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BEYOND ENROLMENT AND APPROPRIATION POLITICS IN DALIT GIRLS' EDUCATION

Dalit Girls' Education in Urban India: Beyond Enrolment and Identity Politics

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Dalit Girls' Education in Urban India: Beyond Enrolment and Identity Politics

Abstract

Arguments around Dalit girls' education in India generally focus on Dalit girls via integration of enrolment and identity politics. Given the expansion of formal schooling among Dalit girls, a large body of research and policy drafts utilizes the integration of enrolment and identity politics either to enunciate the idea of universalization or to locate the paradoxes of these increasing enrolment numbers by describing the socio-economic barriers in Dalit girls' education. However, less attention is given to what lies beyond the enrolment and identity politics in Dalit girls' education. This paper is based on an empirical study conducted among the households associated with 'Unclean' occupations in Haryana to understand the educational experiences and challenges of Dalit girls' education beyond enrolment and identity politics. Using an intersectional and standpoint analysis approach, the paper attempts to unmask the 'multiple patriarchies' deeply embedded in the socio-economic barriers functioning against Dalit girls' education. While doing so, the paper demonstrates the continuous dialectics of external Brahminical and internal Dalit patriarchy, that subsequently keep Dalit girls' education owing to the larger male culture. In conclusion, it argues that educational policies and teaching-learning practices must attend to Dalit girls' education from a Dalit Feminist Standpoint Framework.

Keywords: Dalit girl education; Brahminical patriarchy; Dalit patriarchy; Dalit feminist Standpoint; Manual scavenging communities

Dalit Girls' Education in Urban India: Beyond Enrolment and Identity Politics

1. Background

Policy on girl child education in India often try to equate gender parity to girls' participation in education through several parameters of enrolment. Consequently, considering the history of low enrolment and high dropout rates among Dalits, Dalit girls' education has remained a major problem for the Indian education system.

Thereby, keeping egalitarianism and social justice as the primary goal, the government of India launched several schemes like Kasturba Gandhi Bal Vidhyalaya, Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, National Scheme for Incentives to Girls for Secondary Education etc. explicitly for Dalit girls¹ to bring Dalit girls' enrolment at par with the national average. In accordance with such efforts, the participation of Scheduled Caste (SC)² girls have seen a rise in enrolment rates from only 20.86 per cent in 1961 to 56.50 per cent in 2011 (Census, 2011). In addition, in recent years, there has been a drastic escalation in these numbers, with more Dalit girls than boys entering the Indian educational system (refer to Table 1).

Table 1: Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER)³ among SC boys and girls across different levels of education

Level of Education	GER SC Boys	GER SC Girls
Elementary (1-8)	106	108.3
Secondary (9-10)	82.4	83.8
Higher Secondary (11-12)	50.9	55.8
Higher Education	22.7	23.3

Source: The data for the Classes (1-12) is taken from Unified District Information System for Education Plus (UDISE+) Report, 2020⁴ and the higher education data is taken from All India Survey on Higher Education(AISHE) Report, 2020⁵.

The Two Facets of 'Dalit Girls' Education' in India: Integration of Enrolment and Identity Politics

The widening Dalit girls' enrolment in the Indian education system is generally surrounded by two common beliefs. Firstly, equating the widening enrolment with increasing gender parity (more girls going to school, hence more gender parity) and secondly, to associate widening Dalit girls' enrolment with increasing social inclusion and Dalit empowerment (more Dalit girls going to school, thus improving the position of Dalit girls in society).

As a result, Dalit girls' education is often appropriated as a quintessential example to highlight the success of the Indian education system among major political speeches, policy interventions and popular media reports (e.g. Express-News Services, 2019).

In order to continuously reproduce both the beliefs mentioned above, the Indian education system extensively relies on the integration of enrolment metrics and Identity politics around Dalit girls ('Dalit' and 'Girl'). For instance, while introducing the recent National Education Policy (NEP), 2020, the education minister focused on the increasing enrolment of Dalit girls in premier institutes like IITs, IISc and NITs, to continuously contest and produce the notions of Dalit and women empowerment (Singh, 2021).

However, most often, due to the rigidity of this integration (enrolment + identity), Dalit girls' education loses its context and intersectionality, focusing merely on growing numbers to enunciate the idea of 'education for all' (Singh, 2021; Majumdar, 2021). Thus, excluding critical dialogues around gendered experiences of stigma and discrimination associated with the lives of Dalit girls, the differential socio-economic milieu of Dalit girls, barriers in Dalit girls' education and so on (Roy, 2019).

In this line, with an aim to improve inclusivity and to challenge the common beliefs around Dalit girls' education, recently a growing body of literature highlights several socio-economic barriers and stigmatised educational experiences of Dalit girls in the Indian education system (Vacha Kishori Project Team, 2002; Balagopalan & Subrahmanian, 2003; Jha and Jhingran, 2005; Anand & Yadav, 2006; Kabeer, 2006; Kamat, 2008; Saxena et al., 2009; Pappu and Vasanta, 2010; Morarji, 2014; Kaul, 2015; Shah, 2015; Bhagavatheeswaran et al., 2016; Subramanian, 2016; Narwana & Gill, 2020; Majumdar, 2021). Research illustrates how Dalit girls are victims of double discrimination, Dalit girls are not allowed to go to school due to early marriage practices, girls remain engaged in household chores and miss school, security issues, lack of economic resources and so on.

However, while interrogating these socio-economic barriers as the major impediments working against Dalit girls, Dalit girls' education again keeps jumping from one facet of the problem (i.e., enrolment metrics) to another (i.e., identity politics). Either through investigating the disparities between SC women's access rates and the national average or by binding the socio-economic barriers to the rigid identity walls of being 'Dalit' to claim their identity as the sole cause of the problems/challenges present in Dalit girls' education in India.

This further raises questions like, do these 'contextualised' descriptions of socio-economic barriers in Dalit girls' access to education provide a complete picture of the Dalit girls' education scenario in India? What lies beyond the ongoing enrolment and identity politics around Dalit girls' education?

This paper contributes to the current literature on Dalit girls' education by relating the educational experiences and barriers to Dalit girls' education in three ways. Firstly, to disrupt the current homogenised image of a 'Dalit girl' in India's larger rhetoric of Dalit girls' education, in this

paper I build on the lived narratives of Dalit girls belonging to households associated with scavenging work or, more broadly, 'Unclean' occupations⁶.

Secondly, the paper relates to the educational experiences and challenges in Dalit girls' education beyond enrolment and identity politics to explicitly unmask the larger structures working behind them. Lastly, the paper focuses on caste and gender relations in Dalit girls' education through an intersectional and standpoint framework. Even though Dalit feminists have long been debating an intersectional frame of point toward Dalit women's experiences, however, only a few studies (i.e., DeJaeghere & Arur, 2020; Still, 2017b) position Dalit girls' education in an intersectional framework. Furthermore, even within an intersectional framework, questions around selfhood and representation of Dalit women often reveal a 'masculinized' and 'sarvanized' version (Pan, 2020) of Dalit women's experiences/reality. Hence, the paper eventually attempts to relate to the educational experiences of Dalit girls from an intersectional standpoint.

The structure of this paper flows into four sections. In the first section, the paper highlights the stringent educational experiences of Dalit girls associated with 'Unclean' occupations in Haryana, India. In the second section, moving beyond enrolment and identity politics, the paper attempts to unmask 'multiple patriarchies' embedded in the socio-economic barriers pervading Dalit girls' education. While doing so, in the third section, the paper demonstrates the continuous dialectics of external Brahminical and internal Dalit patriarchy to further show how Dalit girls' education often remains to incur to the larger male culture in society. Eventually, the paper calls for a need to position Dalit girls' education in a Dalit Feminist Standpoint Framework.

Setting the Context: Scavenging Communities in Haryana

Caste and stigma in education have remained a major concern in educational research in India and across the world. However, within the ongoing enrolment and identity politics, the image of a Dalit girl has been limited exclusively to a singular homogenised quota (SC), including only certain upwardly mobile Dalit communities. Notwithstanding, even among Dalits, communities like 'Balmiki' that are traditionally associated with manual scavenging work, are considered the most outcast and excluded in society.

Manual scavenging involves manually removing excreta, garbage, cleaning toilets, sewage etc. And the fatal nature of these tasks can be easily demonstrated by the fact that between 1993 and 2018, nearly 56 manual scavengers lost their lives while working in Haryana (National Commission for Safai Karamcharis, 2018). There are a total of 37 castes under SC in Haryana (Primary Census Abstract for Individual Scheduled Caste, 2001), and amongst them, only specific communities have been traditionally engaged in 'Unclean' occupations. The 'Unclean' occupations in Haryana are majorly performed by SC castes like Ad Dharmi, Balmiki, Churra, Bhangi, Chamar, Jatia Chamar, Ravidasi, Jatava, Mochi, Dhanak and so on. Despite being banned by the Manual Scavenging and Prohibition of Employment Act 2013, manual scavenging continues to be a caste-based occupation in Haryana. In a recent study, Kumar and R (2021) demonstrate the vicious cycle of caste-based occupation among manual scavengers in four towns of Haryana. The study reported that all the participants working as manual scavengers belong to the Balmiki community (SC) and participants further expressed that they usually face caste and occupation-based discrimination in educational settings.

In addition to the caste-based humiliation and stigma, manual scavengers face several irreversible health damages. Kumar and R (2021) illustrate how manual scavengers have to deal with dirt and toxic sewage gas, which results in various skin problems, joint pain and eye problems.

Furthermore, manual scavengers are not even fairly remunerated for the fatal work they perform. Nearly 40 per cent of the participants reported that they earn less than Rs 10,000/monthly (ibid).

Despite such miserable socio-economic conditions, educational experiences among girls from households associated with 'Unclean' occupations remain confined under the widening enrolment ratios for Dalits or the larger roof of universal girls' enrolment metrics in India. This is problematic as such an overgeneralization about the girls belonging to families associated with 'Unclean' occupations disregards their lowest status in the social and educational hierarchy.

Moreover, girls belonging to households associated with 'Unclean' occupations further find it difficult to fit in the ongoing Dalit identity politics, as they are considered outcasts or a special category among Dalits themselves (Moffatt, 2015; Singh, 2009; Bag & Jagadala, 2018). As a consequence, despite a vast literature on Dalit girls' education in India, only a few studies (Mohanty, 2014; Mishra et al., 2012; Gandhi, 2014; Walters, 2019; Nambissan, 2009; Khan, 2020) focus on scavenging communities.

Furthermore, there is no such comprehensive study that explicitly elucidates the existing reality of education among girls belonging to families associated with 'Unclean' occupations. As a result, girls' education among households associated with 'Unclean' occupations predominately remains unattended in the Indian education system. Lack of empirical evidence further misrepresents the education among Dalit girls from households engaged in 'Unclean' occupations and pushes them into an identity pitfall where the probability of public rhetoric missing the stigma attached to the intersection of their occupation, caste, class and gender increases.

2. Methodology

This paper draws from a larger research project conducted by the Indian Social Institute in May 2017 to understand the socio-economic and cultural conditions prevailing among those associated

with 'Unclean' occupations. The objective of the study was to find out about the discriminatory and exclusionary practices in the education system that persist against the households associated with 'Unclean' occupations.

Defining 'Unclean' occupations

For the study, the association of the term 'Unclean' occupations with the households is not based on the parameters of hygiene; but as more of a religious prescription. The households irrespective of caste or creed were considered related to 'Unclean' occupations, where the members are either presently engaged or were engaged in the past in occupations that "*involve physical contact with blood, excrement, and other bodily defilements and are principally considered impure and polluting in society*"⁷.

Data collection and Analysis

In order to identify a substantial number of households associated with 'Unclean' occupations, the study was only confined to urban areas. Based on the population criterion, the data was collected from two cities, Panipat (below five lakhs) and Faridabad (above five lakhs) in Haryana. The cities were further selected due to their proximity to the National Capital Region, which might have changed the socio-economic matrix of the population. From the two cities in Haryana, based on purposive sampling, a total of 11 settlements were selected, six from Panipat and five from Faridabad.

The study was conducted in two phases, adopting a mixed-methods approach. In the first phase, a total of 1,846 household surveys were conducted from Haryana (900 households in Panipat and 946 households in Faridabad). Further, qualitative data were collected during the field investigations, which included ethnographic observations, in-depth interviews and focus-group

discussions (FDG). An effort was made to mix localities from diverse socio-economic profiles. Furthermore, to make the study more comprehensive, the data was collected from various stakeholders like teachers, principals, school management, parents, students, community leaders etc.

During our interactions with the data from the study, one of the key themes that emerged was gender and education. The paper uses a qualitative narrative and dialogic approach (Dubey & Murphy, 2021) to enter the world of girls from households associated with 'Unclean' occupations. The names of the respondents have been further anonymised to maintain the confidentiality of the participants.

3. Educational experiences of Dalit Girls from Scavenging Communities: A Snapshot

They say we are Bhangi, Chamar and Chura and we are at an advantage since we get scholarships. I could hide my identity as I wore fashionable clothes. I dress up smartly and nobody can say that I come from Basti or that my parents are sweepers. (Meenu, 20 years old)

Despite the expansion of Dalit girls' access to schooling, imagine entering a space for learning, where one has to keep negotiating to hide one's identity. Due to the association with actual filth and caste-designated occupation, evidence from the study illustrates that students from scavenging communities are stigmatized (i.e., by calling them 'Bhangi', 'Chura', 'Dirty' etc.) in the education system, not only by their upper-caste peers, teachers and school management but also by the other fellow Dalits too. The changes in access rates of Dalits, are not able to eliminate the discriminatory practices against Dalit students belonging to households associated with 'Unclean' occupations rather it has reshaped these stigmatizing practices resulting in new and modern dynamics of stigmatized experiences against them (e.g., stigma due to scholarships). In addition,

the educational experiences of Dalit girls from households associated with 'Unclean' occupations further lack a socio-cultural "space of utterance" (Kumar, 2020) that often makes their educational experiences even more arduous. Soham from Panipat shared,

Soham left school because he got into a brawl with a Punjabi boy and was thrown out of school. Earlier, the teacher had called him 'Chura'... He adds, "There are around 25 boys like me, of similar age group in the Rajiv colony. They all left school and are working as Safai Karamchari or a labourer in a factory. Dalit boys get into such fights and face expulsion. But girls are different and they quietly face humiliation".

Silently adhering to the everyday humiliation, the findings from the study show that girls from households associated with 'Unclean' occupations are further segregated from subjects like computers, and mid-day meals, are more prone to physical punishment and are asked to clean classrooms. Despite all these challenges, a majority of girls belonging to households associated with 'Unclean' occupations are still attending schools/colleges; however, the evidence from the study illustrates that the familial and cultural importance given to their education is still questionable.

As the parents during the FDG shared,

There is a custom of early marriages among Valmikis and the girls get married early on. Therefore, girls are not encouraged to study beyond secondary, although they are more serious and better in studies than boys.

On one hand, girls' education is not considered an important issue among households associated with 'Unclean' occupations since they will eventually be married. On the other hand, girls further keep adjusting to the needs of their families due to the parental endearment for boys. For example, Bhawika, a student of class 9th shared,

Boys are pampered, especially by mothers and are sent to private schools. Girls are more understanding and adjusting; they know the economic struggle of the family. Besides, the education of girls is not a serious concern of the parents. Girls are sent to government schools since it's cost-effective. Moreover, their education is not related to employability.

Kingdon (2002) argues that the differential treatment of sons and daughters by parents is one of the potential reasons for the gender gap in the Indian education system. She further claims that the conventional 'discriminatory' component that girls face due to the differential intra-household allocation of education remains unexplained in the education system.

In this line the above example highlights two crucial challenges that create a considerable gender gap in the quality of education Dalit girls from households associated with 'Unclean' occupations receive 1) segregation in the type of school 2) isolating employability from education.

According to the study, parents often send their boys to private schools and their girls to government schools. The data suggest that nearly 23 percent of girls attend private schools compared to a total of 30 percent of boys. Hence, despite the increasing enrolment among girls, the distinction between types of schools creates a huge gap in the quality of education, skills and learning outcomes received by girls.

Secondly, since the education of girls is not associated with employability, so when it comes to resource allocation, motivation and any kind of external help like tuition, girls are often left unattended in the education system. Nonetheless, boys are provided with better facilities like English medium schools, tuition and parental push to study. As shared by Meena,

Girls are sent to government schools, but boys go to private schools. Both my brothers are in a private English medium school..... He is also taking tuition; a lot of money goes into his education.

In addition to the lack of support, girls' educational experiences are further hampered by the extra household responsibilities expected from them. For instance, many girls during the FDGs shared that it is mostly only the girls who assist in household chores and take care of their younger siblings. A teacher from Panipat further shared,

Girls often remain absent from school, to work at home in place of their mothers (when they fall sick, or out of home for work). Such girls miss classes and are unable to cope up later, so they eventually drop out.

The gaps in the educational experiences of girls from households associated with 'Unclean' occupations clearly highlight the anomaly between the widening Dalit girls' enrolment and the existing situation of gender parity among Dalit girls in the Indian education system. But do these contextualised descriptions of educational experiences of girls enough to portray the challenges in Dalit girls' education, or do they point towards some larger networks of oppression.

Positioning Dalit Girls' Education among Scavenging Communities: Beyond Enrolment and Identity politics

In the process of positioning the educational experiences of Dalit girls out of the 'enrolment metrics', most often, the current literature underscores several socio-economic processes like discrimination, poverty, marriage, household work etc., as the major barriers in their way to equal participation in education.

However, while interrogating these socio-economic impediments in Dalit girls' education, major attempts in academia and policy interventions predominantly remain submerged in a 'common-sensical approach' (Khoja-Moolji, 2015). A common-sensical approach generally portrays the current socio-economic difficulties in Dalit girls' education as an ahistorical and apolitical

occurrence. For example, criticizing marriage simply as a socio-cultural process fails to unequivocally call out the intersectional caste and patriarchal structures behind it. It instead fixes the whole blame on the Valmiki communities for early-marriage traditions and further submits to the ongoing identity-based segregation in education. Similarly, citing poverty as the primary reason for not giving girls' education its due importance, misrepresents all the intra-household discrimination and gendered roles as a mere response to the lack of economic sources among scavenging communities.

In between this blaming process, patriarchal structures are often considered a separate subject/ variable (e.g., Narwana & Gill, 2020), thereby taking away the spotlight from the primary root cause (the intersection of caste and patriarchy) and its deep embedded networks within the socio-economic difficulties in Dalit girls' education. Such a common-sensical approach to Dalit girls' education conveniently detaches itself from the gendered experiences, the geopolitics of patriarchal and marginal histories that have shaped the educational experiences of Dalit girls today (Yunus, 2021).

Recently a few studies, i.e., Balagopalan (2010) and Yunus (2021), explicitly challenge the broader common-sensical assumptions embedded in the socio-economic barriers working against Dalit girls' education and attempt to unmask the caste and patriarchal synergies present behind them.

However, while operating within the Dalit feminist framework, most often, caste and gender become mutually exclusive (DeJaeghere & Arur, 2020; Pan, 2019). The notions of 'Double discrimination' are often interpreted in an either/or framework that locates the educational experiences of Dalit girls as a sole repercussion of upper-caste patriarchy only. For instance, while theorising gender among Dalit girls' education in India, Yunus (2021), Arur & DeJaeghere (2019),

and Narwana & Gill (2020) do not explicitly recognize and question the attacks by the internal Dalit patriarchy on Dalit girls' education and again falls into the vicious cycle of identity politics around SC women abuse, carried out by upper-castes only.

In this line, Patil (2013) argues that blaming only caste as the perpetrator that transforms Dalit women into poor mute victims ironically ascribes to the similar dominant assumptions of Brahminical ideology about lower-caste women by seeing their problems from a totalising lens of caste. Such epistemological postulations to blame only upper-caste identity for the dismal situation of Dalit girls' education highlight a unitary form of patriarchal oppression, a universal experience of Dalit womanhood and the erasure of differences among women in an attempt to homogenise feminist politics by simply adding caste to it (Pan, 2019). And further disregards Rege's (1998) idea of multiple patriarchies, by eliminating debates around the two-way process of assimilation and acculturation of caste and gender norms within different caste groups.

As a consequence, the experiences of Dalit girls from scavenging communities are either simply narrowed down to the identity politics of SC quota women, who are perturbed simply due to their caste or are considered mere exceptions within the Dalit communities with an additional layer of occupation-based stigma (again located as an identity marker). It further creates a sharp distinction between the abuser (the upper-castes) and abused (Dalit identity) to then exclude the internal Dalit patriarchal abuse faced by girls from households associated with 'Unclean' occupations.

In this context, to move away from the ongoing enrolment and identity politics, in the upcoming section, I attempt to reveal the dialectics of external Brahminical and internal Dalit patriarchy that works simultaneously to impede equal educational opportunities among girls belonging to households associated with 'Unclean' occupations.

4. The Dialectics of Brahminical and Dalit Patriarchy against Dalit Girls' Education

The various hurdles in the education of girls from households associated with 'Unclean' occupations underlie the deeply interrelated and intertwined relations of domination and power structures that are often manifested to mediate the educational experiences of Dalit girls. From gendered discrimination by the parents to several gendered silencing techniques, girls' education among those associated with 'Unclean' occupations remains subjugated to the continuous dialectics of deep external Brahminical as well as internal Dalit patriarchal structures⁸.

While on one hand, the educational experiences of girls from families associated with 'Unclean' occupations remain vulnerable to different kinds of exploitations due to the profound Brahminical values of caste and gender supremacy. On the other hand, despite the identity politics of being 'Dalit' and eloquence of caste consciousness, hegemonic caste and patriarchal frameworks continue to work against Dalit girls even within their own communities.

Pointing to the oppression faced by Dalit women in the Indian education system from dominant castes like *Jats*, during the study, a Valmiki leader from Panipat, shared,

The college president is a jat, drinks openly in the canteen, troubles girls, but nobody dares to say anything even the principal is afraid of jats.

The fear of the dominant caste establishes several security issues among girls from marginalized communities like those belonging to 'Unclean' occupations. Such Brahminical patriarchal power relations further refrain parents from sending their girls for higher studies that often require long hours of travelling and indulgence with boys from dominant castes.

However, this prosaic fear of Brahminical patriarchy pertaining to 'not sending girls to far away educational spaces' can't be simply interpreted as a mere result of external relations of caste and gender. Since, the claims of an 'unsafe environment' by Dalit parents ('for the sake of their girl's security'), are generally well-rooted in the interrelated networks of internal Dalit patriarchy as well. For instance, during the FDGs in Panipat, parents shared that the neighbourhoods are fraught with alcoholism, young Dalit boys often drink in the open which further creates an unsafe environment for girls. Furthermore, the onus of the unsafe environment is not limited to the neighbourhood boys but also on the girls themselves viz-a-viz the fear of getting spoiled.

The intersectionality of caste and gender relations is internally used by Dalit patriarchy in multiple ways. To begin with the 'fear of getting spoiled' illustrates how internal Dalit patriarchal structures extensively rely on the concept of honour to maintain their caste 'respectability' and patriarchal modalities of controlling the sexuality of girls. In her book 'Dalit Women: Honour and Patriarchy in South India', Claudia Still argued that to fill the gap created by economic and social disadvantages, honour becomes a crucial status symbol among Dalits (Still, 2017a, p.146). Consequently, the primary concern for Dalit parents is that daughters will undermine any educational opportunities by having an affair which will bring dishonour to the family. Hence, in order to not take any risks, they are often ready to outweigh all the benefits of education (Still, 2011). For example, Maya, a 20-year-old girl doing BBA mentioned,

Her brother, who is a school dropout, doesn't want her to go to college that is an hour away from her house. He objects to her wearing western clothes and keeps pestering her parents to get her married.

Further, the discourses on honour and use of patriarchal violence often inform many mundane and everyday processes internally among Dalit communities (Gorringer, 2018). Paik (2014, p.85) argues that men's assertions of Dalit rights and social status sometimes strengthen patriarchal formations

and notions of masculinity in the community. As found during the survey, girls from households associated with 'Unclean' occupations frequently witness quarrels, physical abuse, alcohol abuse etc., at their homes.

Another way to reproduce the existing caste and gender relations internally is to utilise the graded hierarchy within Dalit communities themselves. For instance, Riya shared,

She hesitated to meet the teacher who handled the scholarships, probably an SC but occupied by a middle-class ideology. He would often comment that SC children come to college only for scholarships and not for education..... "We keep quiet and tolerate such aspersions as we are helpless".

The teacher, despite being a Dalit, fully reproduces a Brahminical social order to create a graded hierarchy among Dalits (upwardly mobile meritocratic Dalits and those associated with 'Unclean' occupations) that stigmatizes the educational experiences and rights of the girls belonging to households associated with 'Unclean' occupation.

Considering the deep embedded multiple patriarchal structures in the everyday educational experiences of girls, will Dalit girls' education remain an independent entity, even if they attain higher levels of education?

DeJaeghere & Arur (2020) illustrates how Dalit girls' participation in schooling is often construed based on individual parameters of shifts in gender and caste relations, i.e., delayed marriage age, moving out of traditional jobs etc. Although contradictory to the findings from DeJaeghere & Arur (2020), early marriages and traditional jobs ubiquitously frame a larger reality for the girls from households associated with 'Unclean' occupations. However, the few girls who are able to move out of these constraints still could not shift away from the larger social stickiness of patriarchal and caste synergies working against them (also mentioned in DeJaeghere & Arur,

2020). The continuous dialectics of external Brahminical, as well as internal Dalit patriarchy, sustain control over women's status, mobility and experiences in education by always keeping their education owing to the larger male culture in society. For example, Ritika, who has done MPhil in English and is teaching at a Girl's College in Panipat, shared,

In spite of being highly educated, she would get marriage proposals from illiterate village folks. She further shares that "Parents do not support educating girls as it is extremely difficult to find an educated match for girls".

The above example exhibits how girls' education among households associated with 'Unclean' occupation remains directly proportional to men's level of education within the community. This makes girls' education among households associated with 'Unclean' occupations beholden by men's (essential and non-essential) needs from girls' education. For instance, many parents in the study shared that, in the marriage market, education till class 12th is considered essential to provide support to the patriarchal ecosystem of procreation (also mentioned in Still, 2017b).

Such bounded relations with the male culture, strengthens and continuously revitalizes dominant patriarchal structures to make girl education among those associated with 'Unclean' occupations merely a gendered 'nominal activity'; whereby girls are only enrolled in the education system to cater and adjust to the needs of the male culture. The nominality of girls' education constrains new possibilities for schooling and is one of the biggest reasons why even the widening Dalit female enrolment in education is unable to bring gender parity and economic independence among girls from households associated with 'Unclean' occupations.

5. Towards a Dalit Feminist Standpoint

The success mantra for Dalit girls in the Indian education system often follows a simplistic two-fold agenda. Firstly, to expand the access rates among Dalit girls and secondly to talk about the socio-

economic difficulties like discrimination, marriage, poverty etc. in Dalit girls' education. However, the study illustrates how these agendas based on enrolment and identity politics often portray Dalit girls' education (and the challenges) as a mere identity problem of being a 'Dalit' or a 'girl' rather than a result of larger intersectional caste and gender issues.

In the study, the narratives from various stakeholders like families, teachers, community members, and students reveal that Dalit girls' education among those associated with 'Unclean' occupations is a very complex phenomenon. The educational experiences among girls' who drop out or even those who are still continuing education illustrate how girls' education continuously faces attacks from the external Brahminical as well as internal Dalit patriarchy. Furthermore, even though enrolment dynamics among Dalit girls are continuously expanding, however, Dalit girls' education among those belonging to households associated with 'Unclean' occupations simultaneously keeps drawing from the persistent caste and gender norms by continuously reshaping their education according to the needs of the larger male culture.

Due to the persistent male culture and the invisibility of internal Dalit patriarchy in major debates around Dalit girls' education, there exists a 'masculinization of Dalithood' and 'sarvanization of womanhood' that further excludes the self-expressions and standpoint of Dalit girls in the education system (Pan, 2020). Henceforth, one of the critical implications for Dalit girls' education is to move toward a Dalit Feminist Standpoint. An intersectional standpoint will place the educational experiences of Dalit girls within a socially constructed group that focuses on the multiple changing structural power relations of caste, class, ethnicity etc. (Rege, 1998).

In this paper, by examining the multiple caste and patriarchal synergies working against Dalit girls' education, I attempt to illuminate the larger structures of oppression behind the ongoing enrolment and identity politics. In conclusion, Dalit girls' education needs to attend to the oppressive struggles in their lives over identity labels and schooling must enable them to locate

their own 'standpoint'. Hence, educational policies and the teaching-learning practices in the classroom, must empower Dalits girls to question their position in their education system and society at large by interrogating the everyday forms of oppression in their lives.

Notes

1. For more details on Dalit girl education schemes in India, refer:
<https://ncert.nic.in/degsn/pdf/degsnmodule6.pdf>
2. In this article, I have used the term Scheduled Castes interchangeably with Dalits, which is the official term for Dalits.
3. According to UNESCO, the number of students enrolled in a given level of education, regardless of age, expressed as a percentage of the official school-age population corresponding to the same level of education is referred to as GER. The population used for the tertiary level is a 5-year age group beginning with the official secondary school graduation age.
4. Department of school education and literacy, Ministry of Education. (2020). Unified District Information on School Education Plus (UDISE+). Government of India.
https://www.education.gov.in/sites/upload_files/mhrd/files/statistics-new/udise_201920.pdf
5. Department of Higher Education. (2020). AISHE Report. Ministry of Education.
https://www.education.gov.in/sites/upload_files/mhrd/files/statistics-new/aishe_eng.pdf
6. Although we do acknowledge that other communities are also involved in 'Unclean' occupations. However, considering the numerical abundance of Scheduled castes (i.e. Nearly 90 percent in the study) in 'Unclean' occupations and their stigmatized experiences in society, in this article, I have interchangeably associated 'Unclean' occupations with Dalits.
7. For more details on the methodology of the study, see Chapter 1: Caste in Education: An Introduction by Dr Paul D'Souza and Dr Teena Anil in "Discrimination and Exclusion in Education: A study of the Children of Households Associated with "Unclean" Occupations of Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, Himachal Pradesh and Haryana", by Dr. Ratnesh Kumar submitted to the Indian Council of Social Science Research (ICSSR) (Ministry of Human Resource Development) Aruna Asaf Ali Marg, New Delhi, 30 May 2017.
8. The term Brahminical and Dalit patriarchy used in the article is not based on identity labels but rather depicts the external and internal relations of caste and patriarchy. To further show that

'casteism' and 'patriarchy' are well rooted in society, irrespective of any identity. For more details, refer to Gopal Guru's (1995) "Dalit Women Talk Differently".

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