

Facing Caste: Engaging with the Privileged

Contemporary Education Dialogue
1–17

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DOI: [10.1177/09731849231223421](https://doi.org/10.1177/09731849231223421)
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Sujata Noronha¹  and Beena Choksi² 

Abstract

The structural inequalities perpetuated by the caste system are a grave challenge to creating a just society. The education system pays short shrift to this topic and caste discrimination is spoken about without holding caste privilege accountable. Historically, social justice is a core mission of libraries. This project worked closely with a selective sample of seven library educators—most with caste privilege—to (a) examine their knowledge, attitudes and practices on caste issues through reading caste literature, reflective discussions and introspective journaling and (b) understand their preparedness to engage in discussions on caste with children from privileged backgrounds. Children’s responses to caste-themed stories and library activities showed a readiness to engage with the topic. This study found that a more robust pedagogy for the privileged is needed to face caste.

Keywords

Caste, privilege, education, library, India

¹Bookworm Trust, Panaji, Goa, India

²Independent Researcher, East Hampton, New York, United States

Corresponding author:

Sujata Noronha, Bookworm Trust, House No. 127, Mala, Fontainhas, Panaji, Goa 403001, India.

E-mail: sujata@bookwormgoa.in

Introduction

Whilst participating in this study,¹ a student writes in a response journal after reading Rohit Vemula's suicide note: 'Nowhere does he explain/talk about how he was discriminated against. If there was no allusions to caste discrimination in his letter, why did it gain such uproar as a Dalit student's suicide? Why was it tied to caste?'

'The caste system still exists but it now favours the lower caste'. A 12-year-old student's comment after listening to a children's story, Bhimrao Ambedkar: *The Boy Who Asked Why?*

Although 5 years apart in age, the responses of both children reveal the guise of a privileged stance on caste, the rigid system of social stratification that has been at the base of economic, social and cultural inequalities in India for more than 2,000 years (Ghose, 2013).

The caste system operates in every sphere of Indian society and is deeply institutionalised, whether it be in matrimony, food, domestic rituals, education, employment or governance. It is the upper castes who control most positions in political establishments, the judiciary, administrative services, media, sports, industry and the market (Wankhede, 2019). The dominant discourse among privileged caste groups, especially in urban areas, is that caste is a thing of the past. It is this section of society who, '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' (Deshpande, 2013, p. 32). In modern India, historical caste privilege has metamorphosed into merit, giving rise to a form of discrimination and exclusion that Subramanian (2019) labels as 'caste of merit'.

To speak up about any form of caste discrimination without holding caste privilege accountable is akin to taking two steps backwards for every step forward. The responsibility to face caste lies squarely on those with privileges; the 'studied silence' which is maintained on caste privilege needs to be shattered (Sukumar, 2023).

The Schooling of Caste

A textbook culture dominates school education in India and the trust reposed in them by students—and even teachers—is evident from the commonly heard refrain, 'but it's in the textbook'. Professor Krishna Kumar (1987) writes, 'The teacher is bound by the textbook since it is

prescribed, and not just recommended by state authorities' (p. 107). The National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) textbooks 'read by more than 5 crore students in 18 states around the country' are staggering in their reach (Chopra, 2023). Therefore, the implications of the 'rationalisation of textbooks'² carried out requires deliberation. In the most recent exercise carried out in 2021, content related to the caste system was reduced and, in some cases, even altogether dropped. The scrutiny of 21 history, political science and sociology textbooks for Classes 6–12, which had introduced content in 2007 to 'build a sense of a just society', removed examples of discrimination faced by lower castes and minorities (Chopra, 2022). Notable amongst the 'revised' textbooks is the sociology textbook of Class 12 from which 'some of the most crucial historical aspects of the anti-caste movement' have been removed (Shantha, 2022). In the last chapter 'Social Change and Development in India' in the Class 12 sociology textbook, there was a section on the 'upper caste response to increased visibility of Dalits and other backwards classes through social movements', including an excerpt from sociologist Satish Deshpande's book *Contemporary India: A Sociological View* on why earlier upper-caste generations did not think of caste as a living reality of modern India (Chopra, 2022). This content was particularly suitable for students with privileges to face caste and enter into anti-caste discourse. However, this section too was 'rationalised' from the NCERT textbook.

Gatade (2021) reports on the one-of-its-kind study of caste bias in regional textbooks, for which 10 literature and social science textbooks for Classes 4–8 in Odisha government schools were analysed. The findings revealed under-representation of Dalits in the texts and a complete absence of Dalit characters in the literature texts of Classes 4, 5, 6 and 8, which an editorial in *The Telegraph* (2021) describes as 'an institutionalised distortion of the facts of Indian social existence'.

The inclusion of historical facts about caste and literature about the oppressed has stoked controversy and at times been sacrificed on the altar of upper caste morality. Speaking from lived experience, Dalit author and activist Kancha Ilaiah (1996) writes, 'the textbook morality was different from our living morality' (p. 17). On the other hand, the questions raised by professor of education C. B. Sharma, when defending the removal of Mahasweta Devi's (2003) story Draupadi from the English syllabus, are indicative of the textbook morality that Kancha Ilaiah refers to: 'Do we prescribe things that say we are such a bad country, that we are such a bad people, that we are oppressors? Do we teach this?' (Pathak, 2021).

The examples of a rationalised curriculum cited above can be interpreted as the failure of the formal postcolonial curriculum to contest the colonial epistemic frame that favoured Brahmanical hegemony. This has ‘disallowed genuine engagement with questions of structural inequalities’ in this country’s caste-ridden society ‘and concerns of equality and social justice remained peripheral to the curricular discourse’ (Batra, 2021). What remains explicitly unaddressed is the role of the upper castes in perpetuating the oppressive social order. Until the upper castes are drawn into conversations to recognise and interrogate the position and privilege they hold in relation to the lower castes, the system will continue to be conveniently viewed by them as discrete caste blocks that function independent of one another or a matter of the past.

The National Curriculum Framework (2005) made an attempt, by way of content and pedagogy, to address the issue of caste. Kirasur (2021), however, is critical of the attempt and cites instances from the history and political science NCERT textbooks to claim that they ‘implicitly and explicitly’ uphold caste hierarchy. Mittal (2020) in her 2015–2016 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 from Class 9 to understand their opinion about caste-based discrimination revealed that 44.19% of the students denied its prevalence, and barely a quarter of the sample accepted that caste-discrimination still exists. This may be explained by ‘the persistent exclusion of the “experience of caste” and the lived realities of diversity and marginalisation ... from the Indian educational discourse that informs curriculum design and practice’ (Batra, 2021, p. 416)

Where else, then, can students be introduced to caste in ways that will engage their interest, provoke them to think critically and sensitise them towards social justice?

Deschooling Caste in the Library

When a participant of the Library Educators (LEs) Course³ expressed interest to explore 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’. The very concept of libraries is radical: publicly funded spaces that provide

access to information, resources and story without the expectation of a transaction. Historically, social justice is a core mission of libraries which is reflected in various aspects of library practice, usually starting with open access to a space and 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. Over the last decade, a small number of caste-themed fiction and non-fiction stories have trickled into the ecosystem of Indian children's literature in mainstream (English) publishing, making it possible for LEs to use these texts to think and talk about caste not abstractly but as a lived reality.

Despite narrow approaches to librarianship in India, there is a growing movement of children and school libraries that see the library as a radical space for dialogue and dissent. In teaching to transgress, bell hooks (1994) writes, 'What we all ideally share is the desire to learn – to receive actively knowledge that enhances our intellectual development and our capacity to live more fully in the world' (p. 40). This desire to learn and to share is the bedrock of the library. To know the 'world as it is', it requires us to recognise our conditions as well as those of others so that a process of social transformation may begin. The oft-repeated metaphor of libraries as windows and mirrors perhaps draws on this understanding.

Considering the control on and limitations of curricular material used in the classroom, there is no surprise that reproduction of stratified ways of being continue to dominate our lived realities. Yet, the possibility for transformation is alive as is evidenced from the small and big anti-caste movements all over the country despite the constraints from formal sites like schools and rigidly managed material like the textbooks.

Alongside the school and the community, we recognise the liberator force of the space of the library. This potential space is implicitly imagined to include an awareness of one's condition or the socialising of this awareness through the collection, activities and dialogue, political consciousness and critical thinking. In a library space for children, this may manifest as an open access, inclusive space, engagement with community members, power sharing to enable multiple voices and explicit messaging on social justice.

Project Design

Mitta (2023) writes, 'The world's largest democracy is still mired in caste, whatever its avatar and however much it is camouflaged' (p. 28).

It was the growing awareness of this camouflage and alleged sense of pervasive caste-lessness that compelled us to imagine a study on ‘facing caste: engaging with the privileged’.

Following were the research questions:

1. What is the knowledge, attitude, practices of LEs about caste issues?
2. How do LEs engage in discussions on caste and social justice with children from privileged backgrounds?
3. How do the participating children respond to the materials and discussions?

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

Sample

From 15 LEs who were approached to participate in the study, a sample of 10 LEs was selected purposively to include caste/class and geographic diversity. All 10 LEs were female: eight from privileged backgrounds, one from an economically disadvantaged background and one from a socially and economically disadvantaged background. Each one expressed interest 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 LEs, four were school LEs,⁴ four were associated with libraries set up in under-resourced communities, one ran a library for children in an upper-middle-class community and one held a library programme in a child welfare institution. Three of the ten LEs dropped out of the project: one in the first phase of the project due to a personal crisis and two in the second phase of the project on account of health reasons which made it difficult for them to cope with the rigour of the project. All three were from privileged backgrounds.

Data Collection

In the absence of contextually relevant tools to gather data that would address the three research questions, the investigators designed tools,

exercises and activities to collect qualitative data over a period of 9 months. The nature of data collected was reflective, reflexive and experiential.

Note of Interest

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

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 LEs discussed and exchanged ideas over an open learning resource platform with respect to each of the sub-themes.

Survey Forms

Two surveys were designed to gather baseline and endline data.

Survey One⁵ drew upon the KAP model and was designed as a 12-item survey to assess the caste-related knowledge, attitudes and practices of the LEs.

Survey Two was a response-form for a task designed to assess the preparedness (personal and pedagogical) of the LEs 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. 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/zoom call with select LEs. Each LE carried out the exercise at the field site that they are associated with, with one or more groups of children.

Journaling

The LEs were asked to express their feelings, observations, concerns, experiences and insights about caste through written and visual

journaling. The written journal contained textual responses triggered in the LEs by readings and group discussions, and the visual journal contained drawings and markings in response to prompts provided in the visual journaling workshop.

Collection of Caste-Themed Children's Literature

Online access was given to a collection of children's books for participants to read and use in their field exercise and field project.

Field Project Summary

A form was created to capture the LEs planning of a library unit,⁶ observations of children and reflection on their role as an LE.

During the course of the study, the gap in literature available for children to engage with caste explicitly became clear. It can be argued that in every story/book created by dominants tacitly embeds a casteist lifeworld. However, to face caste and engage with the privileged, we began to realise the need for texts with more explicit content. To understand the views of creators of children's content about caste in books, we administered a short survey to 46 of them.⁷

It is important for us to state that as the project unfolded, we, as investigators, grew increasingly conscious of the need for a deeper understanding about the lived experience of oppressed communities, all the while reflecting on and contrasting it with our caste-privileged lives. This led to holding two immersive, literary activities which were voluntary for the LEs: A reading circle to discuss *Coming out as Dalit: A Memoir* by Yashica Dutt (2019)⁸ and a writing workshop under the guidance of an experienced facilitator to respond to the Poems of Dalit saint-poet Chokhamela from a personal point of view.

Discussion on Findings

The findings will be discussed primarily with respect to data gathered from the seven LEs⁹ who were present for the entire duration of the project. Our analysis of data revealed two areas that were critical and challenging for LEs to face caste, and these have implications for engaging with privilege through educators.

The Push and Pull of Engaging with a Discourse on Caste

As discussed earlier, mainstream discourse on caste has miseducated more than educated, given that miseducation sustains ‘the active construction, maintenance, regulation and diffusion of ignorance’ (Angulo, 2016, p. 6). Starting with the note of intent written by the participants, it became evident that the last time most had engaged with the topic was about a decade ago, when it featured as a part of their college curriculum. LE5 admitted, ‘never was I compelled to look into my caste identity’ and LE10 that she had made no effort to find out more and engaged with the ‘entire narrative’. Journal entries, responses to items on Survey One and discussion on readings and interactions with resource persons around the four sub-themes revealed that grasping caste as a construct and social practice posed challenges for the participants. LE2’s journal entry read, ‘After reading the paper *Castes in India* by Dr. Ambedkar, listening to Professor Deshpande, and reading the posts in the discussion forum, I realise the complexity of the subject’. LE9 wrote, ‘the understanding of caste is limited to ‘reservation’ and experiences of disadvantaged communities. The way we look at caste is so distorted that there is so much of unlearning that is needed’.

Of the nine statements on the survey that addressed caste-related concepts, we expected two to leave no doubt for disagreement: Caste is an ascriptive identity and purity/pollution is an inherent feature of the caste system. Surprisingly, only 2/7 LEs were in full agreement about the ascriptive feature of the caste system; of the remaining, two framed their understanding of it as a social construct thereby justifying it as not being an ascriptive identity. The twin notion of purity/pollution, an inherent feature of the caste system, is the basis of most casteist atrocities, including the prevalence of manual scavenging. Yet, 2 out of 7 did not view it as such. The everyday casteist practices involving segregation of spaces and utensils that some had observed in their homes and acknowledged in the survey, are also based on the notion of purity/pollution. Moreover, in the very limited children’s literature on the theme of caste that the LEs are mostly familiar with, it is this feature of pollution/purity symbolised through smell and uncleanliness that becomes the pivot for the plot. This suggests that despite acts of caste-based discrimination and oppression being visible to the caste-privileged, they fail to question who is responsible for and who stands to benefit from upholding and perpetuating the inherently irrational notion of purity/pollution. There were shifts between baseline and endline responses to some survey items in both directions, across the LEs,

suggesting that more scholarly readings and discussions than what was possible during the project period are necessary for a firmer grasp on the conceptual complexities of caste, including naming and categories.

Interactions with Deshpande and V. Geetha enabled the LEs to face new as well as contemporary concepts and ideas related to caste. Deshpande's comments on the hypervisibilising of caste-based disadvantage or vulnerability vis-a-vis invisibilising caste-based privileges or advantage compelled the participants to turn their gaze inwards and re-examine their understanding of and relationship with caste. After discovering at this point in her life that *Shudras* are also *Savarna* and concurrently reading Deshpande's paper, LE4 wrote in her journal, 'the experiences of the Shudras can't be equated to that of Dalits ... I used to feel that I could empathise and "understand" the experiences because I thought I too belonged to an oppressed caste'. Thinking more about her caste location, she reached the conclusion, 'perhaps I could say that I belong to one of the backward castes with privileges akin to an upper caste'.

V. Geetha's point of view that childhoods where caste is a shaping influence and is linked to artisanal work, where labour and skill need to be valorised and respected, offered a perspective about caste that enables recognition and appreciation of diverse childhoods. Although there is not sufficient data to demonstrate that these perspectives will change the LEs discourse on caste with others, 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.

Engaging Students to Face Caste

The original design of the project required the LEs to carry out a field exercise of using a caste-themed story with a group of students (mostly from underprivileged backgrounds) at their site of work. Majority of the LEs said that they felt ambivalent or anxious when they read the task assigned to them, but, after carrying it out, some were surprised by how the students responded. LE9 reported that 'the group is ready to engage further with texts, which was my first apprehension'. LE5 wrote, 'I was really not expecting children to discuss about the different layers in which oppression and discrimination occurs'.

The responses of students from underprivileged backgrounds showed that they were able to discuss oppression which is a lived reality for them. On the other hand, our growing awareness to recognise our

positions of privilege and what that embodies led us as investigators to become more attentive to our appropriating and patronising ways. A conscious decision was therefore made by the investigators to switch the target group from students from underprivileged backgrounds to students from privileged backgrounds for the field project, and the rationale for it was discussed with each LE individually. Two LEs expressed strong discomfort about having to work with students with privilege, citing no prior experience. We speculate that responses such as these may have more to do with the discomfort of holding up the mirror of caste privilege to one's own kind having acknowledged one's personal casteist practices. All LEs had responded to the statement in Survey One about being aware of personal casteist practices either in the affirmative or as being unsure. LE4 had elaborated, '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 always believed that I was not'.

It is significant to note that participants alone were not uncomfortable working with students of privilege. Schools of privilege too were resistant to the project when approached. Finally, only six LEs¹⁰ engaged with students¹¹ who were privileged (as defined by their school type or socio-economic profile).

It is with remarkable ease that LEs speak of and use books on diverse themes that their educational experience opens out for them. Words like representation, inclusion, multicultural literature, diverse collections and critical literacy, slide easily off the privileged tongue. Yet, there was consternation about how to talk about caste to students with privilege. A virtual bookshelf provided access to a collection of about 40 children's books to select from. The three fiction stories that were the popular choice to use with the junior and middle school students were 'The Why Why Girl' by Mahashweta Devi (2003), illustrated by Kanak Sashi and published by Tulika; 'Bhimrao Ambedkar: The Boy Who Asked Why' by Sowmya Rajendran (2013), illustrated by Satwick Gade and published by Tulika and 'Clear Sky' by Ambai (1998). The intent was to provoke students to think and question, not to offer answers or solutions. Students received the stories with a natural curiosity, raising their own questions about caste. In the case of the junior students, some expressed confusion as to why hierarchies are present. This encouraged the beginning of critical thinking as students grappled with a reality, seen freshly. However, the junior most age group also had conceptual difficulties in separating class from caste, and it appears that larger narratives from discourse at home/school 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, homelessness and such. 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. Non-fiction and poetry worked well with senior school students. Across sites, the capacity of students to engage with questions¹² that often adults imagine are beyond their scope was demonstrated. The LEs too were taken by surprise by some of the uninhibited and critical responses of students. We concur with Guru (2023) who perceives storytelling as ‘fundamentally an ethical practice. Its ethical appeal to justice and equality still has a power to awaken a moral imagination and motivate people to look at their society’s bad practices more critically and ask how they can make society more decent’ (p. 9).

One or more library activities such as a book display for browsing and borrowing, an interactive library display which included artifacts and guided drawing were used to trigger further conversations that a text had opened up. An activity that was piloted with senior school students at both sites was the Privilege Game,¹³ designed in-house. 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/classes. The game enabled the naming of the issue of caste, a pivotal step in the facing caste journey.

Despite the tag of being ‘alternative’ schools, the topic of caste remained invisibilised and was explicitly opened up for the first time in two such schools which participated in the study. This became all the more apparent with the senior school students not knowing their caste locations, appearing to be acknowledging casteism for the first time, and in one case describing the topic as being ‘intense’—suggesting discomfort with it.

The very limited sample does not allow us to read too much into these preliminary findings, but to visibilise the topic of caste in the library, a multimodal approach elicits greater interest and deepens thinking about it, even while creating discomfort.

Exploring: A Pedagogy for the Privileged

For the six education sites that were willing for the LEs of this study to talk to their students about caste through library activities, there were seven education sites that either flatly refused or went silent. This was a

clear ‘Do Not Disturb’ sign. As if to say, why bother discussing caste as a lived reality perpetuated by people with privilege when classroom discourse treats caste as an objective category that can be viewed from a distance and is a relic of the past? We are almost certain that if the study had been couched in terms of talking to students about ‘differences’, ‘diversity’ or ‘multiculturalism’, we would have faced no rejection.

Sreenivas (2011) writes, ‘Multiculturalism is grounded in a politics of recognition; it pushes for the inclusion and acceptance of the subjugated culture’s “difference”, alongside the dominant culture’ (p. 317). This notion of multiculturalism is well understood by all LEs who were a part of this study. There was no difficulty in recognising that library bookshelves need stories that represent marginalised voices and experiences. There was little resistance to ‘diversity’ as understood by the privileged, making space on the shelf for that one book whose protagonist is a Dalit girl. But their resistance to recognise and for us to inform and sensitise the ways in which power and privilege are contextualised and embedded in stories that represent ‘diversity’ was insurmountable in the time period of the study.

In pursuing the goal of social justice and anti-caste education, LEs—or for that matter, all educators with privilege—choose to talk about oppression with the oppressed and disadvantaged communities despite the total absence of any lived experience of it or the examination of privilege as part of the oppressive systems in society. As Woodson (1998) says, it is like ‘standing in the room watching without adding or participating in the experience, without changing because of the experience’. We recognise that many of the LEs we work with may be increasingly identifying with the cause of the oppressed, and in doing so, we may be in danger of what Allen (2002) refers to as the ‘delusional space where everyone is the oppressed and no one is the oppressor’ (p. 4).

Our study revealed that facing caste amongst the privileged involves overcoming resistance on two inextricable fronts: Examining one’s own privileges—in order to discuss caste inequities authentically with students. We draw upon the ideas of Allen and Rossatto (2009) to explore a pedagogy for the privileged. We too question the effectiveness of ‘safe’ discourse to achieve any meaningful transformation in the consciousness of the privileged. The Indian education system and school curricula play it safe if at all they acknowledge caste inequities. We agree with their thesis that to come to a problematised understanding of the oppressive, privileged identity, a significant cognitive and emotional experience is as necessary for the educators as it is for the

students they work with. This kind of experience is enabled effectively and imaginatively by reading caste-themed texts (prose and poetry) along with the use of a wide range of multi-modal approaches that library spaces afford—book and library displays, reader’s theatre, play and performance-based sessions drawn from applied theatre and guided drawing. We reckon library spaces to be the last bastions for open conversations about caste with young people. There is a need to engage with the form of critical multiculturalism ‘that seeks to move those who consciously or unconsciously surveil the hegemony of the oppressor from their comfortable, “neutral” place towards a transformed and deliberate monitoring of a type of social justice that is in alliance with the oppressed’ (Allen & Rossatto, 2009, p. 164).

The ‘Do Not Disturb’ mindset enables the perpetuation of a status quo from which the privileged continue to gain, and our findings compel us to continue to address the role that privilege plays in maintaining and strengthening the unjust system of caste inequality.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The authors declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship and/or publication of this article.

Funding

The authors received no financial support for the research, authorship and/or publication of this article.


Notes

1. The authors use the term ‘privileged’ to denote persons with caste privilege, arising out of the accumulation of economic, social and cultural capital.
2. This term refers to the revisions made in the NCERT history, mathematics, science, political science and sociology textbooks of Classes 6–12 in 2021 in the form of reduction and deletion of content. It is justified as necessary to reduce the learning burden that the COVID-19 pandemic placed on students. There has been consensus and controversy about the rationalisation exercise within the educational fraternity.
3. The LEs Course is a professional development programme offered by Bookworm Trust since 2017 in partnership with Parag of Tata Trust until 2021. The course is accredited by Tata Institute of Social Sciences from 2019.
4. Of the four school library educators, two worked in elite private schools, one in a government-aided private school and one in a low-cost private school. Of the four associated with libraries in under-resourced communities, three were urban communities and one was a rural community.

5. Five items assessed knowledge, four assessed attitudes and three assessed practices 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. Space was provided for elaborating/justifying their response.
6. A library unit refers to using two or more of the following library activities to introduce students to caste and engage them in discussion about it: story read-aloud, library/book display, book browsing and borrowing, book talk, guided drawing using a poem/story, the Privilege Game and songs.
7. This included editors (16), authors (14) illustrators (9), translators (4) and funders of children's literature (3). Responded by 35, it indicated keenness to engage with this 'risky' topic.
8. See 'References' for the article about the reading circle by Noronha (2022) in *Teacher Plus*.
9. In this section, the LEs will be referred to specifically as LE1, LE2, LE4, LE5, LE6, LE9 and LE10.
10. LE1 did not receive confirmation from either of the alternative/progressive schools that she 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.
11. For the purpose of analysis, we grouped them into three categories: Junior school students 6–9-year-olds (at one site), middle school students 11–13-year-olds (at three sites) and senior school students 15–17-year-olds (at two sites).
12. See supplemental material for examples of questions asked by students in response to stories and discussion on caste.
13. The game was designed based on the transformative work of Augusto Baol. Using a socio-dramatic technique and built upon a more traditional game structure of The Line Up, where participants organise themselves on the bases of height, date of birth, and such: 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 hyper-visible about 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. This game was designed by Alia Sinha and the Facing Caste project participants in a workshop in Goa in May 2022.

ORCID iDs

Sujata Noronha  <https://orcid.org/0009-0003-0475-3114>

Beena Choksi  <https://orcid.org/0009-0000-7284-4315>

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