Engaging with the Privileged A Research Study](#) undertaken by Sujata Noronha & Beena Choksi under the Transforming Education for Sustainable Futures grant, India ( 2022) .

The objective of hosting a workshop was to continue to engage in open conversations around caste that would enable practitioners to recognise and critically appraise caste and alleged castelessness . It was planned as a space that would enable participants to understand ascriptive identities together with regional differences that frame caste as lived experiences. These engagements we believe will enable us to strengthen our understanding about facing caste and move towards a more conscious attempt at a just society.

The workshop consisted of a small representative group of civil society persons who through readings, films, story and conversations led and held by Nidhin Donald and Asha Singh, were able to learn more about anti caste movements especially in terms of the role of the teacher, the transnational nature of caste , the concurrence between caste and class and how caste plays out in schools and society. The time spent in this discourse together enabled each participant to reflect on their own caste realities and listen to distinct and shared responses from each other.

## Facilitator Biographies

Nidhin Donald: Nidhin Donald is currently a postdoctoral fellow at IIT Bombay. He completed his doctoral studies from Jawaharlal Nehru University, Delhi. He has worked as a researcher with National Campaign for Dalit Human Rights, Delhi and Savitribai Phule Pune University. His research interests include family, caste, state categories, Indian Christianity and visual sociology.

Asha Singh: Dr. Asha Singh is an Assistant Professor in Gender Studies with the Centre for Studies in Social Sciences, Calcutta (CSSSC). Prior to her academic career, she was a journalist in Hindi newspapers of Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra. Her PhD is from Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai. Her doctoral work focuses on the intersections of gender, caste and migration in Bhojpuri folk songs. She also has written on the OBC women's question.

## Participant Biographies

**Vinatha Viswanathan:** Vinatha works full-time at the Eklavya Foundation in Bhopal. She is the head editor of the organization, which publishes children's books. She is interested in how caste is discussed in publishable material. Her most recent degree is an M.S. She enjoys politics, reading, and engaging in social issues.

**P. Anuradha:** Anuradha works as a program mentor in Hasirulada in Hyderabad, as well as assisting in part-time consultancy work for Bookworm Library in Goa. She is interested in how to address caste in Library settings, and to be more confident in this topic for her writings in the future. She has received an M.A in education as well as in Sociology. She enjoys reading, working on social issues, and traveling.

**Ishita Biswas:** Ishita is a graphic designer and visualizer at the Eklavya Foundation in Delhi. She wants to learn about caste through history and see how it relates to the way caste is described in visual art today. She hopes this workshop will help her better understand how to visually represent caste in the children's novels she illustrates for. She has received her MA in visual art and enjoys working on social issues and traveling.

**Mangala Honawar:** Mangala is a grant-writer at the Mariwala Health Initiative in Mumbai, in the role of lead grant writer. She wants to attend this workshop to better assist organizations that have been discriminated against due to caste in her career. She enjoys working on social issues and music, and has her PhD in social work.

**Priti Sridhar:** Priti is the CEO of Mariwala Health Initiative in Mumbai. She finds it difficult to talk about caste with those in the upper caste, and wants to take this workshop to better understand how to discuss caste with those from privileged backgrounds. She has her PG diploma in counseling and enjoys working on social issues.

**Chatura Rao:** Chatura is a children's author and part-time teacher at the Srishti Institute of Art, Design and Technology in Bangalore. She enjoys politics and reading, and holds an MA in Design in Education. She wants to take this course to improve in her writing about caste in children's identities.

**Madina Bi Maqbool:** Madina works part-time at Parcham as a football coach in Mumbra, using football as a way to ease tensions between Hindu and Muslim girls. She is pursuing a BA in Political Science and is interested in better understanding caste from experts Nidhin and Asha. Being a Muslim in India, she has experienced caste and wants to relearn things, and build friendship among all of the community girls that she works with, regardless of religion or caste.

**Neeraj Naidu:** Neeraj is a library educator at Bookworm Library in Goa. He has his certification in Bookworms Library Educator Course. He is interested in understanding caste inside and out, and wants to learn from scholars because he hasn't taken many humanities courses. In the future, he hopes to walk in the path of anti-caste. He enjoys politics and reading.

**Brajesh Verma:** Brajesh is a full time teacher in Bhopal, and he has his Bachelors degree in education. He wants to take this course because he works with children in DNT tribes, and wants to understand how to better help them through anti-caste practices. He wants to use the knowledge from this workshop to do new workshops with the children he works with going forward. He enjoys politics, reading and working on social issues.

**Lata Sangade:** Lata is a full time theater and music teacher in Bhopal for Muskan, an NGO school. She has her bachelor's degree in music. She hopes to take this class to better understand how caste affects the children that she teaches. She enjoys politics, working on social issues, and traveling.

**Priya Naik:** Priya is in the position of Lead Operations at Bookworm Library in Goa. She has her masters degree in sociology and enjoys working on social issues. She wanted to take this course to learn more about how caste exists in various texts that are engaged throughout the workshop. With that, she hopes to change her perspective on caste and have a more holistic view of it.

## May 25 - On Education and Caste

### Articles:

- "For more than two months, Reddy's in Telangana Village boycott Dalits" by Balakrishna Ganeshan ([www.thenewsminute.com](http://www.thenewsminute.com) )
- "Hatred in the Belly: Politics behind Dr. Ambedkar's Writings" by the Ambedkar Age Collective (The Shared Mirror Publication)
- "Cow, Backwardness and 'Bahujan' Women" by Asha Singh
- "Story of Chuni Kotal" by Mahasveta Devi (Economic and Political Weekly)
- "Rajani's suicide" (Pages 572-574, passage from "No Alphabet in Sight: New Dalit Writing from South India" by Susie J Tharu)
- "The impossibility of being Sunil Yadav" by Vinay Shende, professor at Tata Institute of Social Sciences
- "Can't teach students about Ambedkar's life?" by Gokul Vannan ([www.newindianexpress.com](http://www.newindianexpress.com) )
- "Why it is important to teach children about caste in schools" by Aishwarya Mahesh
- Religion as 'unsettled' by Nidhin Donald (Prabuddha Journal of Social Inequality)

### Introductions (10 AM - 11 AM)

- Everyone said their name, age, experiences
- We agreed to speak in our native languages
- Nidhin and Asha introduced themselves first, and told everyone that they will be leading the workshop
- Participants include a health worker, a football coach, an NGO worker that works with denotified tribal communities, a publisher, a librarian, a writer, a library administrator, a visual artist, and a grant writer for mental health.
- Highlights
  - "I've been miseducated" on caste, and history - after all, the people who write the textbooks are the ones that want to sculpt understanding to their interests.

- "Children drop out of school as early as age 10 because they are treated so badly for their caste"
- "Being caste blind is a privilege only accessible to the upper caste"

#### Presentation (11 AM - 12:30 PM)

- Objective understandings of the next three days
  - Caste is a product of human enterprise
  - Disturb basic assumptions about caste
  - Underline the need to historicize caste and people, and the struggles against this
  - Reflect on the ways to resist caste in everyday life
- We discussed different castes, this was meant to create confusion and unsettle the notions we hold that caste is a system easily understood.
- Jati, Varna and Caste system are all ways of separating people - but we discussed how we equate what we know about caste to textbooks and how we conflate one word for another but they are not the same.
- Census in the late 19th/early 20th century is what established the fourfold system - Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaishya, and Shudra (with Dalit not even a part of this list)
  - The British borrowed the caste system from the Brahmins to hold power, the upper caste and priestly caste became their partners to make sense of the caste system and use it for administrative and control purposes.
  - Before the British, there were different systems in different parts of India - Bengal, central, Madras, North West Province were just a few highlighted. Nidhin clarifies this by saying, "caste emerged in the Late 19th and Early 20th century to make sense of pre-existing categories."
  - Caste itself is a product of the modern state, and comes from a Portuguese word, 'casta' meaning 'lineage' and was used as a social and racial identifier.
- We discussed endogamy, how marriage was used as a tool to maintain caste lines and at times rise above caste.
- There exists greater diversity of opportunity in what you can do and how you can live as your caste status increases.
- People mobilized around the census, because it highlighted everyone's individual caste and disrupted the neat categories of the varna system. However with the domination of the varna system in everyday discourse, the census may also return to the varna system in the present day enumeration.
- Today, tribes are being pushed into Hinduism, and put in lower castes within Hinduism due to governmental categories and political categories that are

emerging. The Rajbansi community of West Bengal were shared as an example of a tribe with caste characteristics

- And the caste system is still very much relevant - we discussed a quote from the Kerala High Court judge who said that Brahmins are twice born, have clean habits, are lofty thinkers with sterling character.
- We seem to be confident about caste because we associate certain qualities with caste. We however need to fight culturalization of caste and recognise that caste is an ascriptive category and needs examining

#### Reflection (1 PM)

- Writing on the background of our last names



#### Sharing (1:15 PM)

- We discussed our last names and what we journaled about
- People from wide variety of castes and last names
- Both last name and fathers name are expected in Maharashtra
- One person had no surname
- Surnames get confusing because as we see in the caste surnames shared, caste names travel
- It bothers us when we don't have power to control our names
  - Many people wanted different names because of the connotation of their last name

#### Presentation (2 PM)

- We did a scavenger hunt to better understand the ways that caste influences society, all given different articles
- I read an article about the way that wristbands in school hurt people from having self-esteem and succeeding in life. Also I read an article about a



scientist who was bullied for his last name, having dark skin, being effeminate and being a Dalit. Now he has become a scientist

#### Lunch Break / Conversation (2:30 PM)



#### Presentation - Caste Distinctions in the Indian Government (4:30 PM)

- There are caste distinctions in the Indian Government National lists and State lists.
  - Scheduled Caste (SC) - A, B, C, D . Untouchability is more or less the sure test for this category. Scheduled Caste is an Indian category.
  - Scheduled Tribes (ST) - so-called "primitive" tribes
  - Other Backward Classes (OBC)
    - OBC exists between Scheduled Caste and Upper Caste
    - OBC includes orphans and transgender people
  - Most Backward Classes (MBC)
  - Economically Weaker Section (EWC)
- We appear to not have any struggle with understanding 'untouchables'. Our reading of this is that many occupations are unclean, so much so where you use different furniture, eat different foods on different utensils than people of other castes
- Only Buddhists, Hindu's and Sikh's can be SC, Christians and Muslims are excluded.
- To be considered scheduled tribes, remoteness and general socioeconomic ways of being are the indicators
- There are ST and SC seats reserved in Parliament and House.
  - Reservations are only meant for the public sector, they were created to break the hegemony and dominance of the upper caste in power. This has succeeded to a certain extent
- Identifications of the untouchables:
  - Denied the supremacy of the Brahmins

- Did not receive the mantra from Brahmin or other recognized Hindu Guru
- Denied the authority of the vedas.
- They can identify caste through social, educational and economic factors: child marriage, source of drinking water, literacy, etc
- The state must pass a resolution accepting a certain group into the SC/ST list
- Myth that there is an expiry on caste reservation was clarified. Only political reservations had a 10 year expiry as recommended by the Mandal Commission.

5:45 PM - Speaker Change to Asha

- OBC is a social construct, and when it was created it determined the job that you do
  - Caste status decides the jobs/opportunities that open up. British choose who the Shudra is so they can negotiate with the public sector
- Clearly, the British mobilized the top against everyone else, this is happening in the 20th century, they had the upper caste communicate with the lower castes.
- There was a demand to give space to non-Brahmins, that non-Brahmins must have education, speak English, and have representation. Brahmins gave the British a dissent note so they didn't give non-Brahmins proportionate representation, and they gave a merit argument against non-Brahmins.
- Colonials who were ruling wanted social order but they did this by increasing inequality.
- Reservation in government should not be taken for granted, it is limited in quantity and not the norm.
- The new vision was equality for all, that would make reservation the exception.
- A 1950's report identified those who are backward classes and said there should be new methods to identify backward classes and bring them to light.
  - The new method was to look for a solution to help these people so they mobilize a negotiation, BUT the lower castes weren't to remember this as negative history
- Now, two more classes were created. The public sector became smaller and privatization became rampant. Socialization of Dalit's wasn't big, pre-freedom gender inequality continues to exist.
- Switched to discuss how you must be in good standing with your family to get a caste certificate, discussions will start on these new categories

- Women in this time now asked - can they marry outside of the community, will they get great jobs, will they escape domesticity?
- Critical category of knowledge is that many people are discussing education, this discourse of education is important here.
- Now - good English is needed to get a job, people that never used to interact are now interacting with each other (without dying) and understanding each other for the first time - this is through reservation.
- New negotiations came about, strengthening public institutions.
- Gendering of backwardness was the discourse enabled by Asha

## May 26 - Resisting Caste

### Articles:

- "Reservations: Experience as Framework of Debate" by Kancha Ilaiah (Economic and Political Weekly)
- "Challenging the Ashrafs: The Politics of Pasmada Muslim Muhaz" by Arshad Alam (Cornell University library)
- "Punjab Ad Dharm Movement: Which turned Untouchables into proud Mulnivasis" by Ronki Ram ([www.forwardpress.in](http://www.forwardpress.in) )
- "Trivangi Singh and JNP Mehta" by Premkumar Mani ([www.forwardpress.in](http://www.forwardpress.in) )
- "Rohidas the Shoemaker" (pages 245-248) and "Ravidas in the contemporary world" (pages 249-256) all from "Untouchable Saints: An Indian Phenomenon" by Eleanor Zelliot and Rohini Mokashi Punekar
- "100 years on, remembering Vaikom Satyagraha as an anti-caste civil rights movement" by Cris and Binu Karunakaran ([www.thenewsminute.com](http://www.thenewsminute.com) )

Article Discussion (10 AM)



- A participant discussed how wristbands are used to socialize children in the caste system. Many children are wearing wristbands voluntarily because it shows their social power. Justification is used that wristbands are a part of Hindu culture.
- Mini discussion on how school is a way for kids to get out of the system but children still live at home - lower caste children still do domestic work, are oppressed based on caste, cannot attack the Brahmins and must watch what they say
- Schools taught B. R. Ambedkar in a certain way, overall selection of people in textbooks aligned with certain pedagogies (pedagogies of the upper caste)
- Entering the education system is the beginning of the fight but you must keep going - get a job, maintain it, etc.
- People deal with caste by seeing in black and white. A woman from lower tribe is considered an animal, she tries to work but is really bad, because of the horrible conditions she complains but they don't listen (how can this be okay).
- New languages are now included in education.
- Dalit community has a 15th century Saint who shares food with everyone. This saint looks towards a world where everything is equal, but even to this day the upper castes are frightened to make a temple for this peaceful saint.
- People killing Dalits are neighbors, those in the same economic classes but they use this as their way of being slightly better through caste
  - In the presence of any kind of assertions from the lower caste, violence and atrocities emerge. Often this violence...Violence is designated to economically disadvantaged members of higher caste

## Presentation (12 PM)



- Caste is a new category which conceptualizes pre existing systems of hierarchy
- Caste-based categories need to be viewed in light of their specific histories
- Last Caste census we have access to is from 1931. In 1941 the caste census was truncated due to W/W1. So we can only return to this data for now
- In the absence of fresh data we go back to our myths.
- Literacy rates in the 1900s show significant differences between that of women and that of men as well as between castes.
  - Education as a system of economic redistribution must make sure that both girls and boys are uplifted in these processes
- Upper caste women are more uplifted than lower caste men.

- Onnupara Pannickar learned that untouchable children entered schools, he fainted, became paralyzed, and died.
  - How ingrained is the caste system in the beings of those in the upper caste?
- Schools are ways for upper castes to reproduce the status quo, but letting others in allows for everyone to have these opportunities.
- Dalit love is the idea that Dalits are capable of loving more than others and Dalit Love is what enabled them to survive despite such oppression
  - Similar to love of African slaves in the America's in 18th century
- Education is vital need to fight notions of inescapable fate and ascriptions of caste and religion - BR Ambedkar
- The British only educated those of higher caste, because they were "easiest to work with", under the assumption that upper caste people would educate the rest of the population, which they didn't.
- The British played into the desires of the Hindu Elite rather than educating the masses.
- "Providing education to the masses would create unnecessary excitement" - but really what must happen is doing more than just allowing untouchables into education, and also making them powerful.
- Non-veg often means lower caste (but then lower castes go veg to imitate those of upper castes)
- In the 20th century, scholarships existed to help brahmins, but none existed to help those of lower castes.
- Christian missionaries were also a big influence on who should be educated

Documentary Screening - *In A Shadowless Town* by Gouri Patwardhan (4:30 PM)

- The documentary focused on how Pune has a stamp of Brahmanism, one example of this is in its heritage walk
- They don't mention Jyotirao Phule even though he is so relevant in the history of the city. This is because the Brahmins were upset with him. He was a lower-caste man, and an activist. He made a school for untouchables and girls, not to make them become wives and physical laborers but to give them a completely different world.
- And also, you never find details about Phule's wife, or colleague Fatima Sheikh
- Fatima Sheikh is the first Muslim woman teacher, but you find practically nothing about her (this is clear [here](#))
- Only people from scheduled castes know about who Phule is.
- "Unless you are rich or come from a family that is highly educated, formal education in India is useless"

- "Economic differences alone aren't the basis of inequality, when men are born to hate each other there are also these more systemic issues."

#### Discussion (6 PM)

- The reason that upper caste people still have this hold in Pune is because upper caste narratives have been perpetrated in upper caste regions of Pune continuously
- Politics of remembering - the upper caste using their power and influence to systemically erase the memory of lower-caste visionaries to perpetuate the myth of the lower caste as inferior.
- Young researchers are trying to reconstruct the story of Phule and others but are struggling, there is a complete lack of documentation. In a city that isn't ready to understand its history this is made even more difficult
  - This changed in the 1990's because of SC/ST/OBC Act, and more policies pushing for affirmative action
  - Dalit movements grew significantly in the 1990's
- The moment when they researchers find glass with a photograph of Phule, they say they found their father - no upper caste motive is of such emotion
  - The possible reason for such emotion behind this subject is because Dalits are trying to build a political community behind this emotion that has built up over so many years
  - But there is also the argument of Dalit Love, which is more likely.
    - Nidhin articulated this theory as essentializing, and therefore problematic
- By finally finding a photograph of Mahatma Phule, you can much more effectively understand the idea of the impacts he made on you
- When Non-Dalits find the Dalit movement appealing, it is much more difficult for the elites to maintain power. This is because they can't maintain power if they are a minority
- Politics is about convincing the other. We build our politics based on coming to understand the opposing forces that make up society
- Dalit movement says no to same sex marriage on the basis of Phule saying families should be for procreation - he actually adopted a child and the institution of marriage was very different then. So we cannot compare (just like we cannot say the bible says no to same sex marriage)

## May 27 - Caste and Everyday Life

### Articles

- "At Uttarakhand School, Students Refuse to Eat Midday Meals Cooked by Dalit Woman" by Yogesh Kumar ([www.thewire.in](http://www.thewire.in) )
- "Why is removing meat and eggs from school midday meals casteist? We ask an expert" by Rohitha Naraharisetty ([www.theswaddle.com](http://www.theswaddle.com) )
- "Not a Single Dalit in 60% of Kolkata's Neighbourhoods. How caste divides Indian Cities" by Dilip Mandal ([www.theprint.in](http://www.theprint.in) )
- "The Hidden Politics of Vegetarianism" by Hugo Gorringe (Economic and Political Weekly)
- "No First Use Nuclear Policy" by Ali Ahmed (Economic and Political Weekly)
- "The 'Non-Brahmin' Cook from Pune and the Myth of the 'Caste-less' Middle Class" by Vidula Sonagra (Economic and Political Weekly)
- "The English Language and Denationalization" by Amita Kanekar (Al-Zulajj Collective)
- "Medium of Instruction in Goan Schools: Mother Tongue or Multilingualism?" by Ferrao, Fernandes, et. al. ([www.roundtable.co.in](http://www.roundtable.co.in) )
- "Family Ties and Entanglements of Caste" by Joseph Berger ([www.nytimes.com](http://www.nytimes.com) )

### Article Discussion (10 AM)



- One article - A cook was appointed to make midday meals in government school, she cooked meals for kids and initially they all ate her meals. However, when the parents of the children learned that she was a Dalit



woman, parents complained about her identity. She (the cook) filed a complaint and was allowed to keep her job.

- The cook says "I have been asked to cook for those willing to eat"
- Many schools in India are becoming Veg - at the expense of the health of the children that eat
- You must be affluent to have a diverse and healthy veg diet, but many kids that are now forced to turn veg for lunch don't have adequate nutrition when they take away meat
- Some foods (Sativik foods) are fed to children so that they remain "calm"
- Strictly vegetarian atmosphere - caste by another name. Food is a proxy for caste
- There is a stigma around eating meat, and often there is a shame to those who eat meat.
- There was also an article about a scientist who fired her cook and reported her to the police when she realized she was Dalit.
  - The fundamental idea here is "if you lie about your caste you are cheating me"
  - But does freedom of religion outweigh basic human rights?
- Discussion of language - people are learning English and now even Hollywood English
  - The idea of English in primary school emerged post-independence
  - Multilingualism is the only solution but often at the expense of the other 1600 languages spoken throughout India
- Counterpoint: Markers such as job, education and wealth are more important than Caste today
- The 'ghetto' operates as a collective of informal workers, where you can get lower-cost labor than through firms. Cheaper labor helps create greater wealth for the capitalists
  - This is at the cost of many artisanal groups living in Muslim slums in deplorable conditions
- Now, Candolim is being split into wards based on last name (which is caste by another name)

Reading of Short Story - *Tetari Dadi Is A Liar* (11:30 AM)



- *Tetari Dadi Is A Liar* by Asha:
  - There is a train station filled with women ages 13-14 who are being taken by future husbands and future husbands- male family members back to their home community to get married. All of these women are blindfolded
  - In transit, the main character is a low caste woman. She gets accidentally switched with another woman in the station and brought to a different community
  - She is married without much thought, and only a few years later do they realize they got the wrong girl for the marriage - BUT the husband's family thinks she is upper caste, so there is no problem in keeping her here.
  - 60 years later, the community finds out she is of a lower caste than their caste, and the family gets angry at her. "Why didn't you tell us you were lower caste?" they demand.
  - They return her to her village where no one recognises her until a childhood playmate who is upper caste recalls her.
  - Throughout the whole play, the role of her husband is intriguing and the address tattooed on her hand.

#### Reflection on Play (1 PM)

- In Kerala, they hire family members to mourn because children have left Kerala
- Caste exposure only matters once it has become public - this is one of the main ideas in the play read by Asha. When it is private, those expectations or barriers break apart

- It is easy for families to accept men back into the family, but much more difficult for families to accept women back into the family

### Writing Biographies (3:30 PM)

Objective: Write about the life of someone you know that is characterized by caste

- We are given time to write a biography about a person close to us that was greatly impacted by caste
- "Writing biographies allows Dalit women to record history"
- Education is a site of contestation, which can rupture and consolidate caste.
- Story is told where a lower caste man marries a higher caste woman. So the woman's family kills the husband and tries to kill their daughter but she escapes
  - What does this say about family? What does this say about caste?
- I wrote the sociological biography of friends' Mom Sara Taqi Ahmed - who is upper caste
  - Her parents were born in India and moved before she was born, they faced racism and difficulties in assimilating
  - She was raised in an affluent area with a high concentration of immigrants - Chinese-Americans, (upper caste) Indian Americans, Japanese Americans, etc. She had a "typical American childhood" despite the struggles her parents endured
  - Today, lower caste people are for the first time moving to areas of Michigan, USA with a high Indian population. The Troy, Michigan school system is best in the state, but Sara decides to move her daughter to a worse and much more costly private school because she doesn't want her daughter associating with lower caste people
    - Believes they have bad manners
    - Doesn't want her daughter to get "polluted" by exposure to them
  - Very sad story, just one of many examples where caste has crossed border lines and exists far past India.

### Sharing Biographies (4:30 PM)

- I won't share specific stories to respect privacy
- All of the stories shared show how caste is problematic (both upper and lower caste)
- Caste is NOT just a Dalit problem.

- Intercaste marriage is the site of contestation because it reproduces the idea of caste.
- Intercaste marriage is life changing but often leads to boycott
- Caste operates significantly with non-Hindu's (Muslims, Christians, etc.)
- Internal hierarchies also exist within caste

## Post-Workshop Feedback

### Major Takeaways

- A better understanding of how the government, pre- and post-independence has seen/sees the caste system
- The rich history of caste struggles by the lower castes
- The changing status of a caste from state to state, caste to caste
- The need to keep talking about caste, everywhere
- Higher education is a key to diminishing caste-based discrimination
- Readings, discussions on policy level, and and numerical data highlighted the prevalence of caste
- The relationship between caste-based issues in different religions and even places
- The facilitator's had a deep understanding of caste, and a great capacity to hold the planned tasks. They had a diverse and well-thought out pedagogy, and used resources with a diverse range of pedagogies.
- Strong sense of safe space created through facilitators and participants.
- Any social discourse can be most relevant when it is open to the perspectives of different sections of the society.

## Biggest Surprises

- The unreliability of historical texts to help us understand the history of caste
- That we don't have a recent caste census
- That a caste can change category from state to state
- The turnout of the workshop (in numbers - I thought there would be a few more people)
- To know that caste-based reservation was proposed before Independence as a way to make a more just and meritorious society, so different from the charity perspective post Independence, was a real surprise. It has changed my perspective on how to work on projects involving social justice.
- Significant use of examples and data evidence throughout the workshop
- Balancing the team without making everybody engage personally
- Discussion in general
- How little mature educators know about caste and yet how easily terminology is used by all of us to describe and understand this system.
- How difficult it is to articulate what we sense and practice from, but cannot explain.
- The complexity of defining caste and its layered realities.

## Ways to Improve, Moving Forward

- Having the readings and schedule shared many days before the workshop could lead to more richness to the responses.
- More readings for participants
- Timing of the workshop could be better to conduct when the weather is more conducive.
- Creating a space for participants to share their work in this area could be really good. Eg. Vinatha has worked with these themes in publishing, Brajesh has worked with caste in his work in Muskaan, Anuradha with Hasirudala libraries and more I think, etc. I would have loved to hear more about their engagement with caste in their own work contexts.
- Having more caste diverse participants
- Engaging with more frequent discussions, readings and building the team with experienced people in the field going forward
- Added resource persons in the workshops from different backgrounds other than just academia.

- "I think it was all perfect."

## **Did you Enjoy the Personal Aspects?**

- "Yes, the writing and sharing sessions anchored theoretical discussions and allowed spaces for support and healing. All of the personal articulation sessions were good, and led to reflection. This reflection also happened through the film, story and readings. More than this might not work in an intensive, three-day workshop, as it could get too heavy or distressing for some participants."
- "Yes I definitely enjoyed the more personal aspects most importantly because it felt therapeutic. And I believe in the personal-political model. Any social discourse needs to get personal, because just looking from the outside keeps the discourse at surface level and generates polarity amongst people."
- "I loved the personal and individualized tasks. But I also liked how there was time built in to share and to listen. This highlights the safe and non judgemental space created by the facilitators"
- "Yes I liked the personal aspects, it took me to see the real things in another context, and also it made the group begin to think about caste issues from their own experiences"
- "Yes, I think they were very instructive. Going forward it might be nice to have more of variety of activities, perhaps"

## Testimonials

- "The Facing Caste Workshop created a space to discuss, reflect, and learn about living in a caste-society such as our's, and for touching upon matters that are overwhelmingly part of our lived experience yet little discussed. The history and perspective this Workshop offered, in a sensitive and supportive environment, was invaluable for me as a researcher, educator and author. I'm truly grateful to Nidhin, Asha and to the Bookworm team and hope to be invited to attend Facing Caste Version 2.0, if there ever is one!" - **Chatura Rao**
- "The Facing Caste Workshop conducted by Bookworm Goa was a therapeutic and engaging experience. The discourse was in-depth and much needed in today's time of toxic polarization and heightened political extremism. The method of getting into personal narratives was very refreshing." -**Ishita Biswas**

