

THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

**Context of Caste: Transcending the Global Boundaries**

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### **Abstract**

Caste-based discrimination is a significant issue in both the Indian and Indian-American diasporic contexts. In this paper, I explore the complex dynamics surrounding caste discrimination and its justification that manifests within educational institutions, in India. The study employs a multifaceted approach, encompassing a literature review and consolidating previous works to show how the recent discrimination flows from India to the US, secondary data analysis, and survey questionnaires to provide a comprehensive exploration of caste-related discrimination within educational contexts, with a particular emphasis on first-generation Indian-Americans who may not have had direct exposure to the Indian discourse on caste in India. The findings provide valuable insights into the perception and recognition of upper caste identities caste, who explicitly state the relevance of the ethos and the enshrined principles and right in the Constitution of India-an independent, sovereign, postcolonial modern India, curate their caste-blind and caste expressions based on the complex interplay between caste identity, notions of merit, and social stratification. In addition, the findings also shed light on the dynamics of caste privilege and its relationship with mobility and educational/economic opportunities in a transnational context. Overall, these findings highlight the need for a more nuanced and comprehensive approach to address the multifaceted nature and impact of the reservation policy in educational institutions and in the US.

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## **Introduction**

*“We must begin by acknowledging first that there is complete absence of two things in Indian Society. One of these is 'equality'. On the social plane, we have in India a society based on privilege of graded inequality, which means elevation for some and degradation of others.”*

Dr. B. R. Ambedkar addressed the Constituent Assembly of India, as the head of Drafting Committee<sup>1</sup>. The caste system was the antithesis of the valued Principles of Liberty, Equality and Fraternity<sup>2</sup> espoused by the independent, modern India.

Various authors have implicitly defined ‘Caste’, and all of them seem to have some common understanding. Caste is understood to be a system of division of labor. Each caste corresponds with ‘jatis’, and every ‘varna’ is a cluster of jatis. It’s a rigid system, with no social mobility, which fears ‘Varna Sankara’, the mixture of varnas, having rules against inter-dining/marriage (It is varnas that are described in Hindu canons, not jatis). The distinction between caste and class is that the former is ascribed to the accident of birth as caste became institutionalized social stratification. It’s a hierarchical system, with one varna below the other in terms of ritual status and purity (Brahmins- scholars, priests, Kshatriyas- warriors, Vaishyas- merchants, traders and Shudras successively. The first three are dvija/twice born). Untouchable ‘antyajas’ are treated as the most impure or polluted, existing out of this system. At the foundation of this system was the subsistence and dependence economy, which had local connotations and was not expansive on the whole Hindu community. the different economies throughout the subcontinent gave different meanings and social status to such classifications. (Sumont 1966 and Nadkarni 2003).

[“The opposition between purity and impurity is the fundamental principle of the caste system. It is not simply a matter of physical cleanliness, but of a religious and ritual distinction. The pure is that which is in conformity with the divine order, the impure that which violates it... The opposition between purity and impurity is ...of a social and cosmic order. The pure is that which is in conformity with the order of the universe, the impure that which violates it. The pure is superior, the impure

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<sup>1</sup> II Ambedkar 's Writings and Speeches 184- 87. Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India.

<sup>2</sup> Preamble of Indian Constitution, 26 January 1950

inferior. This opposition is the basis of the caste system, which is a hierarchical order of pure and impure groups." (Dumont 1966, 70-71)

The issue of classifying caste associated with varnas and jatis has been contested by Indologists and Indian sociologists, contesting the Western sociologists and their imposition of the term caste which comes from the Portuguese word *casta* (Samarendra 2011, 51). *Casta* means unmixed, pure, color, race, breed, or lineage in the Oxford Spanish Dictionary. The British state tried to study Varna as an active principle of social classification, whenever someone new entered the society, they were classified in the *four* varnas described in *Dharma Shastras* (there was no fifth varna) according to one's qualities and actions (Bateille 1996, 21). While Bateille says that caste was referred to as varna, and now as jati, the argument can be countered by citing Hindu canons, as done by Nadkarni. Varna never had a rigid hierarchy norm, nor was it based on birth, rather it was based on the qualities of a person (*samskara*) (Nadkarni 2003, 4787). Structurally rigid Caste systems cannot serve as an analogue of the egalitarian Varna classification. British colonizers tried to group jatis with the understanding that they were occupational subcastes and were hereditary. They tried to encompass the diverse categories uniformly and categorized the varna as Caste. But this mere interpretation of jati was an incomplete understanding on their behalf. Jati/Jat can be used to describe groups, communities, and even humanity; the sexes are also referred to as Jats. It is also something that doesn't exist only within the Hindu community but also in other religions of the Indian subcontinent. (Nadkarni 2003, Bateille 1996 and Samarendra 2011).

Caste is thus, the result of an early 19th-century census under British colonizers. They faced a problem of regional status differences between jatis/ occupational identity, and they made it an ethnic identity to homogenize for their convenience. They failed to compare the diverse caste lists from different provinces as they attempted to enumerate the caste group by applying the uniformity principle. They even drifted away from the textual model of varna. The memorandum for the first decennial census of 1871-1872, presented in the British Parliament was also conceded to not

having a proper plan to inform the difficult subject of caste and every writer opted for a method that best suited them (Samarendra 2011, 54). But then the state tried to refine the definition of caste. They tried to empiricise caste and view them as a verifiable body, associating them to varna classification by hollowing the meaning of varna. They also created racial profiles within the varna order (Samarendra 2011, 55). HH Risley for the 1901 census attempted to define caste in terms of social precedence (Samarendra 2011, 56). Similarly, Jaiswal argued that the institutionalization of caste as a hierarchical structure can be attributed, in part, to the 1871 census conducted by colonial rulers. This census sought to categorize the population based on a hierarchical schema, thereby introducing a more fixed quality to the caste system. The purpose behind this categorization was deemed to be essential for "effective governance" as it aimed to identify and classify individuals according to their economic and social status (Jaiswal, 1996, p. 77). This census-driven institutionalization solidified the caste-based hierarchy, reducing the scope for mobility that previously existed within the system. Thus, the idea of contemporary academic writings, that state policies are caste-conditioned emerged because of the census under the British state, an institutionalized form of social stratification (Samarendra 2011). Caste is now compared to the social categories of Western Societies (estate, race, class etc) (Sheth 1999, 2503). From this point on whenever "Caste" will be referred to, it will be with the understanding that it is a system which has transformed and become a very rigid hierarchical form of social stratification.

### ***Background of the study***

The makers of the Indian Constitution carried forward with the caste lists which were the result of the census performed under the British State, along with their implicit understandings of the caste system. Not once does the Constitution define what it means by "caste" but has provided measures

to remove discrimination that buds from the caste system<sup>3</sup>. This also included the reservation system<sup>4</sup>, a policy which provides affirmative action in education to members of historically marginalized castes and tribes. This caste reservation has led to various dichotomous discourses surrounding itself. There is opposition to having a census and enumerating castes which will give an idea of how to expand or improve the reservation policy. The politics of not counting caste according to Satish Deshpande and Mary John is that the Constitution has only provided the country with formal abolishment of caste, which doesn't deal with defining what constitutes upper/general category castes and lower/marginalized castes. However, since there has been the absence of caste census there has been increasing inequality between caste groups and has caused "caste blindness". The castes that have "legitimately" cashed in on the benefits such as expensive education, inherited wealth, and abundant connections among their own groups advocate against caste census so they don't lose the anonymity that they have capitalized upon for three generations since the country's independence (Deshpande & John 2010, 42). In addition, the caste that has benefited from their privilege of caste blindness states that the lower castes will squabble more quotas and become more caste conscious which is harmful as opposed to their non-explicit stating

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<sup>3</sup> Article 15 of the Indian Constitution prohibits discrimination on the ground of religion, race, caste, sex, or place of birth. Article 16 provides for equality of opportunity in matters of public employment and prohibits discrimination on the same grounds. Articles 47 and 335 provide for special provisions for the promotion of the educational and economic interests of weaker sections of society, including Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs), who are historically disadvantaged due to their caste status. The Constitution (Scheduled Castes) Order, 1950, and the Constitution (Scheduled Tribes) Order, 1950, list the communities that are recognized as SCs and STs, respectively, and are eligible for affirmative action policies.

<sup>4</sup> Article 16(4) of the Constitution states that "Nothing in this Article shall prevent the State from making any provision for the reservation of appointments or posts in favor of any backward class of citizens which, in the opinion of the State, is not adequately represented in the services under the State." The reservation of castes is also governed by various laws and regulations such as the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989, the National Commission for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes Act, 1990, and the Protection of Civil Rights Act, 1955.

of caste. The authors have argued that one needs to determine how much harm the absence of such a census causes to propose pro-caste census arguments.

In reply to Deshpande and John, V K Nataraj extended what seemed to be the model of “logistical” opposers of caste census by Deshpande. Deshpande categorized a group of opponents as those who say that it is not possible to simplistically enumerate caste is the line of argument that Nataraj extends upon. According to Nataraj, this cannot be merely a question of what is logistically possible or not, it is about the assumption that caste is a static category. He provides anecdotes to this issue, like there is a sub-sect Sabar of a Lingayat caste which is categorized under Other Backward Classes (OBCs), according to administrative papers they are assimilated in the larger caste group of Lingayat in Karnataka. He also states that in a democratic country like India, numerical matter, and in this way there is a larger marginalization and then assimilation of disadvantaged caste groups within another larger caste group with similar criteria. This is because the first Karnataka Backward Classes Commission found that 88 castes in the state of Karnataka were less than 0.01%, and 347 people could not be ascertained in a caste group. Moreover, it becomes difficult to identify who qualifies as an OBC, because dominant castes<sup>5</sup> exist in OBCs as well.

To elaborate better, OBCs were granted 27% reservation in 1990 based on the Second Socially and Economically Backward Classes Commission. This led to a massive form of protest against the commission’s report headed by BP Mandal<sup>6</sup>, which came to be known as Mandal Protests.

Following this, there was a landmark judgment given by the Supreme Court of India in the famous

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<sup>5</sup> A caste may be said to be "dominant" when it preponderates numerically over the other castes, and when it also wields preponderant economic and political power. A large and powerful caste group can be more easily dominant if its position in the local caste hierarchy is not too low. (Srinivas 1955, 18)

<sup>6</sup> **The Mandal Commission** was a commission established in India in 1979 to identify socially or educationally backward classes of India and recommend measures to assist them. Its recommendations led to the implementation of affirmative action policies, including reservations in educational institutions and government jobs, for Other Backward Classes (OBCs) in India.

Indira Sawhney vs Union of India case, which stated that reservation should not exceed 50% including the Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribes reservation (the SC and ST reservation was in place since the time of independence). This judgment of 1992 was set in the backdrop of that the SC and ST reservation constituted 25% of the population, but with the introduction of OBCs, 75% of the population was under reservation. The OBCs were granted reservation as they were identified as castes which have not been historically discriminated against but are socially and educationally backward. This is when the judgment imposed the definition of who doesn't constitute OBCs, i.e., the "creamy layer"<sup>7</sup>.

This has added to the arguments of the side that was discussed above by Natraj. The further classification is based on "caste" which has different regional significance and hierarchies, getting homogenized for policy implementation. The lack of clear definitions has created these dichotomous debates and discourses which extend to the concept of merit.

### ***Indian Discourse on Caste Based Reservation and Discrimination in Education.***

The work by Jaya Goyal and D P Singh (2014) studied how there is a huge discrepancy in the argumentation by the general category<sup>8</sup> that there is an effect on the merit getting represented in higher educational institutions. The authors see that there is hardly any compromise on merit because groups like OBCs also don't enjoy the representation that they have been granted under the legal purview. Moreover, the rising private institutions create more discrepancies between those who can afford expensive education and those who cannot. Furthermore, according to the

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<sup>7</sup> The "creamy layer" refers to members of the Other Backward Classes (OBCs) who have achieved a certain level of social and economic status and are therefore considered to be outside the purview of affirmative action policies. The term was coined by the Supreme Court of India in 1992 in its ruling on Indra Sawhney v. Union of India.

<sup>8</sup> In India, the term "general category" refers to individuals who do not belong to any of the reserved categories, which include Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, and Other Backward Classes. The general category is also known as the "open category" or "unreserved category." This categorization is used in various areas, including education, government jobs, and political representation, to ensure that individuals from historically disadvantaged communities have access to these opportunities through affirmative action policies. This definition is supported by the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment of the Government of India. (source: <https://socialjustice.nic.in/writereaddata/UploadFile/Guidelines.pdf>).



2011 Census of India, the general category constituted approximately 41% of the total population, while the reserved category population constituted approximately 59% of the total population. With 7.5% quota for Scheduled Tribes and 15% quota reserved for Scheduled castes roughly corresponding to their population, according to the Census.

However, when we talk about the actual representation in the institutions Only 4% of faculty positions at Indian Institutes of Technology (IITs) are held by members of Scheduled Castes (SC), despite SCs making up 16% of the population. Similarly, only 2.7% of faculty positions at Indian Institutes of Management (IIMs) are held by SCs, despite SCs making up 16% of the population. Only 1.8% of faculty positions at the Indian Institutes of Science Education and Research (IISERs) are held by SCs, despite SCs making up 16% of the population. In the Indian Institute of Technology Bombay (IITB), only 1.8% of faculty positions are held by members of Scheduled Tribes (ST), despite STs making up 8% of the population. Amongst PhD students at IITs, only 6.9% are from SCs and 1.7% are from STs. In contrast, 52% of faculty positions at IITs are held by members of Other Backward Classes (OBCs), who make up 41% of the population (Paliwal 2023).

According to a report by the Ministry of Education, Government of India, published in 2021, the Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) for Scheduled Castes (SCs) in higher education increased from 8.2% in 2010-11 to 13.2% in 2019-20. Similarly, the GER for Scheduled Tribes (STs) increased from 4.4% to 8.5% during the same period. However, the GER for Other Backward Classes (OBCs) was higher at 18.2%, indicating that there is still room for improvement in terms of representation of SCs and STs in higher education<sup>9</sup>.

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<sup>9</sup> [https://www.education.gov.in/sites/upload\\_files/mhrd/files/statistics-new/aishe\\_eng.pdf](https://www.education.gov.in/sites/upload_files/mhrd/files/statistics-new/aishe_eng.pdf)

In an article published by The Print, it was highlighted that the Delhi government wrote to the University of Delhi to lower their cut-offs for the reserved seats for SCs further because approximately 5000 seats remain vacant<sup>10</sup>. This expands on the complex situation of marginalization in academics despite the policies and legal reforms in action.

### *Point of Departure for Study*

Laying down the information about how there exists contesting opinions regarding identity based on caste and opposition to the caste-based reservation and caste-based census. There has been a growth in demand that reservation should be made on a class basis instead of caste (Shah 1985, 142), as modern India is not so much grappled with the evil of caste, but rather the evil of class differences. Thus, the plea to modify the reservation system from a social to economic solution-based legislation. This discourse once again caught itself in strength, as nearly 40,000 Indian medical students were left stranded in Ukraine as the conflict there intensified. Leading to the death of one student. Groups that did not necessarily gain any advantages from the system of reservation in India, used this situation with their political motivation and touted that as a cause of death<sup>11</sup>. The argument placed was that students who left the country to avail opportunities in higher education did not get a fair opportunity to compete in the Nation Eligibility cum Entrance Test (NEET) for medical education in India. This was further situated in the economic context that the government is allowing the capital to flow outside of India. The second economic-based argument is that if there is actual upward mobility? This sprouts up as an argument because families who have accrued educational capital from the lower caste strata continue to take the reserved seats while the families from the very strata who are in poverty both educationally and economically

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<sup>10</sup> The Print. "AAP govt writes to DU to lower cut-off for SC, ST students to fill vacant seats; VC says not possible to reopen admissions." The Print, 10 August 2018,

<sup>11</sup> Mandal, Dilip. "What Forced Naveen to Study Medicine in Ukraine — Reservation or NEET? Here's the Real Answer." The Print, 04 March 2022.

are not able to reap the benefits of this system. This is something that scholars in India have addressed and will be discussed in the following section. Interestingly, the idea of competing on the basis of merit seems to be only attached to the upper castes in this discourse. This is the binary of caste and merit which is grappling India's discourse centrally. They tend to overlook that they are largely benefitted by the accumulation of social and cultural capital over generations and even economically at times. This is exemplified in higher education as most students from India move abroad to attain master's degrees after completing their undergrad in India itself. Those who are largely able to procure their degrees abroad when they don't continue their studies and careers in India belong to the upper strata, while this is an opportunity which is rarely available for the lower strata. This privileged section then moves to a new context, seemingly having the same notion of their identity and their merit as they situate themselves.

### ***Caste-based Discrimination and Legislation in the U.S.***

The fascinating and intriguing idea is how the discussion on caste-based discrimination started gaining traction in the U.S. in 2020. In February 2023 legislation was passed in Seattle for caste being recognised as a protected category and banning discrimination on its basis. Ajantha Subramanian, a professor of Anthropology and South Asian Studies at Harvard, who also wrote a very comprehensive book "The Caste of Merit" (2019), co-wrote an article about this apparent issue in the new context for Time<sup>12</sup>. The article argues that caste discrimination is a real and serious problem in the United States. It cites several examples of caste discrimination, including a study by Equality Labs found that 60% of South Asian Americans have experienced caste discrimination in the workplace, a report by the National Human Rights Commission found that caste

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<sup>12</sup> Chopra, Rohit and Subramanian, Ajantha. "Caste Discrimination Exists in the U.S., Too—But a Movement to Outlaw It Is Growing" Time, 11 February 2023.

discrimination is widespread in the education system in the United States, a lawsuit filed by the South Asian Americans Leading Together found that caste discrimination is a problem in the housing market in the United States. The most shocking of all was a case that they cited in their article.

[The second was filed in May 2021 against the Hindu trust BAPS (Bochasanwasi Akshar Purushottam Swaminarayan Sanstha), a nonprofit that since 2009 has had the status of a 501 (c)(3) organization. It was brought by lawyers representing a group of Dalits who claim that they were brought to the United States under the R1 visa for religious workers and forced into underpaid, exploitative construction work on a Hindu temple in New Jersey.]

This phenomenon is rather disconcerting as it reveals that the caste system, persists not merely within its local origins, but rather endures and adapts within a broader contextual framework that transcends spatial and temporal boundaries to a significant degree. The article also discusses the opposition to make caste a protected category under federal law. Some people argue that making caste a protected category would be a form of racial discrimination. They argue that caste is a religious and cultural practice and that it should not be protected under federal law. However, the article argues that making caste a protected category is necessary to address the problem of caste discrimination in the United States. The article cites the example of the United Kingdom, which made caste a protected category in 2013. The article argues that the UK law has been effective in addressing caste discrimination. Concluding it by calling on the United States government to make caste a protected category under federal law, arguing that this would be a step forward in the fight against caste discrimination in the United States.

However, as the discourse continues and expands to different parts of the US, we see the opposite notion getting a legal space as well. In California post weeks of hunger strike the governor, Gavin Newsom had vetoed the bill which would have banned caste discrimination on 7th October 2023. This was due to the case against two managers in Cisco against whom caste discrimination was

filed as two employees complained that they had even pay discrepancies due to their caste. This shows that caste-based discourse has entered the political systems and administration, rising as a cause of concern.

**In this play of modernity that India is emulating and engaging in discourse, and globalization, having an influence that allows the transcending of discriminatory practices associated with caste in a new spatial context is due to the engagement of the reservation system in education, so is the reservation really mediating the issue or creating more nuanced issues at a global level?**

### **Methodology and Limitations**

The research predominantly revolves around an extensive literature review, with a focus on scholarly sources. The aim is to synthesize and establish a structured framework that elucidates the intricate interplay between legislation, social issues, and the emergence of discursive challenges. To further explore the implications of caste-based migration within a global context, shedding light on the cultural aspects involved. Furthermore, it strives to demonstrate how the valuable findings derived from Equality Labs, a start-up by Thenmozhi Soundararajan in the United States are underpinned by the real-world implications of these challenges, with a particular emphasis on instances such as those encountered by Cisco. This examination underscores the persisting legislative hurdles within India, encompassing issues related to caste, institutional discrimination, and the pervasive caste-based disparities evident in the realms of education and employment. Additionally, secondary data sources were collected from various Indian government agencies and ministries in the introductory section of the paper. I web-scraped Telegu Association of North America's (TANA) leadership and donor list along with web-scraping a list of Kamma caste surnames to extend the study of caste-based kinship migration to the US and organization of caste in the US in a similar manner, using Python. The scrapped data was saved on Microsoft Excel

and the percentage of individuals having a Kamma caste surname was calculated to study the dominance Kamma have amongst the Telegu population in America. These secondary sources enriched the study with critical statistical and empirical data that complemented the theoretical perspectives presented in academic literature. These datasets encompassed a wide range of information, shedding light on the pervasive nature of caste-based discrimination in both Indian and diasporic contexts, particularly in the domains of educational access, employment opportunities, and socioeconomic outcomes.

Despite the extensive body of literature on caste and discrimination, a noticeable gap emerged when it came to exploring the specific manifestations and continuance of these issues within the United States. Recognizing this gap, the research crafted two distinct survey questionnaires, the 2018 survey report by Equality Labs and Pew Research Centre found in their Caste Report that the survey method is a method which finds a lot of response and cooperation on this topic. The first questionnaire targeted Indian students pursuing a master's degree in Computer Science at the University of Chicago. This group included those who had previous experience with the Indian educational system and competitive exams, such as the highly competitive IIT JEE or NEET. To further enrich the research, two students from the same program at the University of Chicago, who grew up in the United States and had only interacted with the American education system, were identified as key informants to assist in the distribution of the survey. By incorporating both groups, the study aimed to capture diverse perspectives, including those who had first-hand experience with the Indian education system and those solely acquainted with the American system.

The survey questionnaires featured a wide array of questions, including multiple-choice, range-based, and a few open-ended queries. These questions were thoughtfully designed to delve into an array of topics, such as when and how caste identity became relevant for individuals, their

perceptions of merit in relation to reservation policies, economic self-perceptions, and their comparative evaluations of American universities versus their Indian counterparts. The aim was to capture nuanced perspectives from the respondents and uncover their experiences with caste-based discrimination within educational contexts.

The first group, consisted of individuals with direct exposure to STEM-based competitive exams and institutions in India, as these exams are highly competitive, with millions of students vying for a limited number of seats. The competition's intensity, coupled with a reservation system, made this group especially pertinent for understanding how caste and merit are perceived in this educational context as described above in the recent case of anti-reservation discourse in NEET. The second questionnaire was tailored to individuals within the second group who had grown up in the United States, primarily from families with a STEM background. These respondents were part of a demographic that viewed STEM careers as highly aspirational and aligned with the American dream as was espoused in Roohi's (Roohi 2017) paper, especially in the IT boom and the skilled migration since the 1990s. The survey aimed to delve into their experiences of caste-related social interactions and identify specific instances where they perceived caste influencing their social interactions. This approach allowed the study to uncover how the Indian diaspora in the United States navigates the persistence of caste identity within social contexts, particularly among first-generation individuals who may not have had direct exposure to the discourse surrounding caste in India.

To ensure ease of data collection, Google Forms, a widely accessible and user-friendly platform, was used to distribute survey questionnaires. These questionnaires were efficiently distributed within the respective peer groups of the respondents via WhatsApp, ensuring convenience and timeliness. Furthermore, respondents' anonymity and confidentiality were maintained by

collecting their responses without any identifying information. This approach encouraged participants to express their views freely, without concerns of retribution or bias.

The sample sizes for both groups were deliberately limited to 10 individuals each, primarily due to the exploratory nature of the study and the desire to gain in-depth insights from a manageable number of participants. While this small sample size may limit the generalizability of the findings, it was deemed sufficient for the purpose of this research. Responses were collected and organized using Microsoft Excel, which facilitated the aggregation of data and the creation of frequency distributions for analyzing and summarizing the findings.

In conclusion, this research adopted a multi-faceted approach, encompassing literature review, secondary data analysis, and survey questionnaires to provide a comprehensive exploration of caste-based discrimination and its manifestations within educational contexts. By incorporating diverse data sources and methodologies, the study aimed to enhance the validity and reliability of its findings, contributing to a deeper understanding of the experiences of individuals in both Indian and diasporic settings. This is done keeping in mind that there is the limitation of no data being available to compare and study if there is indeed a caste-based stratified entry in the United States education system. While the study employed a range of research methods to explore caste-based discrimination in educational contexts in India and the United States, it's important to recognize the limitations that may affect the interpretation and generalizability of the findings. The most significant limitation is the relatively small sample size for both groups, which may not fully represent the diversity of experiences within the Indian diaspora or among students studying in the United States. Moreover, the findings are contextualized within Indian and diasporic settings, and caste-based discrimination may manifest differently in other geographic and cultural contexts. Lastly, the survey questionnaires provided a snapshot of respondents' experiences at a specific point in time, and a longitudinal perspective would be essential to comprehensively understand



how caste-based discrimination evolves over time. Future research could consider such longitudinal studies to capture the temporal dimensions of this complex issue (Raudenbush 1989).

## **Review of Literature**

### ***Social Issues and the Relevance of Legislation***

W.E.B. Du Bois (1903) examined the persistent issue of racial prejudice and inequality in the 20th century. He argued that prejudice cannot be eradicated solely through legislation, such as the Civil Rights Act of 1875. While these laws are important, they have not eradicated ingrained racial biases. Du Bois contends that prejudice is deeply rooted in societal structures and the attitudes of individuals, and thus requires broader social and cultural transformation. He focused specifically on his concept of the "color line," which is a multifaceted system of stratification that goes beyond physical separation based on color. It manifests itself in economic, and physical segregation and limited opportunities for advancement for marginalized racial groups. These groups also face psychological impacts of the color line, as Du Bois introduced the concept of "double consciousness" (Bois 1903). This is the dual consciousness that African Americans deal with, one through their own lens and the other through the way society views them as they navigate a world marked by racial prejudice. The internal conflicts that result from double consciousness contribute to a sense of alienation and frustration. To deal with this situation, Du Bois believed that work had to be done beyond legislation. He called for broader economic opportunities, educational reforms, and recognition of African American cultural contributions. This identity segregation and stratification can be broadly understood by contemplating the interplay of culture and identity, done by aligning the work of Antonio Gramsci. Gramsci's concept of cultural hegemony (Gramsci 1973) describes how dominant groups maintain their dominance by controlling cultural norms, values, and beliefs. He argues that this can be achieved through both coercion and consent. In the modern context, this can be seen in the way that dominant groups use

institutions, media, education, and popular culture to shape the worldview of society. For example, the ruling class may use the media to promote its own values and beliefs, while marginalizing or silencing opposing viewpoints. They may also use the educational system to indoctrinate students with its own ideology. They may use popular culture to reinforce their own values and norms while making those of the subordinate class seem undesirable or even deviant.

In both works, we see that educational structures and institutions can be used as social and political tools to further marginalize certain groups and prevent them from having equal opportunities. This is becoming increasingly important as we move towards a more globalized world, which means that there is an increased exchange of cultures and the possibility that cultures with local characteristics will be transplanted to other cultures. This is because, although Anthony Giddens (1990) defined globalization as an intensification and compression of time and space, resulting in a simplification of culture due to its removal from local contexts, this definition has been criticized in extensive scholarship for oversimplifying how society and culture function and for making the underlying assumption that modernization and globalization will make local practices and cultures superannuated.

### ***Mechanism of the Reservation Policy as a Legislation***

Initially, I underscore the imperative of reservation policy by drawing upon Pranab Bardhan's seminal work, "The Political Economy of Development in India." Bardhan contends that policy formulation should not be limited to short-term objectives but should instead address the underlying structural and inequality issues for the policy to be truly effective (Bardhan, 1984, p. 231). However, in "Politics in Time," Pierson introduces the concept of path dependence, which elucidates that the outcomes of a process are influenced by its starting point and the subsequent historical sequence of events (Pierson, 2004, p. 1). This notion helps us comprehend the deep embedding of policies and political institutions, making them resistant to change. Pierson

examines various case studies, such as the social security policies for the elderly in the United States of America, to illustrate this phenomenon. The author highlights a positive feedback loop, whereby the causal mechanisms of policies can yield amplified effects or substantial returns, reinforcing the need for their continued existence. Conversely, a lock-in effect can occur when institutional inertia or the high costs associated with change hinder modifications (Pierson, 2004, pp. 47, 77, 127, 155). Pierson emphasizes the significance of historical context in understanding the development and persistence of institutional dynamics and policies, as well as the challenges associated with achieving change.

### ***History and Element of Caste-Based Social Hierarchy***

As previously expounded, caste functions as an ascriptive marker of identity that is ascribed to individuals at birth. This identity is intricately connected to occupational roles, drawing a parallel to the guild system prevalent in Europe. The institutionalization of this hierarchical structure can be attributed, in part, to the 1871 census conducted by colonial rulers. This census sought to categorize the population based on a hierarchical schema, thereby introducing a more fixed quality to the caste system. The purpose behind this categorization was deemed to be essential for "effective governance" as it aimed to identify and classify individuals according to their economic and social status (Jaiswal, 1996, p. 77). This census-driven institutionalization imposed a rigid framework that further entrenched social stratification and perpetuated notions of purity and pollution. The historical analysis presented here elucidates the multifaceted dimensions of the caste system. The significance of historical transformations and their impact on the caste system is also underscored by K.L. Sharma, as observed in his work "Caste and Class: Some Conceptual Problems" (1984) Sharma contends that understanding the caste system necessitates acknowledging its historical modulations. One notable period of historical influence on the caste system can be traced back to the medieval era, characterized by the emergence of new sub-castes

and the concurrent growth of a merchant class. Moreover, the colonial period further deepened the impact of history on caste identities. Census operations, as mentioned previously, were one such mechanism employed to systematize and stratify the diverse Indian population according to caste. These efforts not only entrenched the caste system but also formalized the classifications and hierarchies within it, thereby strengthening the social and economic privileges associated with specific castes. Sharma's analysis emphasizes the multifaceted influence of history on the caste system. The medieval era witnessed the emergence of new sub-castes. These historical modulations shed light on the evolving nature of caste, its social implications, and the enduring impact it has had on Indian society.

### ***The Complex Development of Caste in Modern India***

In the context of modern, industrialized, and urbanized India, significant developments have been observed in the post-independence era (Sharma, 1980, pp. 85, 88). Scholars such as Sharma (1980), Vaid (2016), and Sheth (2002) have noted the emergence of a "middle class." Simultaneously, the processes of globalization have further exacerbated educational and economic inequalities. While this new context provides individuals with opportunities for upward mobility through economic avenues, it has also contributed to the attainment of status symbols associated with consumer goods and cultural markers. Within this sector, there exists a tendency to overlook traditional identities, including caste, leading to a weakening of traditional collective identities. However, a complex dynamic has emerged with the rise of this new middle class—an interplay between caste and class dynamics. Macroeconomically, individuals from lower castes often find themselves situated in lower socioeconomic classes, facing unequal access to educational and professional opportunities. Consequently, the processes of liberalization and other factors associated with modernity have introduced a degree of flexibility into the caste system. It is now perceived as a "collection of elements" that extends beyond religion and occupation, encompassing

factors such as education and lifestyle (Shah, 2012, p. 54). Shah argues that the formation of identity is a combination of these various factors, resulting in diverse implications for understanding caste-based discrimination and exclusion. Although the caste system may not retain its rigid form, the persistence of discrimination and exclusion persists (Shah, 2012, p. 127). This dynamism within Indian society along with globalization contributed to the movement of the intellectual middle class to the United States, sparking the brain drain phenomenon in the 1960s. This class of individuals believed that they were unable to reap the benefits of the development and growth they were instrumental in bringing about in post-independence India. The Nehruvian socialist government, which focused on excessive resource equalization and redistribution, motivated the migration of the middle class seeking better opportunities abroad. It is noteworthy that middle-class identity is highly desired among Indians, encompassing its own set of values and morals. This characterization of the class into lower, middle, and upper-middle strata is unique to India, even encompassing individuals who may be considered wealthy in other countries (macro-economically the upper caste) (Deshpande, 1992).

### ***Legislation in Independent India: Unveiling Complexities and Discursive Challenges***

Addressing caste-based economic discrimination has necessitated the implementation of various interventions and affirmative action programs aimed at creating financial, educational, and employment opportunities for marginalized communities, particularly within government institutions and jobs. While these measures have demonstrated some effectiveness, they often fall short of fully addressing the required social and cultural structural changes. Consequently, such initiatives can elicit a sense of "reverse discrimination" among the dominant castes, leading to resistance against affirmative action policies (Thorat and Newman, 2010, p. 257). Thorat and Newman (2010, p. 260) advocate for a more inclusive approach to combating caste discrimination, emphasizing the promotion of inter-caste marriages and social mixing as essential for meaningful

transformation. Their argument resonates with the ideas put forth by Du Bois, highlighting the importance of dismantling social barriers and fostering genuine inclusivity as legislation is not sufficient on its own.

In opposition to the critiques of the affirmative action policies, scholarly works, underscoring the concept of reverse discrimination have developed. Deshpande (2013, p. 59) notes that while affirmative action has contributed to increased access to education for individuals from lower castes, it has failed to create an enabling environment within educational institutions for those who enter the system in lower numbers. These individuals often lack the social and cultural capital necessary to navigate and thrive within these systems. Consequently, the notion of a casteless and meritocratic "general category" becomes a fallacy, as it perpetuates privilege and entitlement while undermining reserved categories, thereby perpetuating the existing caste system and hierarchy.

An extension of this can be found in "The Caste of Merit" (2019) by Ajantha Subramanian provides an empirical examination of the Indian Institutes of Technology (IITs), renowned engineering colleges globally, which are symbols of national promise and aligned with the idea of utmost meritocracy. Through a historical anthropological study, Subramanian contends that despite their purported meritocratic nature, the IITs serve as sites where the caste system is perpetuated. Upper-caste students, she argues, enjoy significant advantages in the IIT admissions process and continue to dominate both the student body and faculty. Subramanian asserts that this reproduction of caste hierarchy within the IITs is rooted in the very concept of merit that shapes these institutions. Subramanian reveals several factors contributing to the perpetuation of caste-based inequality within the IITs. Firstly, she highlights the heavy reliance on standardized tests in the admissions process, which, she argues, systematically favors upper-caste students while posing challenges for lower-caste applicants. Furthermore, Subramanian sheds light on the dominance of upper-caste values within the IITs' culture, creating barriers to success for lower-caste students.

By highlighting the intricate connections between merit and caste, Subramanian's book offers valuable insights into the formidable challenges of overcoming caste inequality in India. Therefore, Deshpande and Yadav (2015) in another work suggest that the affirmative action that is currently in play is flawed and needs a more nuanced approach, a more inclusive approach to accommodate both caste and economic status. This is because this stratification begins from the stage of schooling itself, wherein the 'weak' students are those who come through quotas, but then again, the quotas are never filled because they are never able to meet the elite schooling requirements, the reformation needs to start taking place from this level itself (Deshpande 2009). This was further observed by the idea that the Other Backward Classes (OBCs) are creating fragmentation in their communities, as only a few continue to reap the benefits of affirmative action, and the whole community is not able to benefit from it. The policy is thus being used as a tool for perpetuating and maintaining the hegemony of the dominant castes (Thakur Sai 2014), because firstly the categorization of OBCs is state-based and secondly, it is very dependent on political pressures so those who actually should be categorized as one are left out (Goyal and Singh 2017).

Goyal and Singh in 2017 used the University Grant Commission's (UGC) data to show how the dropout rates and academic performance of the OBC students in comparison to the General Category students is higher in the states of Punjab, Haryana and Himachal Pradesh. Similarly, another study conducted at the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) and the National Institute of Technology (NIT) found that there were GPA differences between SCs who got through affirmative action, but it could have been significantly more of a difference had there been no such action (Bagde et al 2019). Both these studies concluded that there needs to be a better addressing of structural inequality. These are the students who are left behind due to a lack of mentoring, tutoring and other support that can be socially, economically and culturally gained.

This should then boil down to how there is too much focus on reservation alone, we should aim for substantive equality which is not by removing reservation because it increases the representation of historically marginalized communities, therefore it should be viewed as an ongoing and continuous process. But when we have to deal with the idea of a “creamy layer” of beneficiaries who are already privileged within their communities, and thus do not need affirmative action benefits is based on the assumption that all members of the community have the same level of privilege and ignores the diversity within the community which thus needs a more nuanced approach for ensuring benefits reach those who have historically been marginalized and disadvantaged (Khaitan 2015, 2-3). The idea of dealing with structurally created equality so that the issue of inequality can be dealt with to its roots and to the level of eradication from the consciousness of individuals with no other context giving it reasons to thrive as a social evil. But, there have to be other nuances that have to be studied when we move ahead to study the extension of this in the U.S.

***Exploring Theoretical Frameworks: Assimilation and Ethnic Solidarity in the Extension of Caste in the United States***

Explanations for the process of assimilation among immigrants in the United States are continuously being challenged due to changing economic conditions in both the U.S. and sending countries, as well as the prevailing racial constructs within the U.S. society (Park 1921, p. 9). However, recent scholarship challenges the exclusive focus on the receiving culture in the assimilation process. Nee and Alba argue that immigrants create local subcultures within their concentrated neighborhoods, which they value as they provide economic mobility and networks (Nee and Alba 2012, p. 843-844). Moreover, immigrants may have higher educational attainment and wealth compared to native-born Americans, contradicting earlier views of immigrants seeking a higher standard of living (Nee and Alba 2012, p. 843-844). Rather than solely being sites of



socialization in American culture, schools now serve as resources for immigrants, and academic success can reinforce identification with one's own cultural group (Nee and Alba 2012, p. 847). The concept of assimilation as the complete adoption of a single culture by all members within primary groups becomes questionable. Individuals within the same primary group may not necessarily adopt the same culture, even if one culture represents the majority (Park 1921, p. 9). This challenges Park's assumption that assimilation requires a shared "universe of discourse" or common customs, values, traditions, and language (Park 1921, p. 14). Classical theories of assimilation assumed that it was a desired outcome for both the host nation and immigrants. However, forced assimilation and discrimination can have the opposite effect, further alienating immigrants and leading to revitalized ethnic solidarity (Fouka 2020; Waldinger and Feliciano 2004, p. 380). Fouka argues that forced assimilation tactics can strengthen ethnic solidarity among immigrant groups facing exclusion (Fouka 2020). This suggests that there is reactive ethnicity, the individuals are not passive, they impose their identities and culture in newer contexts, and that constitutes assimilation. This is something that allows us to see how the Indian American diaspora here then extends their ethnic identities based on caste, along with which comes caste-based discrimination as a consequence.

Equality Labs is a South Asian-American human rights startup that conducted a groundbreaking survey on caste discrimination in the United States in 2018. The survey, titled "Caste in the United States, sought to understand the experiences of individuals from lower castes or caste-oppressed communities in the US. The report began by tracing the migration of South Asians to the US. The earliest were the ones who migrated as laborers and didn't have the religious sanctity for their identities in a caste system. They didn't have the fear of losing their identity based on the religious texts that suggested moving across seas could harm the Hindu Caste identity, i.e., Dalits, Adivasis, Muslims and Sikhs between 1897 and 1924 on the West Coast. Eventually Immigration Act of

1917 and 1924 created standards of immigrants based on literacy and whiteness, to curb immigration from undesirable countries of Asia- pacific zone. This point of exclusion marks the first explicit imposition of caste privilege in the US. The upper caste Hindus following the Ozawa v. US case emulated that they shared Caucasian blood, which is different from lower castes and their caste practices forbid them from mixing blood with lower castes. This argument was due to the British application of the Aryan theory of race to India in the late 19th century which has now come to be known as the 19th-century myth (Thapar 1996). This theory is not absolutely rejected even now as there are privileged sections that still find benefits from it.

The survey found that caste discrimination is a significant issue for many South Asian Americans in the US, with more than two-thirds of respondents reporting that they had experienced or witnessed caste-based discrimination in some form. Additionally, the survey found that many respondents felt that caste-based discrimination was not taken seriously by non-South Asian Americans and that there was a lack of awareness about caste-based discrimination in the US. It was reported that nearly two-thirds of respondents reported that they had experienced caste-based derogatory jokes or comments. More than one-third of respondents reported that they had experienced workplace discrimination based on their caste. More than one-third of respondents reported that they had experienced discrimination in the education system based on their caste. A majority of respondents felt that caste-based discrimination had affected their mental health and well-being. The Print is an e-news platform which opined that the survey had certain drawbacks such as the sample was not a random sample, and that the sample was reached out by their contacts thus, a self-selected sample<sup>13</sup>.

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<sup>13</sup> "Indians have imported casteism to the US & a black journalist writes on the need to ban it" Cooper, Kenneth, 27th March 2018, The Print.

Following the 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act there was a huge migration from the upper caste educated Indian groups. Meanwhile, those castes who benefited from affirmative action in education and found their own networks to travel to the US, found themselves excluded from the casteist attitudes and organizations of the upper castes and they hid their identity.

Following this was the 1990s skilled workers' migration. Roohi (2017) using Vertovec's (2004) bifocality concept for migrants studies how migrant's lives of being and there simultaneously function in the context of Kammas, who are a group of dominant castes from the coastal regions of Andhra Pradesh who have attained education from reputed technical institutions of India . Roohi tries to contest the literature of scholars like Portes (1997) who suggested that highly skilled workers do not rely on their social capital for knowledge networks to migrate. She illustrates how transnational social fields are then maintained specifically in the context of skilled workers migrating since the 1990s tech boom. She argues that marriage, kinship and caste-based networks are used to migrate to the US and achieve the American dream that has been heard around in Indian neighborhoods and within a kinship community about the incremental lifestyle changes. Marriage also acts as a commitment to kinsmen while performing it spacial and social mobility in this context, hence performing functions of that unskilled workers rely on (Roohi 2017, 2759). This creates the transnational habitus wherein future migrants from the same caste groups negotiate the transnational spaces.

## **Findings**

As an extension to Roohi's paper, I have tried to quantify the dominance that Kammas have and how they organised themselves to dominate themselves in TANA and amongst the Telegu population. I first scrapped the list of names from the donors' list and then the board member list from their website using Python and saved the data on Microsoft Excel. Similarly, I scraped the

Kamma surnames list from a website I found online<sup>14</sup>. Using the if-else statement I scored the name on a scale of 0 and 1, where 0 means that the name doesn't equate to the Kamma surname and 1 if it does. Once the scores of the names were attained a cumulative percentage was then derived. From Fig 1 we can see that 80% of the Board members of TANA are Kmmas and 56% of the donors were Kmmas from Fig 2.

(Fig 1: Percentage of

Board Members

of TANA with

Kamma Surname)

Names				Kamma Surname
Murali		Vennam		1
Lakshmi		Devineni		1
Dr.	Nagendra	Srinivas	Kodali	1
Janardhan	Nimmalapudi			1
Srinivas	Lavu			0
Dr.	Chowdary	Jampala		1
Niranjan	Srungavarapu			0
Anjaiah	Chowdary	Lavu		0

Names							Kamma Surname
Sri.	Vinay	Mahajan	and	Family			0
Sri.	Kiran	Kumar	Nuthi	and	Family		1
Sri.	Ravi	Karamsetti	and	Family			0
Sri.	Chaitanya	Manne	and	Family			1
Sri.	Umesh	Challappa	and	Family			0
Sri.	Mahesh	Kasa	and	Family			0
Sri.	Radha	Alla	and	Family			1
Sri.	Viswa	Kandi	and	Family			0
Sri.	Samba	Mowva	and	Family			1
Sri.	Dasarath	Kunapaneni	and	Family			0
Sri.	Hari	Katragadda	and	Family			1
Sri.	Satish	Nagilla	and	Family			0
Sri.	Mani	Kuchan	and	Family			0
Sri.	Praveen	Chintha	and	Family			1
Sri.	urthy-Koppa	and	Family				0
Sri.	Suresh	Karusala	and	Family			0
Sri.	Ravi	chandra	Vadlamudi	and	Family		1
Sri.	Sri	Atluri	and	Family			1
Sri.	Nageshwara	Rao	Guduru	and	Family		0
Sri.	Rajinikanth	Kakarla	and	Family			1
Sri.	Shravan	Atluri	and	Family			1
Sri.	Kiran	Pottluri	and	Family			0
Sri.	Venkat	Gottipati	and	Family			1
Sri.	Shiva	Kondru	and	Family			1
Sri.	Ravi	Chikkala					0
Sri.	Venkat	&	Smt.	Silpa	Kadiyala		0
Sri.	Raj	Kumar	Chamarti	and	Family		0
Sri.	Vamsi	Vasireddy	and	Family			1
Sri.	Vijayababu	Tatineni	and	Family			1
Sri.	Suresh	Reddy	Venkannagar	and	Gamily		0
Percentage Kamma							56%

(Fig 2: Percentage of Donations to TANA by Kmmas)

<sup>14</sup> <http://kmmaschowdary.blogspot.com/p/kmmas-surnames-and-gothrams.html>

### Survey Result Analysis

'Group-1' refers to students who studied in India, participated in STEM-focused university entrance exams, and are currently pursuing a master's in computer science at the University of Chicago in the U.S. 'Group-2' encompasses students in the same program as 'Group-1,' as well as their contacts representing the Indian American diaspora and first-generation students who have grown up in the U.S., interacting with the American education system from the beginning.

### Result Analysis for Group-1

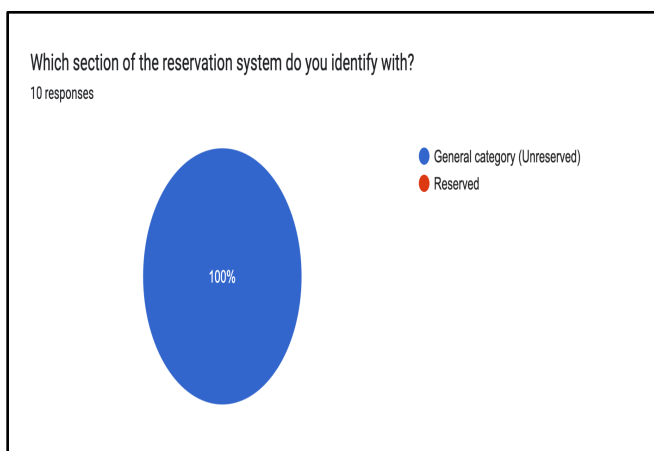


Figure 3

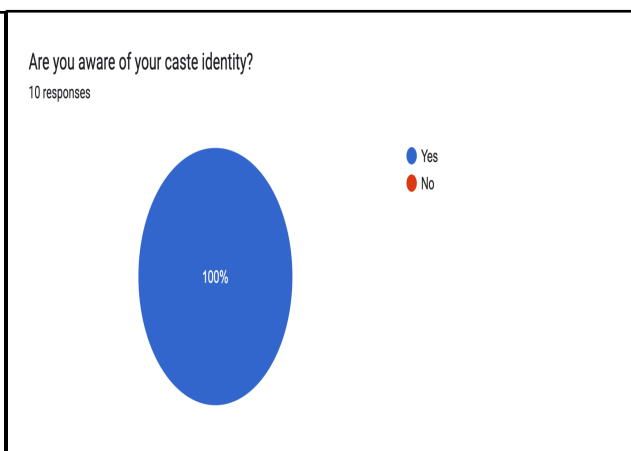


Figure 4

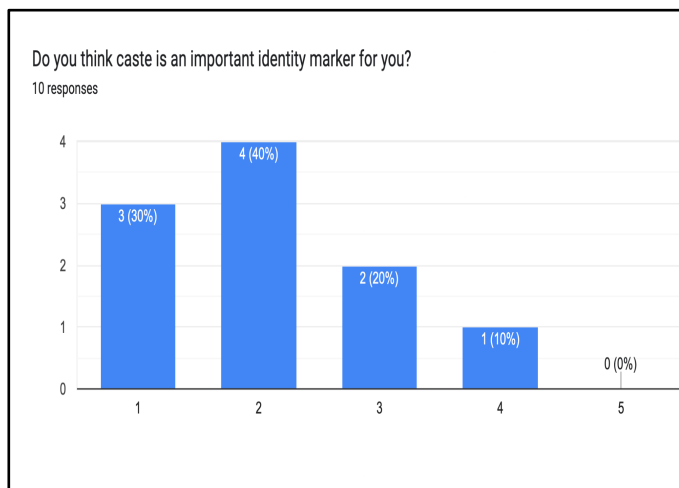


Figure 5: where 1 = insignificant and 5= significant

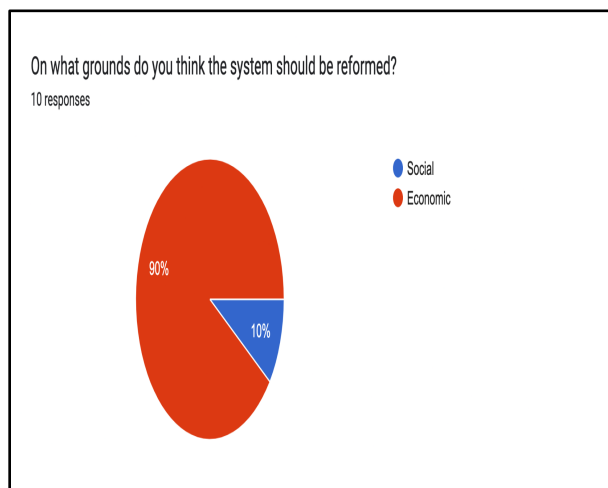


Figure 6

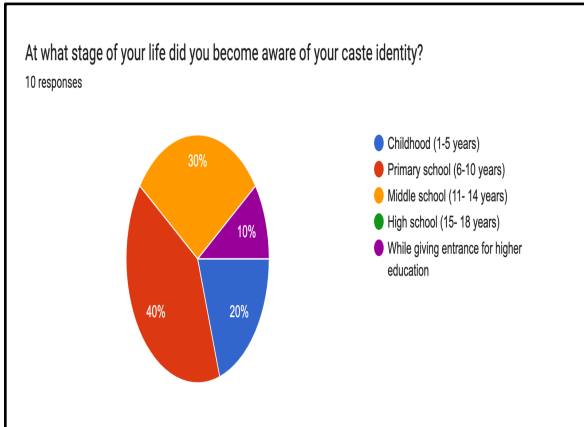


Figure 7

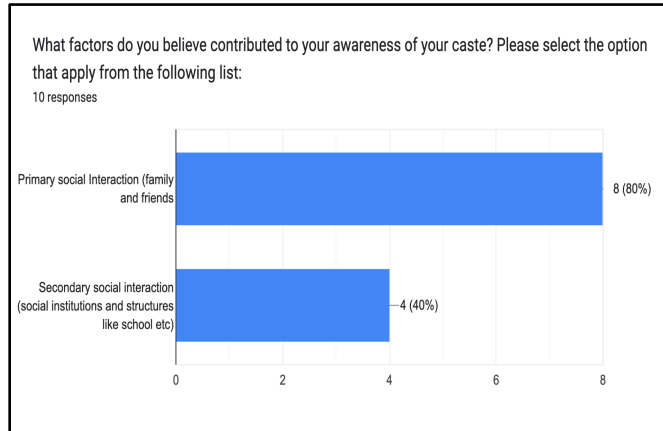


Figure 8

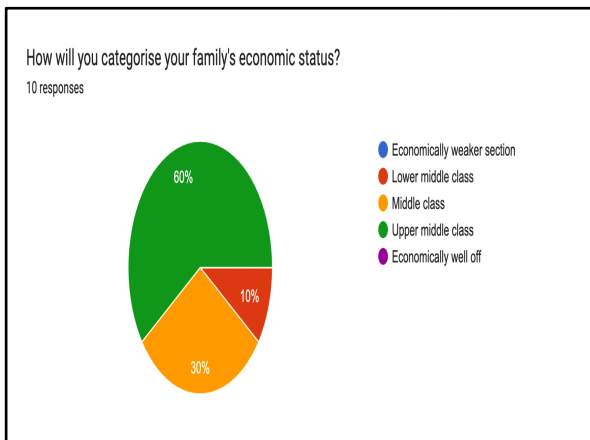


Figure 9

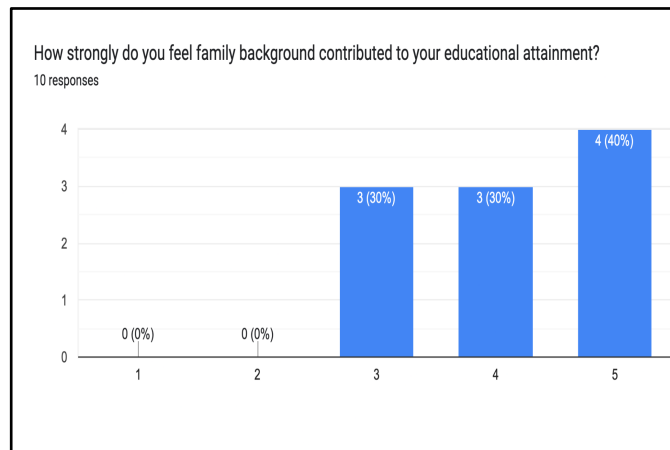


Figure 10: where 1= negligible and 5 = very strongly

From fig. 1 and 2 we can infer that all the respondents in this group were general caste and were completely aware of their precise caste identity. This composition provides insights into the lack of diverse backgrounds in higher education, even in the U.S. Despite identifying themselves with specific caste categories, a significant majority of respondents expressed a disagreeing to a neutral stance on the idea that caste identity holds significant importance for them in Fig. 5. The finding that individuals do not personally attach great significance to their caste affiliation in shaping their self-perception and identity raises intriguing questions about the complex nature of caste dynamics. Interestingly, a significant majority of respondents (90%) believed that the reservation

system should be modified based on economic considerations rather than social identity as seen in Fig 6. In line with their perspectives on reservations, respondents acknowledged the influence of their family backgrounds in facilitating their studies as seen in Fig 10. Many identified themselves as belonging to the "middle class" or "upper middle class" in Fig 9. This observation suggests that socioeconomic status, influenced by factors such as caste privilege, plays a significant role in educational attainment and opportunities. It underscores the inherent advantages that individuals from privileged backgrounds may have in accessing resources and support systems that contribute to their academic success.

When exploring why respondents perceived their academic journey in the United States as superior, some expressed the belief that the absence of a caste-based reservation system allowed for merit-based admissions. This viewpoint reflects a deep-seated notion of caste-based meritocracy, whereby individuals are evaluated solely based on their abilities and achievements rather than social identities. It highlights the persistence of caste-based hierarchies and the belief that merit should be the primary criterion for educational opportunities, regardless of social background. The findings also shed light on the dynamics of caste privilege and its relationship with mobility and educational opportunities. While individuals from privileged caste backgrounds may have the resources and capital to pursue education abroad, there remains a lack of understanding and acknowledgement of how their caste privilege has contributed to their socioeconomic advantages. This understanding is essential in recognizing and addressing the systemic barriers faced by marginalized communities who are unable to access similar opportunities due to the interplay of caste-based discrimination and economic disparities. Furthermore, discussions within the Indian Parliament regarding the departure of high-net-worth individuals from the country underscore the wider implications of caste privilege and its impact on social and economic mobility. The substantial number of high-net-worth individuals leaving

the country since 2014, further highlights the complex interplay between caste, class, and educational opportunities.

In Fig 7 only one respondent said that they became aware of the stage of giving entrance examinations. In Fig 8, 80% of the respondents attributed their primary social interactions with friends and family to being responsible for their awareness. This means that it is not the reservation or the outside social institutions which lead one to think of their caste identity, it exists in the daily and personal lives of people. This solidifies the argument of convenience, the beginning of caste consciousness and biases have formulated for individuals at a primary stage, which incurs bias and politically motivated arguments based on merit. Such biases are sustained even when individuals transcend boundaries.

**Result Analysis of Group 2**

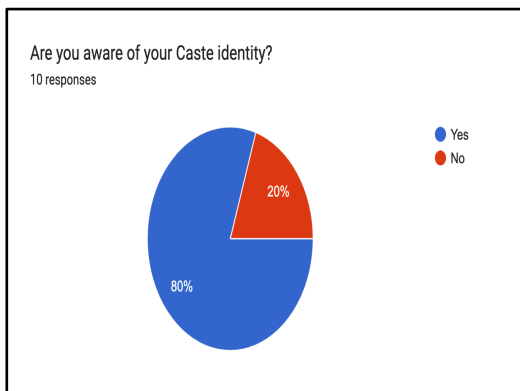


Figure 11

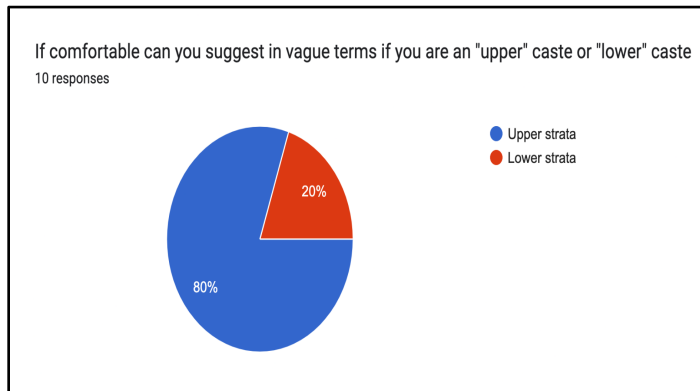


Figure 12

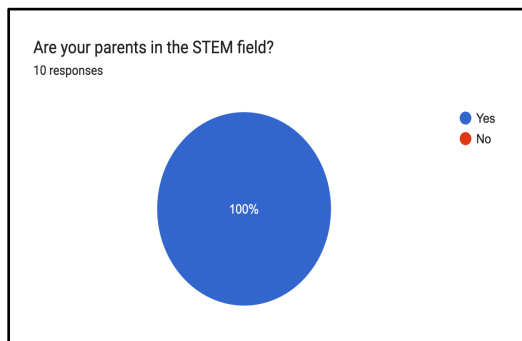


Figure 13



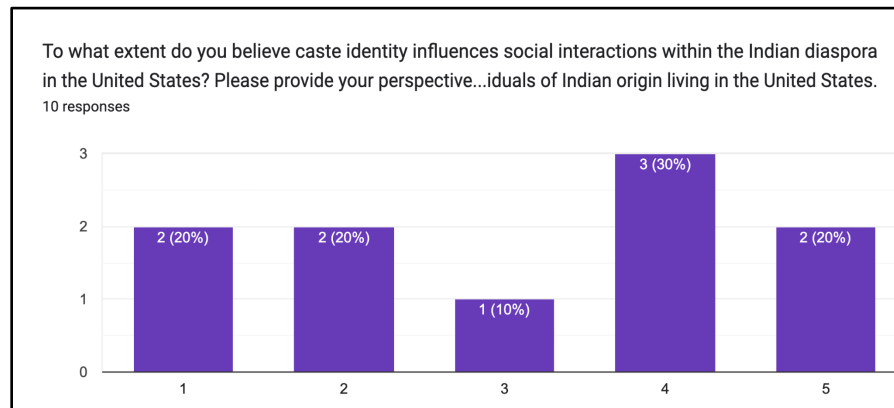


Figure 14: Where 1 = Little to None and 5 = Extreme

When respondents were asked to categorize their caste in more specific terms, 80% of them identified themselves as belonging to the upper strata, while the remaining 20% indicated otherwise, as seen in Fig 11. In Fig 14, the finding highlights the continued influence of caste dynamics, even in a new social context. It is worth noting that the respondents in this study came from families where their parents work in STEM-based industries. This observation is significant as it challenges the notion of merit and economic markers as indicative of a level playing field for the privileged group. Despite their socio-economic advantages, the respondents acknowledged the existence of caste-based differences and the impact of the caste hierarchy on social interactions. This suggests that the markers of merit and economic status alone are insufficient in eradicating caste-based disparities. Furthermore, when comparing the responses of this group to those of Group 1 respondents, a noteworthy contradiction arises. More than 60% of Group 1 respondents stated that caste did not affect their family and social interactions significantly. This contrast between the perspectives of the Indian American diaspora and those residing in India indicates that even within contemporary Indian society, caste-based practices and divisions persist. These findings underscore the complex and multifaceted nature of caste dynamics. Despite living in a

different country, the Indian diaspora in the United States remains cognizant of caste-related differences. This suggests that caste continues to shape social interactions and identities, transcending geographical boundaries. These observations further emphasize the need for continued efforts to challenge and dismantle caste-based discrimination and hierarchies. Merely focusing on merit and economic considerations is insufficient in addressing the systemic injustices rooted in caste. Achieving true social equality requires a comprehensive understanding of the complexities of caste dynamics and the implementation of inclusive policies that address both economic and social dimensions of discrimination.

### **Common Theme and Understanding**

A fundamental common theme inferred from the findings is the influence of social and cultural conditioning on individuals' thought processes, regardless of their level of education. This conditioning shapes their perspectives and interactions, including their responses to legislation and policies. Privileged groups often exhibit resistance to inclusive measures, driven by political motivations and an inherent bias that attributes their success to their caste identity. This resistance often manifests as a perception that accommodating and empowering minority groups through affirmative action gives them an unfair advantage based on an "accident of birth." This perspective becomes intrinsic to their identity and self-view, even when they interact in the new context provided by the U.S. This sustains caste-based discrimination, affecting job opportunities and housing in the U.S. Given that working in the STEM industry is a pursuit that attracts the middle class of India (Deshpande 1992) and fulfils the American Dream, it does not create an equal playing field for social interactions in the U.S. The findings suggest that education alone may not be sufficient to overcome deeply ingrained biases and structural inequalities. Additional efforts are needed to address these societal issues and foster a more inclusive and equitable environment that recognizes and values diversity while challenging discriminatory beliefs and practices.

## **Final Remarks**

The paper began with establishing the complexities and modulations that have been there to impact the present understanding of the word caste and how the practices and caste consciousness are beginning to matter in social organisation in local as well as transnational contexts. The system has become a rigid form of identity forming the kinship and structural rigidity, acting as social mobility capital.

To deal with this issue of stratification and organisation that places a group of castes with the advantages, benefits and privileges to not just acquire and accrue the knowledge capital both in the context of India and the U.S., there have been legislations to bring about affirmative action. I showcased through literature review and survey that there are challenges presented to such affirmative action, but as Pierson (2004) suggested there needs to be a feedback loop that keeps the mechanisms in place, which is why it makes sense to keep the policy of reservation in place. Various works and statistics beyond that are part of this paper, elaborate how although marginally the intended marginalized population has benefitted from the policy, it still needs to be in place as there still exists an overrepresentation of the upper caste majority in the educational institutions and academia.

When it comes to education, even those students who enter through the means of affirmative action have to face problems due to structural inequality persisting in these educational systems and not actually creating an inclusive space of growth and upward mobility according to the works of Goyal & Singh (2017) and Bagde (2019). As Thorat and Newman (2010) and Deshpande (2013) discussed there are spaces for creating fallacy-based arguments of “reverse discrimination” and “attack on merit”, Thorat and Newman along the lines of Du Bois (1903) suggest that it is not just the legislation that helps mediate the social exclusions, there need to be inclusive steps in the way

of social reforms and while education is one such way, we need to expand in the ways of holistic social inclusive practices such as intercaste marriages.

While it is evident that reservation policies are insufficient to eradicate caste-based discrimination, the argument that they are the sole reason for its persistence, even on a transnational level, remains a subject of ongoing debate.

Through an examination of the works of Roohi (2017) and Equality Labs (2018), we have observed how caste identities manifest when privilege is at stake. Even in the United States, there is opposition to explicitly ban caste-based discrimination. It is noteworthy that kinship networks rooted in caste and caste-endogamous marriages play a pivotal role in the migration of highly skilled and educated individuals to the U.S. This challenges the conventional perspective found in classical migration studies, which suggests that such groups do not rely on social capital. This observation underscores the significance of caste identity in the organization of Indian-Americans in the U.S.

In light of the functioning of organizations like TANA and the survey responses indicating a link between settlement and educational attainment in the U.S. and upper-caste status, it is clear that reservation policies alone have not led to the transcendence of caste discrimination practices across global boundaries. Rather, it is the enduring social criteria of caste that continues to underpin such discriminatory practices. Thus, we conclude that addressing the issue of caste discrimination requires a multifaceted approach, encompassing legal measures, social reforms, and an understanding of the persistence of caste identity in transnational contexts.

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