Non-Governmental Organizations and Rural Development in Andhra: Challenging or Reinforcing Social Hierarchies?

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NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT IN ANDHRA: CHALLENGING OR REINFORCING SOCIAL HIERARCHIES?

A Dissertation Presented

by

ANUSHA CHAITANYA

Submitted to the Office of Graduate Studies, University of Massachusetts Boston, In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

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NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT IN ANDHRA: CHALLENGING OR REINFORCING SOCIAL HIERARCHIES?

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ABSTRACT

NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT IN
ANDHRA: CHALLING OR REINFORCING SOCIAL HIERARCHIES?

August 2021

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This research examines how non-governmental organizations (NGOs) working on rural development in Andhra are structured to challenge or reinforce existing hierarchies in the society based on caste and gender, by focusing on NGO leadership. The right to equality as a fundamental right in the Constitution of India recognizes forms of inequality based on caste and gender. This right is significant to note because while most studies on NGOs focus on poverty as the central problem in a neo-liberal state (Dempsey, 2009; Fisher, 1997; Mercer, 2002; Tembo, 2003), they remain incomplete without considering socio-economic factors. These factors not only affect the marginalized communities but also critically shape the change agency of leadership in NGOs. This dissertation emanates from my experiences of working in the NGO sector in India and is introduced through an autoethnography of these experiences. It follows a three-paper multi-manuscript model where each paper can be read
independently while they are connected to a common research question. The first paper is a
critical historical review of civil society organizing in Andhra. It is followed by two
empirical studies of NGOs and their leadership in Andhra. These studies use an Ambedkarite
framework to critically analyze interviews of leaders as well as field observations to uncover
how hierarchies are challenged or reinforced in these spaces. The findings from this
dissertation will contribute to leadership approaches and policy changes for organizations
working on social change in the context of the historically persistent social hierarchies they
operate in. Finally, an Ambedkarite framework for doing caste and anti-caste analyses is
offered as a theoretical contribution to organization studies. While there is an emerging
interest in the study of caste, there is very little work from a critical perspective and a
surprising lack of attention to Ambedkar’s anchoring of caste analyses in history, culture, and
political philosophy.
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I would like to start by acknowledging that the land that I have been residing on while working on my dissertation is the territory of the Massachusett and their neighbors, the Wampanoag, and Nipmuc Peoples, who have stewarded this land for hundreds of generations. I pay my respects to these communities and their ancestors who have suffered repeated violations of their rights here and across Turtle Island. I’m grateful for having been able to reside on their land since 2014 while working towards this dissertation.

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This dissertation is dedicated to children everywhere who struggle against social hierarchies in their most vulnerable years.
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CHAPTER 1

PROLOGUE

Purpose of Thesis

This dissertation examines how non-governmental organizations (NGOs) working on rural development in India are structured to challenge or reinforce existing hierarchies in the society based on caste and gender, by focusing on NGO leadership. The right to equality as a fundamental right in the Constitution of India recognizes forms of inequality based on caste and gender as stated under Article 15, “The State shall not discriminate against any citizen on grounds only of religion, race, caste, sex, place of birth or any of them” (See Appendix I for full text of Article 15). This right is significant to note here because while most studies on NGOs focus on poverty as the central problem in a neo-liberal state (Dempsey, 2009; Fisher, 1997; Mercer, 2002; Tembo, 2003), they remain incomplete without considering socio-economic and cultural factors such as caste and gender. These factors not only affect the marginalized communities but also critically shape the change agency of leaders of NGOs given their positionality in a hierarchically stratified society. The presenting focus of this thesis is on the agency of leaders who are embedded in the very same hierarchies that they may be addressing through the work of their organizations. To analyze this across different NGOs, I turn to Dr. B. R. Ambedkar’s scholarship and hope that organization studies can engage more substantially with his work. Finally, I’m hoping this dissertation can inform policies for NGO leadership at the individual, organizational, and macro levels.
Motivation for the Research

Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in India are quite difficult to define given their vast variety (Kudva, 2005; S. Sen, 1999; Sheth & Sethi, 1991) and diverse work on human rights, health, education, development, livelihoods, and so on. In the Indian context, one can see NGOs as organizations that perform functions similar to those of the government without being part of the government. They are typically registered legal entities that may be funded by the state, private agencies, transnational entities such as the World Bank, international donor agencies or individual donors. They vary in political ideologies as well as religious or non-denominational orientations. NGOs also vary in size and funding, leadership, organizational structure, areas of operation, and other attributes. For the purpose of this dissertation research, I will focus on NGOs in the rural development sector working on poverty alleviation in the context of Andhra that are locally based organizations, and not arms of global NGOs, and mostly locally or governmentally funded (with a few exceptions having international donors).

In this prologue, I briefly introduce caste, elaborate on my positionality as a researcher, and use an autoethnography of my professional experience of working in NGO spaces, which helps explain my motivation for this dissertation research on NGOs and rural development in Andhra and how NGOs are challenging or reinforcing social hierarchies. Autoethnography has been used as a method by researchers to write about their experiences, to be reflective about them and analyze them in relation to the socio-cultural context in which researchers are located (Chang, 2016). Chang (2016, p. 43) notes, “Stemming from the field of anthropology, autoethnography shares the storytelling feature with other genres of self-narrative but transcends mere narration of self to engage in cultural analysis and interpretation.” Thus, while I narrate my experiences working in NGOs, I also engage in a cultural analysis and
interpretation to make sense of these experiences guided by the problematic of caste. Prior to doing so, I discuss my positionality as a researcher located within the caste hierarchy which may help make better sense of my autoethnographic analysis.

Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in general and rural development NGOs in particular are predominantly understood as being change agents in the dominant discourse of a receding welfare state and a rising neo-liberal state in India. These NGOs are often seen as working for poverty alleviation. Among the sector-wise classification of NGOs, rural development and poverty alleviation is a sector in itself and has 28,736 NGOs listed under it (NITI Aayog, 2021). I have worked for nearly a year in one such rural development NGO and interned briefly at other NGOs with similar orientation while pursuing my post-graduate studies in rural management. The hierarchical culture and the contradictions that I observed during my work at these NGOs provoked my interest in research. I initially looked for the roots of the hierarchical culture in managerialism given the managerial discourse in large donor-funded NGOs (Roberts et al., 2005) and my training in critical perspectives on organizations and management (Adler et al., 2007; Burrell & Morgan, 2019). However, having witnessed similar contradictions in a movement-based NGO without a managerial discourse, I realized the hierarchical culture had deeper roots in the caste culture of the society that has a history of a few thousand years.

A Brief Introduction to Caste

Caste is a more than three-thousand-year-old hierarchy and caste identity is ascribed at birth. Its origins can be roughly traced to 1500 BCE in the Rigveda, an important text for Brahmins who hold it sacred, and it plays an important role in their philosophy, that can be understood as Brahminism. Today, this philosophy is central to Hinduism as the large majority
of caste-oppressed people living in India have been labeled as Hindus under Brahminical rule (Aloysius, 1997; Ilaiah, 1996) that became politically powerful at various stages, most significantly during 185 BCE when Manusmriti, another important text for Brahmins, was made the rule of law (Ambedkar, 2014a, p. 271). This was a result of a political change at the time, that gave Brahmins control over a large territory to enforce this hierarchy as law (Ambedkar, 1948). Ambedkar (2014b, p. 160) further notes the hierarchal nature of caste:

“Castes form a hierarchy in which one caste is at the top and is the highest, another at the bottom and it is the lowest and in between there are castes, every one of which is at once above some caste and below some caste. The caste system is a system of gradation in which every caste except the highest and the lowest has a priority and precedence over some other caste.”

The broad classes in the caste hierarchy can be understood through visualizing a caste pyramid with Brahmins (or priests) at the top, followed by Kshatriyas (or warriors) and Vaishyas (or traders), who can together be understood as the privileged castes historically while constituting only about 5-6% of the population of India (W. Francis, 1902). At the bottom of the pyramid are Shudras who are understood as the service class such as peasants and workers, who according to Rig Veda are considered lower in status and meant to serve the top 5% of the castes at the top of the caste pyramid (Ambedkar, 1946). Outside the caste system are Dalits and Adivasis i.e. they are not part of the caste system but treated as outcastes by those part of the caste system because they historically resisted caste and Brahminical rule most militantly (Ambedkar, 1948).

Dalit broadly translates to oppressed. It is a term used for assertion that became popular with the Dalit Panther movement in Maharashtra in the 1970s. Adivasi translates to original
inhabitants and is a term that became popular through indigenous peoples’ self-determination movements. So, Shudras, Dalits and Adivasis can be understood as the oppressed castes. Today, as per the constitution of India, Dalits are known as Scheduled Castes (SC), Adivasis are known as Scheduled Tribes (ST), and most of the Shudras are classified as Other Backward Classes (OBC). Brahmins and other privileged castes are known as Other Castes (OC) or Forward Castes (FC) and are over-represented in positions of power despite constituting only about 5-6% of the population (Ambedkar, 1945; Joshi & Malghan, 2017; Pandian, 2007; S. Thorat & Attewell, 2007; S. Thorat & Sadana, 2009).

A notable feature of caste based on Ambedkar’s earliest thesis on caste is that caste is primarily maintained through endogamous marriages i.e., marriages within caste, which are enforced violently by prohibiting inter-caste marriages. One of the ways this is enforced and ordained through Brahminism is through child marriage, where children are married before their age of consent to ensure they are married to someone within a caste. And this is a practice largely prevalent within privileged castes and those who accept Brahminical supremacy, more so in rural areas. As a result of strict endogamy, which continues to this day where only about 5% of the marriages are inter-caste according to the India Human Development Survey (Desai & Vanneman, 2018), people are largely socialized within their own castes in their families and their social networks are largely based on caste. Other contemporary indicators of caste as a hierarchy include the practice of untouchability in both rural and urban areas (A. Thorat & Joshi, 2015) and the fact that crimes against Dalits keep increasing every year (Ministry of Home Affairs, 2017).

In the constitution of India, there are safeguards against this hierarchy, under Articles 15 and 16 which uphold the right to equality by the prohibition of discrimination based on
religion, race, caste, sex and place of birth and the right to equality of opportunity in public employment. This was possible largely through the efforts of Dr. B. R. Ambedkar who is the chief architect of the Indian Constitution. Despite being enshrined in the constitution, this right to equality has been constantly denied due to lack of political will and the strength of caste under the Brahminical political system.

**A Brief Introduction to Dr. Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar**

Born in 1891, Dr. Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar comes from one of the oppressed Dalit castes. He was a scholar, activist, political leader, and legislator. His positionality and lived experience of caste oppression were influential in informing his resistance against caste. Starting his higher education from the University of Mumbai, he completed multiple graduate and doctoral degrees in Columbia University and the London School of Economics across various disciplines. He is well known as the chief architect of the Indian Constitution. He constantly strived for social justice throughout his lifetime, fighting for the rights of the people most oppressed in Indian society by caste, class, gender, religion, language and region (Omvedt, 2004). In Chapters 2 and 3, I use two different frameworks distilled from Ambedkar’s work. I use the framework in Chapter 2 to unpack encounters in history, culture, and governance and the framework in Chapter 3 for organizational analysis at the individual, organizational, and macro levels. I have found that the richness in Dr. Ambedkar’s work provides multiple analytical frameworks that can be deployed by contemporary scholars to further research in organization studies, and my hope is that other scholars will look into his work more for theorizing.
Positionality of the Researcher

In this section, I elaborate on my positionality in the caste hierarchy and how that shaped my perspective while also informing my approach to this research. I may identify as a cis woman belonging to a Shudra peasant caste from North Coastal Andhra and part of the second generation in my family to have access to higher education. Shudras constitute the castes in the fourth and last class in the Brahminical graded hierarchy of castes that is arranged into four classes with Brahmins at the top and Shudras at the bottom (Ambedkar, 1946). My maternal family had caste-d and gendered experiences in their native village under Zamindari rule (an oppressive land tenure system) but found opportunities for upward class mobility as a result of my maternal grandfather’s migration to the city and subsequent employment as a dockworker in a public sector enterprise established during the colonial period in Andhra. My caste has varied status as an intermediate Shudra caste with OBC or non-OBC status across different regions of Andhra while generally aspiring to a social status similar to dominant land-owning Shudra castes in Andhra since the early 20th century. The 1901 census of India classifies my caste as a cultivating caste that comes under the grouping of “Shudras who habitually employ Brahmins as purohits and whose touch is considered slightly polluting” (W. Francis, 1902, p. 137). Purohits are Brahmin priests who preside over Hindu ceremonies and rituals such as marriage, birth, and death. With rising consciousness among the Non-Brahmin Shudra castes from the Non-Brahmin Movement [movement against the supremacy of Brahmins by Non-Brahmin castes, particularly in then Madras presidency] in the early 20th century, some of the land-owning Shudra castes tried to raise their own social status in relation to Brahmins (A. Satyanarayana, 2005). However, with upward class mobility, they asserted their new social status through the oppression of people from castes lower than them in the
Brahminical caste hierarchy even though Shudras as a group themselves occupy a low ritual status in this caste hierarchy.

Shudras are considered to belong to the fourth and last rung of the Brahminical chaturvarna system of stratification (Ambedkar, 1946). Chaturvarna translates to four varnas or classes. It is a graded hierarchical system ordained by Manu in Manusmriti (Ambedkar, 1946). Politically conscious Shudras have resisted this Shudra identity imposed by Brahmins and have claimed the Non-Brahmin/Dravidian identity differentiating themselves entirely from Hinduism (Ilaiah, 1996) and from Brahmins viewed as Aryan-settlers (Periyar, 2005; Phule, 1873). Some of the landowning Shudra castes that had been dominant in the Madras Presidency, called themselves Sat-Shudras (or good Shudras who enjoyed a higher social status compared to lower Shudra castes) (W. Francis, 1902, p. 137). This status of Sat-Shudras was originally conferred by Brahmins on some of the Shudra rulers in south India as a result of their patronage of Brahmin priests, as part of the process of the spread of caste in early medieval Andhra (W. Francis, 1902, p. 137). Shudras in general gained a share in education and employment in British India as a result of the Non-Brahmin Movement of the early 20th century (Pandian, 2007) with Non-Brahmin women gaining access to education at a much lower and slower rate than men (Vulli, 2013). The Non-Brahmin Movement claimed to represent the interests of all non-Brahmin castes, yet empowered some of the dominant Shudra landowning castes to the relative neglect of the Depressed Classes better known as Dalits or Scheduled Castes today, especially in Andhra (Jangam, 2005). Depressed Classes is a term used in pre-independent India in the Census of India reports since 1910 to denote those known as Dalits or Scheduled Castes today.
The extent of the anti-caste ideology of this Non-Brahmin Movement as against improving the status of certain dominant Shudra castes in comparison to the Brahmins is much debated (Jangam, 2005). In the last few decades, some of the dominant Non-Brahmin Shudra castes in Coastal Andhra Pradesh, including the caste I belong to, have taken part in and perpetuated caste discrimination and atrocities against Dalits or Scheduled Castes (See Karamchedu massacre in 1985, Tsunduru massacre in 1991 and Lakshmipeta massacre in 2012) in the post-British Brahmanical India. This is especially true in regions where the dominant Shudra castes have attained political power, own large tracts of irrigated land and have benefited from the Green Revolution (Srinivasulu, 2002). These are also the regions where Dalit-assertion for equality was significant with access to education (Srinivasulu, 2002).

Scholars have argued that there has been a rise in caste-based atrocities in rural areas of Coastal Andhra Pradesh where development benefits were mostly accrued by the privileged Shudra castes (Srinivasulu, 2002). Women have been victims and perpetrators in such atrocities based on their caste positionality, wherein victims have been at the receiving end of gendered caste violence.

**Autoethnography of Work-Experiences at NGOs**

My aspiration to work in the NGO sector stemmed from the belief that NGOs were spaces that nurtured values of egalitarianism as they worked towards social change. However, I noticed hierarchical culture alongside a mission for social change during my work at different NGOs. Some signs of hierarchical culture in NGOs I worked at were how different people in the organizational hierarchy of the NGO had, beyond their functional roles, different privileges, the ways some were considered superior to others as a rule, the ways different people addressed each other, where different people sat in the office, who asked permission
from whom to enter a space, the vehicles one got to use, the differential access to information, the way one’s interpretations were privileged over those of others, who had the loudest voice and took the maximum space in meetings, who decided the agenda, the authority to be called to one’s room, who stood up first, who sat last, who waited for whom, who wore what, who decided when, who paid for the tea and who served the tea, and many more hierarchically ordered meanings. Their organizational hierarchies seemed to be congruent with existing social hierarchies based on caste, gender, class, age, regional background, religion and so on thus indicating embeddedness according to the embedded inter-group relations theory (Nkomo & Stewart, 2006). For example, the leader of an NGO was a caste-privileged cis man while the community organizers who are at the bottom of the organizational hierarchy were Adivasi women.

I gained employment in one such NGO after my training in rural management. The roles performed by different social groups in the hierarchy of the NGO and the ways in which the organization privileged professionals over community leaders and organizers seemed contradictory to the mission of social change. Adivasi community organizers in the NGO were non-contractual and paid on an hourly basis, and their earnings were lower than any of the NGO staff. There were also many fieldworkers among the NGO staff with several years of experience but limited opportunities for upward mobility within the NGO without a professional degree while they performed the bulk of the NGO’s work. On the other hand, those with a professional degree were privileged in the hierarchy and had faster growth opportunities. This hierarchical tension was quite palpable among the NGO staff and community members. I saw myself privileged in the NGO’s hierarchy by my professional training while I was among the few women represented among the professional staff members.
My training in critical perspectives in management initially made me view this as a problem of managerialism (Roberts et al., 2005) in the NGO sector.

I then left the NGO to volunteer for a social movement-based NGO for Adivasi people’s land rights. In comparison to my previous experience, this NGO had no formal hierarchy as such but was led by two leaders from caste privileged backgrounds who were from outside the region and had moved to the area a couple of decades ago. Here, I bore witness to an incident of verbal abuse by one of the two leaders against a community activist. A paternalistic attitude was used to legitimize this as acceptable practice by viewing the caste-privileged male leader as a fatherly figure. The same leader contested elections based on his leadership in the movement for over a couple of decades. This leader’s decision to contest elections was supported by several caste-privileged supporters of the movement who contributed to his campaign with time and resources. However, there was an explicit stand earlier by the same leaders and supporters of the movement to not contest elections, based on which they refused to support the campaign of an Adivasi leader from the movement who contested elections in the past. Thus, here too, the leadership or decision-making positions were occupied by caste privileged people from outside the indigenous community and the region.

As I grew up in a Shudra family that was not politically conscious around caste, it was only through later exposure to the Ambedkarite movement and Dr.B.R.Ambedkar’s scholarship, particularly through anti-caste social media platforms and activist communities that I developed greater political awareness around my positionality as well as the hierarchical caste culture at large that was not only prevalent in the broader society but also in organizations with a progressive mission towards social change. This dissertation research is thus informed
by developing consciousness of my positionality at the intersections of various social hierarchies that I am part of and my experiences in the NGO sector. Below, I present a summary of the motivation and core findings of the three research papers in the dissertation.

**Motivation and Core Findings of the Research Papers**

This dissertation thesis follows a three paper multi-manuscript model, where each of the three papers constitutes an independent research paper while contributing to the main research question in different ways. The first paper, Chapter 2, provides a historical backdrop of civil society organizing in modern Andhra and how caste and gender hierarchies have been negotiated in different civil society spaces through this history. This history helps situate the ways in which NGOs operate in contemporary times. This is followed by two qualitative empirical studies in Chapters 3 and 4 based on analysis of primary data that paint a more contemporary picture of NGOs in Andhra. This primary data was collected with IRB approved protocol (See Appendix II). Chapter 2 is based on analysis of primary data from one of the most powerful NGOs in the district led by caste-privileged leaders. Chapter 3 is based on the analysis of primary data collected from four different NGOs led by women from different castes to help compare and contrast women’s leadership across caste.

**Chapter 2: History of Civil Society Organizing in Modern Andhra and the Negotiation of Caste and Gender Hierarchies**

To understand how NGOs in rural development are challenging or reinforcing hierarchies, it is helpful to first explore the historical context of civil society organizing in the region where an NGO is located and how caste and gender hierarchies have been dealt with through this history. In this study, I look at the modern history of civil society in Andhra from late colonial times to more recent history, roughly from early 20th century to
early 21st century i.e., from 1900 to 2000, I locate the major ideological streams of organizing in civil society in Andhra and how caste and gender hierarchies have been negotiated in these spaces. I find that modern Andhra had seen a variety of political changes amidst which vibrant civil society organizing had taken place during this period. This includes the spread of education, religious conversions, formation of caste associations, and social movements across the spectrum, including Marxist-Leninist, Ambedkarite, atheist-rationalist, and Hindu nationalist movements.

Across these movements, there are patterns of caste and gender hierarchies being contested and reinforced at various times amidst political changes that presented different kinds of opportunities for the oppressed to organize and resist. Successful contestations have been possible through inclusive democratic organizing with a representative leadership. Simultaneously, there have been attempts from the top of the hierarchy to start counter-movements, appropriate and dilute existing radical movements. Despite this, new independent movements have emerged and the oppressed continue to use all the spaces available to organize themselves towards a fight for an egalitarian society.

This history of civil society in Andhra helps better understand and appreciate the current NGO sector in Andhra where the different kinds of NGOs draw inspiration from the models of organizing from the movements of the recent past. Notably, we see NGOs that are representative and led by the caste-oppressed that are able to work by building solidarity through networking with similar like-minded NGOs, trade unions, social movements, and coalitions at local, state, national, and international levels. They continue to do so despite the forces at various institutional levels that are not in their favor. On the other hand, there are NGOs led by caste-privileged leaders working predominantly with
caste-oppressed communities without their representation in leadership, generally inspired by M.K. Gandhi’s trusteeship model, that have been issue focused and are well-recognized, given their proximity to the Indian state. While these spaces are not radical, history indicates that they have not stopped the oppressed from being able to use these spaces to organize and come together to eventually build independent radical movements. A major gap in existing literature is the negligible focus on leadership of caste-oppressed women in civil society organizing in Andhra. Future research in this area can contribute much to our understanding of how women have resisted Brahminical patriarchy in civil society, including spaces such as NGOs, social movements, and trade unions.

**Chapter 3: “All the Fingers of a Hand are not Equal;” Understanding “Exclusionary Inclusion” through an Ambedkarite Analysis of Brahminism in Organizations (Co-Authorled with Maureen Scully)**

This study contributes to emerging work on critical inclusion by examining encounters with exclusion. We reveal “exclusionary inclusion” through the distinctive experiences of South Asian organizational constituents in a South Asian context and explore what an Ambedkarite framework for understanding exclusion can add to organization studies. We probe subtle and overt signals of Brahminism in organizational spaces, prompted by everyday personal encounters in a prominent locally based NGO during field work in India. The title, “All the Fingers of a Hand are not Equal” is a quote from a senior Brahmin leader’s interview in which he offers a justification for inequality as natural by saying that the five fingers of a hand are not equally sized, they are naturally unequal but are all needed for being functional. He uses this as a metaphor for fingers representing different castes and that they are not equal, but everyone should be okay with their place and perform their assigned function. We use this
metaphor to understand exclusionary inclusion through an Ambedkarite analysis of Brahminism in organizations by unpacking encounters.

The concept of encounter comes from Goffman’s (1969) exploration of how individuals enact an identity in social spaces in ways that make them self-conscious of who they are and how they are greeted in that space. Encounters are sharply experienced moments that can reveal a hidden social identity and perhaps educate others about it in a workplace context (Creed & Scully, 2011). Encounters highlight the importance of “everyday practices woven into the fabric of organizations” (Holvino, 2003, p. 129), as access points to systemic levels. Attending to encounters has created a methodology of “being on the lookout” (McCoy, 2012, p. 763) or bearing witness to problematic moments during qualitative research. Encounters thus provide critical moments to interrogate caste in organizational spaces, which can be traced to the practice of caste in history, culture, and governance as informed by the scholarship and praxis of Dr. Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar. Ambedkar’s framework illuminates the cultural roots of everyday encounters of caste, the historic perpetuation of spaces that exclude “others,” and the need for governance that addresses exclusion. These concepts can inform emerging critical inclusion studies.

**Chapter 4: Caste and Women’s Leadership in Non-Governmental Organizations in Andhra**

In this study, I use an Ambedkarite analysis to unpack the narratives of women as founders and leaders of non-governmental organizations to critically analyze how lived experience, reflection on leader’s positionality, leader’s analysis of social hierarchies, and access to resources play a role in how women leaders envision their organizations. I adopt an Ambedkarite framework, focusing on caste and gender, to pursue an intertextual analysis of
interviews of the leaders of four NGOs located in the same district in south India, who come from diverse socio-economic backgrounds. This study can help appreciate, firstly, at an individual level, how leaders who are part of a hierarchical society are motivated to initiate change through the creation of an organization; secondly, at an organizational level, how social hierarchies are understood and addressed by NGO leaders within their organizations through their vision as leaders, and what shapes this understanding and their organizational policies; and thirdly, how NGOs’ access to resources facilitates or hinders the emergence of leaders and organizations that can challenge social hierarchies.

The dissertation thesis closes with a brief epilogue where I discuss the limitations of scope, other minority voices in the field, possibilities for future research, and finally, my reflections looking back.

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Appendix I: Right to Equality as a Fundamental Right in the Constitution of India

(Articles 15-16)

THE CONSTITUTION OF INDIA

15. (1) The State shall not discriminate against any citizen on grounds only of religion, race, caste, sex, place of birth or any of them.

(2) No citizen shall, on grounds only of religion, race, caste, sex, place of birth or any of them, be subject to any disability, liability, restriction or condition with regard to—

(a) access to shops, public restaurants, hotels and places of public entertainment; or

(b) the use of wells, tanks, bathing ghats, roads and places of public resort maintained wholly or partly out of State funds or dedicated to the use of the general public.

(3) Nothing in this article shall prevent the State from making any special provision for women and children.

1[(4) Nothing in this article or in clause (2) of article 29 shall prevent the State from making any special provision for the advancement of any socially and educationally backward classes of citizens or for the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes.]

2[(5) Nothing in this article or in sub-clause (g) of clause (1) of article 19 shall prevent the State from making any special provision, by law, for the advancement of any socially and educationally backward classes of citizens or for the Scheduled Castes or the Scheduled Tribes in so far as such special provisions relate to their admission to educational institutions including private educational institutions, whether aided or unaided by the State, other than the minority educational institutions referred to in clause (1) of article 30.]

16. (1) There shall be equality of opportunity for all citizens in matters relating to employment or appointment to any office under the State.

(2) No citizen shall, on grounds only of religion, race, caste, sex, descent, place of birth, residence or any of them, be ineligible for, or discriminated against in respect of, any employment or office under the State.

(3) Nothing in this article shall prevent Parliament from making any law prescribing, in regard to a class or classes of employment or appointment to an office

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1Added by the Constitution (First Amendment) Act, 1951, s. 2.
2Ins. by the Constitution (Ninety-third Amendment) Act, 2005, s. 2, (w.e.f. 20-1-2006).
(Part III. — Fundamental Rights. — Arts. 16-18.)

1[Under the Government of, or any local or other authority within, a State or Union territory, any requirement as to residence within that State or Union territory] prior to such employment or appointment.

(4) Nothing in this article shall prevent the State from making any provision for the reservation of appointments or posts in favour of any backward class of citizens which, in the opinion of the State, is not adequately represented in the services under the State.

2[(4A) Nothing in this article shall prevent the State from making any provision for reservation in matters of promotion, with consequential seniority, to any class or classes of posts in the services under the State in favour of the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes which, in the opinion of the State, are not adequately represented in the services under the State.]

3[(4B) Nothing in this article shall prevent the State from considering any unfilled vacancies of a year which are reserved for being filled up in that year in accordance with any provision for reservation made under clause (4) or clause (4A) as a separate class of vacancies to be filled up in any succeeding year or years and such class of vacancies shall not be considered together with the vacancies of the year in which they are being filled up for determining the ceiling of fifty per cent. reservation on total number of vacancies of that year.]

(5) Nothing in this article shall affect the operation of any law which provides that the incumbent of an office in connection with the affairs of any religious or denominational institution or any member of the governing body thereof shall be a person professing a particular religion or belonging to a particular denomination.

17. “Untouchability” is abolished and its practice in any form is forbidden. The enforcement of any disability arising out of “Untouchability” shall be an offence punishable in accordance with law.

18. (1) No title, not being a military or academic distinction, shall be conferred by the State.

(2) No citizen of India shall accept any title from any foreign State.

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1Subs. by the Constitution (Seventh Amendment) Act, 1956, s. 29 and Sch., for “under any State specified in the First Schedule or any local or other authority within its territory, any requirement as to residence within that State”.

2Ins. by the Constitution (Seventy-seventh Amendment) Act, 1995, s. 2.

3Subs. by the Constitution (Eighty-fifth Amendment) Act, 2001, s. 2, for certain words (w.e.f. 17-6-1995).

4Ins. by the Constitution (Eighty-first Amendment) Act, 2000, s. 2 (w.e.f. 9-6-2000).
Appendix II: IRB Approval

March 16, 2020

Anusha Satturu
College of Management

IRB Study Number: 2017094
Title of Protocol: Non-governmental Organizations and Rural Development in India: Challenging or Reinforcing Hierarchies?
(Office of Global Programs, University of Massachusetts)
Type of Review: Expedited
IRB Approval Date: 3/16/2020
IRB Expiration Date: 3/15/2021

The continuing review dated 3/2/2020 of this project has been reviewed and approved by the University of Massachusetts Boston IRB, Assurance # FWA00004634.

As Principal Investigator you are responsible for the following:
1. Following the requirements listed in the INVESTIGATOR MANUAL (HRP-103).
2. Submission in writing of any and all changes to this project [e.g., protocol, recruitment materials, consent form, staff changes, etc.] to the IRB for review and approval prior to initiation of the change(s).
3. Reporting any of the information items listed on the last page of the Reportable New Information form (including unanticipated problems involving risks to subjects or others or non-compliance with the regulations or the requirements or determinations of the IRB) within five business days.
4. Use of only IRB approved copies of the consent form(s), questionnaire(s), letter(s), advertisement(s), etc. in your research. It is no longer necessary to have recruitment materials or consent forms stamped by the IRB.
5. Ensuring that all study staff who are engaged in research involving human subjects have a current completed human research (CITI) training prior to conducting and for the duration of their engagement in this project.
6. Submission of a continuation prior to the IRB expiration date.
7. Submission of a final report upon completion of this project.

The IRB can terminate projects that are not in compliance with these requirements. The study is subject to continuing review on or before 3/15/2021, unless closed before that date. You are to submit a completed continuing review form or final report to request continuing approval or closure at least 36 days before the expiration date.

Contact (617-287-5374) or email (irb@umb.edu) if you have any questions or require further information.

Sincerely,

Sharon Wang, CIP, CIM
Senior IRB Administrator
CHAPTER 2
HISTORY OF CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZING IN MODERN ANDHRA AND THE NEGOTIATION OF CASTE AND GENDER HIERARCHIES

Introduction

To understand how NGOs in rural development are challenging or reinforcing hierarchies, it is helpful to explore the historical context of civil society organizing in the region where an NGO is located and how caste and gender hierarchies have been dealt with through this history. In this study, I look at the modern history of civil society in Andhra from late colonial times to more recent history, roughly from early 20th century to early 21st century, to understand the major ideological streams of organizing in civil society in Andhra and how caste and gender hierarchies have been negotiated in these spaces. Briefly, I analyze the negotiation of caste and gender hierarchies in modern Andhra in the late stages of colonialism and under the post-colonial Indian state in politics, in new social spaces such as schools and churches established through Christian missionaries, in social movements including those that were anti-caste, leftist, atheist, and Hindu nationalist.

I look at how these spaces were organized to reinforce or challenge caste and gender hierarchies through their leadership and discourse around caste and gender. Broadly, these different kinds of civil society spaces that have historically left a mark can be understood across different dimensions, from those that are constituted exclusively or mostly by a single caste or a few castes as against those that are multi-caste and have membership that is more representative of the wider population of the region. I then look at the emergence of voluntary organizations and the NGO sector in India and in Andhra, the different forces from outside the
region, particularly the Indian state, to examine how these forces impact the agency of NGOs in Andhra to challenge or reinforce caste and gender hierarchies. Finally, I analyze the implications of the historical precedents that these streams of organizing have set for contemporary NGOs in Andhra alongside the macro forces that impact NGOs.

The sources of the history of civil society organizing in modern Andhra for this study have been gathered by looking for studies that have discussed caste and/or gender in adequate depth to provide insight into the positionality of leaders, their discourse around caste and gender and how these hierarchies were negotiated in these spaces. The period of study of this history is roughly from the early 20th century to early 21st century i.e., from around 1900 to 2000. The literature is reviewed from a critical perspective around caste and gender hierarchies without going deep into each of the civil society spaces discussed. I thus present a broad overview of the civil society history of Andhra. Here, Andhra has been used interchangeably with Andhra Pradesh. There have been a few changes in the last century in the nomenclature and geographical constitution of what is understood as Andhra. Prior to 1947, under colonial rule, Andhra was part of the Madras Presidency. Under the Indian state, Andhra Pradesh was constituted as a separate linguistic state of the region with Telugu speaking people in 1953. In 2014, the Telangana region, which was until then part of the Andhra Pradesh state, formed into a separate state.

In the following sections, I broadly categorize civil society organizing across two periods, namely late colonial and postcolonial Andhra. I discuss the role of Christian missionaries, the spread of education, religious conversions, migration from rural to urban areas and overseas, formation of caste associations and social movements of varying ideologies ranging from Marxist-Leninist, anti-caste, atheist-rationalist, and Hindu nationalist
movements. I then discuss the emergence of the NGO sector in India and Andhra. Finally, I close with a discussion of the implications of the historical precedents in civil society organizing for NGOs in Andhra.

Civil Society Organizing in Late Colonial Andhra

Colonialism and Caste in Politics

The impact of colonialism on caste in India needs to be understood as an interaction between two historically oppressive forces with caste predating colonialism by a few thousand years in the Indian sub-continent. The footprint that colonialism left through this interaction with caste is summarized by Chinnaiah Jangam (2016, p. 25) as follows:

“The colonial experience in India, confronting the pre-existing caste system, did nothing more than create a peculiar order that was neither feudal nor capitalist in its manifestation. What this deformed system did, instead, was to assimilate the privileged castes into the ruling structure, while simultaneously unleashing multiple forms of oppression on marginalized sections of the population in India.”

The assimilation of privileged castes, particularly, the Brahmins, into the ruling class, ensued through the nationalist Congress movement that was predominantly led by and represented the interests of Brahmins to secure political power and nationhood independent of British colonial rule and constantly resisted any demands for social reform and communal representation by Non-Brahmins and women in the early twentieth century (Aloysius, 1997; Ambedkar, 1945; Jangam, 2016; Pandian, 2007). The political agenda of securing a transfer of power from the British colonizers to Brahmins took center stage in the Congress nationalist movement. The spirit of this sentiment runs as an undercurrent in continuing current imagination of nationalism and is sustained by an ideological discourse propagated by then
Congress leaders, most significantly M.K. Gandhi. Non-Brahmins and women who challenged this agenda of transfer of power to Brahmins as representatives of all Indians were often dubbed as too westernized or divisive or anti-national (Ambedkar, 1945, 2014e; Pandian, 2007).

The colonial period allowed Brahmins a primary advantage in education and employment, positions in the bureaucracy, legislature and judiciary, and ultimately acceptance of their claims to power through the political mobilization of the Indian National Congress at a national level. Exclusive Brahmin representation in these spaces rendered them equivalent to an Aagraharam, an exclusive Brahmin enclave, as referred to them by the Non-Brahmin Justice Party in then Madras Presidency (Pandian, 2007). There was little confusion if any among the majority caste-oppressed population at the time as to whose interests the Congress party represented. In Andhra, the main supporters of the Congress party at the time were the landowning castes while the caste-oppressed and non-Hindu communities, including Christian and Muslim communities, took no interest in the Congress mobilization. For instance, in Andhra, during the Quit India movement in 1942 against the British rule led by M.K. Gandhi, Satyanarayana (2007, p. 179) highlights, “in many cases the attack on government properties was organized by the Hindu upper caste leaders. The poor and lower castes almost kept aloof from such activities.” Wherever they did participate in the anti-imperialist movement led by Congress was where their interests against the Zamindars (landlords in an oppressive land tenure system at the time) or other economic interests were promised to be addressed through some sections of the Congress such as the Congress Socialist Party or those leaning towards the left within the Congress. These entities, however, did not have much leverage against the dominant interests represented by the Congress in alignment with the Zamindars and
moneylenders, who supported Congress to protect their own interests (Satyanarayana, 2007). However, the opportunities for education and employment during the colonial period, particularly in the public sector, even though not equally accessible to the caste-oppressed majority, did provide avenues for social mobility against caste hierarchy that did not exist earlier within the feudal Brahminical hierarchical economy. See, for instance, Y. B. Satyanarayana’s (2013) narrative of the intergenerational impact of employment in the railways as a catalyst for social mobility. The public spaces of education and employment also allowed space for social interaction of people across castes in new ways though the hierarchical caste culture persisted and was also reproduced in new ways (Subramanian, 2019).

**Christian Missionaries, Church, and Schools in Andhra**

It is notable that while Christian missionaries arrived in Andhra by the 1840s (Sunkesula, 2016) and started churches and schools open to all castes in principle, they were unable to prevent the prejudice of the privileged castes and the practice of caste based segregation and untouchability in these churches and schools (Jangam, 2005, 2017). As a backlash against schools run by Christian missionaries, Zamindars in some areas in Andhra sponsored schools that excluded the caste-oppressed and particularly Dalits (Jangam, 2017). Caste based exclusion was practiced even in separate schools for girls that were started by Zamindars, that were reserved only for women from *dvija* [twice-born] castes. However, introduction of colonial education in Andhra, predominantly through Christian missionaries, helped break the monopoly of Brahmins on education and the denial of education to women and caste-oppressed people by opening access to education to all castes (Jangam, 2017; Vulli, 2013).
In order to make these spaces inclusive, interventions were needed by the caste oppressed through their resistance and leadership, for instance, through multi-caste churches and women’s leadership in the church (Sunkesula, 2016; Taneti, 2012). Access to education among Non-Brahmin men and Brahmin women spread at a higher rate during this time, while among Dalits and Non-Brahmin women, it rose at a much slower pace (Vulli, 2013). While Non-Brahmins were just gaining access to education in rural India, Brahmins had an advantage of earlier access to English literacy (Harrison, 1956) that allowed them to occupy central positions of power at the state and national level as legislators, judges and bureaucrats (Pandian, 2007).

The spaces in church and schools with the leadership of caste-oppressed people, including women’s leadership, then opened up opportunities to negotiate and address inter-caste trauma and hurt passed on intergenerationally over thousands of years (Sunkesula, 2016). Such spaces further facilitated possibilities for inter-caste marriages which are otherwise gravely punished and actively discouraged in caste Hindu society at large (Sunkesula, 2016). It is in response to the growing popularity of Christian missionaries and reforms made possible through them via church and schools that some Brahmin men began taking up social reforms within the Hindu reformist agenda through organizations such as the Brahma Samaj and Arya Samaj that aimed at a reformed Hindu identity in preparation for and to legitimize a Brahminical nation by labeling the vast majority of people as Hindus (Aloysius, 1997; Ilaiah, 1996).

**Left Movement in Andhra**

As relates to the distribution of power through the ownership of land in Andhra in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century, there were Agraharams that were
sole Brahmin enclaves, while also some of the Zamindars in Andhra in pre-colonial and colonial times belonged to Non-Brahmin castes and had been Zamindars or Poligars with military powers prior to colonialism under the Qutubshahi and Asafjahi regimes (A. Satyanarayana, 2007). These Zamindars lost their military power as a result of colonialism but retained coercive control over the peasantry in their estates through their control over land and collection of rent. The colonial regime, in its own interest, supported the Zamindars’ powers over their estates while setting limits. This allowed space for the negotiation of power between the Zamindars and the tenant farmers as a result of the legislations around land and tenancy during this time. This colonial legislation allowed tenants some rights of negotiating with the Zamindars against their exploitative practices. Anti-Zamindar mobilization was led by a section of Non-Brahmin middle peasantry, with substantial landholdings under tenancy, hoping to take advantage of commercial agriculture in the colonial market. This section of Non-Brahmin middle peasantry however continued to use their positionality of relative privilege to subordinate the interests of sub-tenants, belonging to the most caste-oppressed sections and exploited their agricultural labor. There was no legislation to check the abuse of power of this Non-Brahmin middle peasantry over the most caste-oppressed sections. Hence, anti-Zamindar agitations during this time were able to redistribute power between the Zamindars and Non-Brahmin middle peasantry while the interests of the most caste-oppressed sections were either not represented or subordinated to the interests of the Non-Brahmin middle peasantry (A. Satyanarayana, 2007). Later communist organizing after the abolition of Zamindari system, continued to problematize landlordism and included the issues concerning landless agricultural workers without however recognizing caste as a foundation for their
exploitation (Omvedt, 2014). This follows recognized patterns in Marxist movements elsewhere of denying historical basis of social stratification and inequality based on race and gender for instance and instead seeing class as the primary contradiction to the neglect or invisibilization of social identities.

A noteworthy point is that the leadership in the left movement, predominantly constituted by Non-Brahmin peasantry, reinforced the subordination of the sections below them in the caste hierarchy whose subordination and exploitation they benefited from while challenging the power of those above them in the hierarchy that subordinated their own interests. This pattern is evident in other types of mobilizations as well, such as the nationalist anti-colonial movement, that consolidated the interests of the Brahmins against the colonial regime while maintaining and reinforcing the subordination of all the Non-Brahmin caste-oppressed sections including women. As Satyanarayana (2007) notes, this is a characteristic feature of social movements wherein mobilization was against a common enemy and rhetorically claimed to represent all subordinated sections while primarily fighting for the caste and class interests of the leadership and expecting the subordinated sections to accept their subordinate status even in the organizational process.

There was little if any organizational space for the expression of the interests of the marginalized sections to be represented or have an equal voice or to gain upward mobility within the movement to be represented in decision making roles, as noted by Satyaranarana (2007, p. 145) when he says, “the whole political activities were rigidly controlled by the top” which is a feature of caste hierarchical culture prevalent in the society and manifests in organizing spaces as well. For instance, Satyanarayana (2007, p. 146) analyzes the ideology and positionality of N.G. Ranga, a Non-Brahmin leader from the Kamma caste,
in the anti-Zamindar movement in Andhra, whose deployment of “Gandhism, Fabian Socialism and Marxism”, reflected his caste and class interests, to be consolidated within the hierarchy of the Brahmin nation, through his absorption into the Congress party and hence was limited in scope without space for the liberation of the most caste oppressed sections. To his credit however, the organizing at different levels as part of the communist movement helped bring together agricultural workers.

While more radical and militant communism emerged through the leadership of other Non-Brahmin communist leaders besides Ranga, they continued to not recognize caste as a foundation for the economic exploitation of landless workers. On similar lines, Ilaiyah (2021, p. 65) shares “Though the communist parties have had Shudra [Non-Brahmin] leaders like Puchalapalli Sundarayya and Chandra Rajeswara Rao, they were never caste conscious. They also did not train and promote Shudra/OBC young leaders who could grapple with the problems of caste and class and lead a national campaign. Hence, the communist parties came under the grip of Brahminic forces.” This indicates the deep-rooted and normalized nature of caste hierarchy that plays a strong role in intra-caste solidarity and inter-caste apathy in a hierarchical manner. This plays out even in progressive spaces that are organized to work towards social change, especially when led by those from caste-privileged sections. It also indicates the limitations in the movement’s organizing where it does not challenge the caste hierarchy while furthering the interests of certain sections within the hierarchy. Thus, while ideologically motivated by anti-landlordism, this movement set a precedent for negotiation of power within the caste hierarchy without challenging it in its entirety.
Anti-Caste Movement in Andhra

The movement against caste in modern Andhra during colonial times around 1900-1950 included separate movements led by Non-Brahmins and Dalits (Jangam, 2017), who challenged it from their own positionalities and against the caste discrimination they suffered based on their positionality in the caste hierarchy. The middle classes among Non-Brahmins and Dalits who started gaining access to education during the colonial period, started raising awareness among their own castes and women through the formation of caste associations (A. Satyanarayana, 2005). In the political sphere, Justice Party, a Non-Brahmin political party emerged during this time in Madras Presidency and had Tamil and Telugu members. It most significantly fought for communal representation of Non-Brahmins in colonial education and employment by challenging the monopoly of Brahmins in these spheres (Pandian, 2007). In Andhra, many of the Justice Party leaders were Non-Brahmin Zamindars, who experienced caste discrimination from Brahmins in spite of their privileged Zamindari status, which motivated them to come together (Jangam, 2017). However, as Zamindars, they were exploiting large sections of the Non-Brahmins, Dalits and women, and it was not in their interest to dismantle the entire caste and gender hierarchy (Ramaswamy, 1978). Further, there seemed to be no space or leadership within Justice Party to negotiate these contradictions. This is in contrast to the anti-caste movement in the Tamil region, also part of the Madras Presidency during the colonial period, where the Dravidian movement provided space for Non-Brahmins and Dalits from different castes to come together under E.V.Ramasami Periyar’s leadership, where caste
oppression by Non-Brahmin Shudras against Dalits alongside Brahminical patriarchy were challenged as part of the movement, at least in its early stages.

Thus, the anti-caste movement with Dalit leadership developed independently in Andhra around this same time in the early twentieth century. Notably, it gave rise to the assertion of an Adi-Andhra identity that recognized Dalits as the original inhabitants of Andhra (Jangam, 2017; Omvedt, 2014). Some of the Dalit leaders of this movement included Jala Rangaswamy, Kusuma Dharmanna, Sundru Venkaiah and Bhagyareddy Verma, who organized annual conferences in several districts of Andhra (Jangam, 2017). The success of this movement, Omvedt (2014, p. 108) notes, is in the increasing number of Dalits who identified as Adi-Andhra in the 1931 Census.

Jangam (2017, p. 111) points out an interesting phenomenon in the separate anti-caste movements of Non-Brahmins and Dalits in Andhra, wherein some of the Dalit leaders emerged by using spaces promoted by the Hindu reformist agenda led by Brahmins. This, he explains, needs to be seen as a result of the alienation of Dalits from the Non-Brahmin movement led by landowning Non-Brahmin leaders and instead finding space in the Brahmin-led reformist spaces as Brahmins were not their immediate oppressors in the caste hierarchy in Andhra. While the Brahmin reformers did not have a radical anti-caste vision, they were increasingly becoming conscious of the popularity of Christian missionaries and conversion of caste-oppressed people to Christianity. In this context, the Dalit leaders who took up organizing through these spaces significantly contributed to the anti-caste movement in Andhra in the late colonial period from 1900 to 1950 (Jangam, 2005).

Another interesting phenomenon during the colonial period that helped further the anti-caste movement was migration for work across the Indian Ocean, notably to colonial
Burma and Malaysia, of Dalits and Shudras, which created some space for the rigidity of caste to ease overseas. This happened through the new scope for taking up work outside one’s caste-based occupation, for earning better wages, social mobility, and for conversion to religions such as Buddhism. Secondly, Dalit diaspora upon their return challenged the caste hierarchy and supported the growth of anti-caste movement in Andhra (Jangam, 2017; A. Satyanarayana, 2001, 2006).

**Atheist Movement in Andhra**

Atheism in India can be traced back to ancient times of Buddha, Charvaka and Lokayat traditions that integrated atheism with social justice, that also found prevalence in Andhra at various times in ancient and medieval history (Quack, 2012; B. S. L. H. Rao, 1969, 1995). This history resonates among those who are drawn to atheism in Andhra. In the late colonial period, there were concurrent atheist/rationalist movements in the Telugu and Tamil regions, predominantly against socially oppressive Brahminism as religion and culture. However, the Telugu and Tamil regions had different leadership with different approaches to caste. The atheist movement in the Tamil region arose from the anti-caste Dravidian movement and was headed by Non-Brahmin leaders like E. V. Ramasamy Periyar. In contrast, the atheist movement in Andhra arose from Hindu reformist trends led by Brahmin reformers in Arya Samaj and Brahmo Samaj such as K. Veeresalingam Pantulu. This movement in Andhra seems to have paid attention to caste in their programs such as in the promotion of inter-caste marriages and inter-caste dining (Quack, 2012), but it appears that organizationally and ideologically, they may have taken a caste-blind approach. For instance, Goparaju Ramachandra Rao or Gora, a popular celebrated Brahmin leader in the atheist movement draws inspiration from Gandhi and supported the Indian
National Congress (S. I. Reddy, 1998) which predominantly represented Brahmin interests (Ambedkar, 1945; Pandian, 2007). Also, contemporary anti-caste leaders around the time like Ambedkar and Periyar, who took a comprehensive stand against caste and Hinduism, do not seem to figure in the history of the atheist movement in Andhra. This may be seen yet again as a limitation based on the positionality and interests of the leadership of this atheist movement that had a limited vision along the lines of Brahmin Hindu reformers. However, despite the leadership representing an elite in the Andhra region, people drawn towards the atheist movement came together because they were vexed with the socially oppressive forces of Brahminical Hinduism, patriarchy, and caste culture.

**Hindu Reformist Movement in Andhra**

In response to spaces that became available for social reform through Christian missionaries and the rising anti-caste movements of resistance, there were efforts predominantly led by Brahmin men as part of Arya Samaj and Brahmo Samaj to bring in some reforms in order to build legitimacy for the idea of a Hindu nation. This ideology labeled the majority as Hindus with Brahmins as their leading representatives while excluding minorities such as Christians and Muslims. Their ideology forms the foundation for right wing Hindu fundamentalist groups such as the Hindu Mahasabha and the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS). RSS is one of the largest NGOs in India, founded in the 1920s by K.B.Hegdewar, an orthodox Brahmin, with an all India presence today. Hindu nationalism shares similarities with German fascism, rather non-coincidentally, as Hitler had been openly admired by RSS during World War II (P. Ghosh, 2012).

Hindu reformist movements in colonial Andhra framed their efforts as aiming to improve the status of women. Women’s deplorable status in Andhra in the late 19th and
early 20th centuries was a result of caste and patriarchy (Sunkesula, 2016; Vulli, 2013). K. Veeresalingam Pantulu, a Brahmin reformist, arose with a Hindu reformist agenda to attend to the social evils against women practiced among Brahmins (Ramakrishna, 1991). He has been rigorously portrayed as a popular champion of women’s rights in Andhra, though some of his reforms had little relevance for Non-Brahmin and Dalit women. For instance, the practices such as Sati, dowry, infant marriage and prohibition of widow remarriage were predominantly problems faced by Brahmin women. Further, women from Brahmin and other caste privileged landowning families had earlier access to education and became representatives in spaces such as All India Women’s Conference and editors of women’s journals in Andhra that catered to the Hindu reformist agenda (Ramakrishna, 1991). They supported the Hindu reformist agenda of Brahmin men by assuming leadership for this agenda under the framing of women’s movement, which included issues such as prohibition of drinking among caste-oppressed men as an issue that affected caste-oppressed women.

Alcoholism was viewed as a problem based on a stereotype promoted by Brahmins, of caste-oppressed men as alcoholics and framing this as the cause of their deprivation that also negatively affected caste-oppressed women (Jangam, 2017; Larsson, 2006). Abstinence from alcohol became a popular agenda pursued by Gandhians and Hindu reformers. It appears that Hindu reformist movements, predominantly led by Brahmin men, defined what constituted women’s issues based on their own interests. It was through the spaces created by Christian missionaries that Telugu women first found space for asserting themselves against caste and patriarchy, be it through conversion (Taneti, 2012) or through the opening up of schools for girls (Vulli, 2013).
Within the spectrum of Hindu reformist movements also co-exist civil society organizations that claim to be secular and Gandhian, adopting the discourse that Gandhi made popular and promoted through the Congress party. Some of the major strands of his discourse in terms of caste were to speak against untouchability while upholding the caste system, to promote the acceptance of one’s caste based profession as a result of actions in a previous birth, to accept the caste privileged landowning and business class that constitutes the ruling class as trustees of the large majority of caste-oppressed people, even though they had conflicting interests, to suffer in silence and with non-violence to seek the empathy of the oppressor while discouraging militant resistance (Ambedkar, 1945). Being a state sanctioned ideology in the post-colonial Indian state, Gandhism finds usage across the spectrum of movements, including for instance, even anarchism (Ramnath, 2012), particularly led by caste-privileged leaders but also others feel obligated to invoke Gandhi in many civil society spaces. Caste privileged leaders across movements which may not necessarily ideologically align with Gandhi’s position on the issues regardless revere Gandhi as their inspiration. This is a characteristic pattern based on the positionality of leaders irrespective of the ideology to which they subscribe.

Civil Society Organizing in Andhra under the Post-Colonial Indian State

Caste and the Brahminical Indian State

The transfer of power and its consolidation under the Indian National Congress at the end of the colonial rule in 1947 provided a powerful state apparatus to Brahmins to institutionalize Hinduism as the primary political identity among the vast majority who had not by then converted to Buddhism, Christianity, Islam, or Sikhism. Some of the gains made through the Non-Brahmin and anti-caste movements from the colonial period were
reversed as a result (Periyar, 2005). For instance, the communal Government Order (G.O.) that was passed in 1926 for the representation of Non-Brahmins through the advocacy of the Justice Party in then Madras Presidency was declared invalid post-independence by the Madras High Court (Periyar, 2005). While there has been diversification in occupations available outside one’s caste-based occupation in post-1947 Andhra, the correlation between caste hierarchy and occupational hierarchy continued to remain strong (Mohan, 1984).

Resistance against communal representation in positions of power was widely seen among the caste-privileged, in their open hostile opposition to reservations in education and employment in the public sector, despite being enshrined in the constitution of the Indian state. The anti-Mandal agitations against Other Backward Classes (OBC) reservations in 1990 are a case in point for the intensification of this opposition over the years. In recent times, however, Non-Brahmin castes that previously did not come under or see themselves among the Backward Classes, and had even opposed reservations, have been agitating to be included under the Backward Classes. Ilaiah Shepherd (Ilaiah Shepherd, 2021) recognizes this to call for building greater solidarity among the Shudras to oppose the Brahminical Hindutva project.

**Left Movement in Andhra under the Indian State**

From the inception of the Indian state under Brahminical rule, the Andhra region saw the rise of militant communist guerilla movements in Telangana (previously part of the Andhra Pradesh state) in 1946-1948, in Srikakulam in late 1960s (Vindhya, 1990), and the People’s War movement in Andhra in the 1980s (Alte, 2008; Ratnam, 2008). Some of the erstwhile communist leaders from the late colonial period transitioned to electoral
politics under the Indian state while others continued to be part of the militant movements. The majority of the membership in the militant movements constituted the most caste-oppressed sections of the population, including substantial participation of women, whose issues these movements were organized around and who also faced the brunt of state repression and torture (Vindhya, 1990). What started as the People’s War movement in the 1980s in Andhra continued to grow with membership from Dalits, Adivasis, and Other Backward Classes. These communities were at the receiving end of caste and class-based oppression and were drawn towards radical spaces that promised liberation from social ills around issues such as landlessness, bonded labor, caste violence against women, and police torture. The ideologies of Marxism, Leninism and Maoism resonated with them because of their potential for liberation from feudalism and capitalism and helped develop political consciousness and self-respect (Alte, 2008). However, the contradictions within the movement became apparent to the membership eventually.

Alte (2008, p. 85) interviews Revati, a Dalit woman activist from the movement, who describes the contradictions of caste and gender in the movement in the 1990s as follows:

“When repression came it had major impact on women. Upper caste women never entered the stage of armed cadres. Only Dalit and Tribal women did. They were the victims. There was no anger from upper caste women against landlords. Only from Dalit and tribal women. The higher castes were never activists like us. I know the subjects and situation of the people. Upper castes do not participate and show themselves openly. They are superficial, their position is fake. Activists need protection. There was no protection for us. My family was not rich. They were
available and they could not give me protection. For protection I need rich relatives. Dalits are not rich. They cannot give me shelter. This is caste discrimination. Dalit activist are more vulnerable.”

The recognized, popular, and celebrated leaders of these militant movements generally tended to be caste-privileged men, and particularly Brahmin men and women (Alte, 2008; Vindhya, 1990), which is what Revati is pointing to above. Caste and gender were subsumed under class by the caste-privileged leadership as part of the programmatic aspects of these militant guerilla movements while strategic focus around caste and gender was missing in the leadership, ideological and organizational aspects. Such a caste-blind approach resulted in alienating Dalit leaders and members, including women, who had played a crucial role in the movement (Alte, 2008). The leadership of the broad movement constituted predominantly by Brahmin men identified the Indian state as the oppressor rather than Brahminism that the Indian state represented. The movement itself was a multi-caste space yet reinforced and resembled caste hierarchy in the hierarchical organizational structure with Brahmins in leadership positions and the caste-oppressed constituting the cadres. This reproduction of caste in the organization hierarchy combined with the unwillingness to address caste, extreme repression by the state, loss of faith in the leadership’s interest in protecting the most vulnerable members in the movement, and ongoing caste atrocities led to the disillusionment of many with the movement itself and thus did not create the space to negotiate the contradictions around caste and gender. The majority caste oppressed membership of the movement suffered from the Brahminical Indian state, from the regional Non-Brahmin state in Andhra, constituted by Kamma or Reddy castes (Harrison, 1956), and central and state police forces, besides special forces.
created particularly to target them (Alte, 2008). Those who thus left the militant guerilla movement found the Ambedkarite anti-caste movement as a space that addressed caste as the fundamental contradiction in the society in Andhra (Ratnam, 2008).

Caste and Trade Unions in Andhra under the Indian State

Caste played an important role in the unionization of workers in Andhra in urban (Devaki Devi, 1991) as well as rural areas (Smita, 2018). Devaki Devi (1991, p. 60) studies trade unions in the Visakhapatnam Port Trust in Andhra in 1969-74 and finds a significant disparity in representation in membership as against leadership by caste. Caste-oppressed workers found greater representation in the membership while caste-privileged workers were over-represented in leadership positions of the trade unions. In contrast, Smita (2018) studies the Andhra Pradesh Vyavasaya Vruthudarula Sangham (APVVU) that started in the 1980s, and details how APVVU organizationally addressed caste and gender hierarchies through representative membership and leadership of informal workers from diverse rural occupations across castes. This included election of 50% women across organizational levels through democratic processes and participation, starting from the village level all the way to the state and national levels. The union also participated in like-minded coalitions and national and international forums such as the World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia, and Related Intolerance (WCAR) to leverage their advocacy efforts with a rights-based approach (Ratnam, 2008).

Anti-Caste Movement in Andhra under the Indian State

Modern Andhra under the post-colonial Indian state saw the rise of a few Non-Brahmin peasant castes, predominantly Kamma and Reddy, to political power. Their upward class mobility as a result of their anti-Brahmin movement, the communist
movement, and from commercial agriculture in the colonial period was further boosted through their gains from the Green Revolution in the late 1960s (N. P. Prasad, 2015; Srinivasulu, 2002). By the 1980s, this resulted in electoral success for the Telugu Desam Party, a predominantly Kamma political party in Andhra that subsequently competed with the Congress party, which too was by then mostly constituted by the Reddy caste. Thus, Non-Brahmin castes such as Kamma and Reddy resisted Brahminical power and monopoly now through electoral politics at the regional level in Andhra while Brahmins secured their control over the central government. The new status of Non-Brahmin political power in Andhra was asserted via intra-caste solidarity and attempts to assert caste supremacy through the oppression of Dalits, with several caste-based atrocities in the 1980s onwards (Ratnam, 2008; Srinivasulu, 2002). The deep-rooted nature of caste hierarchy thus manifested itself in differences originating from class mobility between different castes.

“Heightened caste awareness and mobilisation in the educated middle classes of upper castes, backward castes and scheduled castes dates from the 1970s” (Srinivasulu, 2002, p. 29).

Against these dynamics, by the 1980s, the anti-caste movement in Andhra led by Dalits across Ambedkarite, Marxist, and atheist/rationalist orientations grew independent of other civil society spaces that failed to address caste (Pallithanam, 2007; Srinivasulu, 2002). This notably includes leaders such as Bojja Tharakam, Katti Padma Rao and K.G. Satyamurthy who had diverse ideological backgrounds (Ratnam, 2008). Together they mobilized caste-oppressed sections across castes, including minorities and women. Dalit women activists and writers who provided leadership during this time included B. M. Leela Kumari, G. Jhansi, Gogu Shyamala, B. Vijaya Bharathi, Shrat Jyotsna Rani, Jupaka
Subadra and Chandra Stree (Ratnam, 2008). The anti-caste movement attempted to unite the majority of caste-oppressed people during this time through Ambedkarite ideology with Dalit leadership in Andhra. It continued to grow and had significant impact on political parties, the left, and other progressive movements in Andhra which were forced to rethink their policies around caste. The emergence of Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) led by Kanshi Ram around the same time in Uttar Pradesh, also with a similar agenda of uniting the various caste-oppressed sections and minorities, helped build national level solidarity for the anti-caste movement in Andhra (Ratnam, 2008). Several activists from the movement also started participating in international forums to highlight the need for recognition of caste as a basis of discrimination and human rights violations, drawing parallels to race and ethnicity based discrimination (Ratnam, 2008).

**Atheist Movement in Andhra under the Indian State**

The atheist movement in post-colonial Andhra continued to grow with people drawn towards it for its critique of the caste system. Literature on this movement however focuses mostly on the Brahmin leader named Goparaju Ramachandra Rao, better known as Gora, and a celebration of his legacy, notably initiatives around inter-caste marriages within his family, promotion of inter-caste marriages in the region of their operation alongside promotion of inter-caste and inter-religious dining (Gora, 2011). However, Gora is understood to be a supporter of Gandhi and the nationalist movement that was in its essence Brahminical. The philosophy of atheism and Gandhian politics can be understood to be in opposition yet have been promoted together by Gora whose interaction with Gandhi is celebrated by his followers. In post-colonial Andhra, the movement seems to have continued to promote a caste-blind and religion-blind approach, at least among the
leadership coming from Gora and his associates. See, for instance, “atheists appealed people not to fill up the columns of caste and religion in the application forms” (Vijayam, 1996).

This approach is in contrast to the Dravidian movement in Tamil Nadu under Periyar’s leadership that identified Brahminism, later known as Hinduism, as the threat to rationalist thinking among people. However, despite leadership not being representative of the larger population in Andhra, atheism as a philosophy found resonance among several caste-oppressed people and the anti-caste movement by drawing from the legacy of Jotiba Phule, Ambedkar and E.V. Ramasamy Periyar who promoted rationalism along with the annihilation of caste as an integral philosophy. The Atheist Centre in Vijayawada is a popular institution promoting atheism in Andhra, which was founded by Gora and continues to run as a family enterprise by his next of kin and with a notable lack of women’s leadership or equal representation of women in its membership (Quack, 2012). It has also been observed that members in the atheist movement in Andhra draw connections with Marxist, socialist, and broader social justice movements in the region as a way to promote social change in contrast to preoccupation with intellectual and philosophical aspects of atheism that is noticeable in the west (Quack, 2012). Further, one of the crucial functions played by the atheist movement in Andhra is to transform the influence of religion in the life-course rituals around birth, raising children, marriage, and death by way of suggesting alternative atheist practices (Quack, 2012). The leadership of the movement has however been critiqued for focusing their attention on less powerful local religious leaders and godmen (Quack, 2012).

Emergence of the NGO Sector under the Indian State
Before the term NGO came into usage, organizations with a similar function were better known as voluntary organizations, that were separate from the state and the private sector (Sheth & Sethi, 1991). The NGO sector in India showed remarkable growth in the 1980s as government funding was earmarked for NGOs in the Five-Year Plans alongside the availability of foreign funding from international donor agencies, that progressively increased over the years (Kudva, 2005; Sheth & Sethi, 1991). Political parties across the spectrum from left to right expressed apprehension about international donor funding for NGOs (Kudva, 2005; Omvedt, 1993). The Indian state’s neo-liberal reforms during the 1990s towards liberalization, privatization, and globalization further had an impact on the growth of the NGO sector. These neo-liberal reforms led to a shrinking of the public sector and the state’s spending on social welfare. The increasing number of NGOs during the same time tried to fill in some of the gaps in social welfare due to the withdrawal of the state.

In response to the neo-liberal reforms, the shrinking public sector and growing private sector, scholars have argued for the need for affirmative action in the private sector (Omvedt, 2005; S. Thorat & Attewell, 2007; S. Thorat & Newman, 2007; S. Thorat & Sadana, 2009) though yet unrealized. This argument for the need for affirmative action in the private sector can be applied to NGOs as well that fall outside the public sector. Further, while some have argued that international funding leads to depoliticization of NGOs, others have cautioned against such a generalization especially in the context of NGOs working for Dalit rights (Waghmore, 2012). With growing numbers of NGOs, the Foreign Contribution Regulation Act (FCRA) started to be used to regulate the foreign funding for NGOs since 1984 (Kudva, 2005), with amendments later on. The most recent amendment
was passed in 2020 by the right-wing BJP government, to further increase the control of
the state over NGOs receiving foreign funding that they saw as a threat. Foreign funding
from Indian diaspora channeled through NGOs in India has, at the same time, fueled the
growth of Hindu nationalism in India (Kudva, 2005, p. 238).

The growth of the NGO sector also led to the creation of professional management
programs for training NGO professionals to be employed into techno-managerial NGOs
that led to a shift in focus of NGOs from social change to income-generation activities
through project-oriented service delivery models since the 1990s (Kudva, 2005, p. 248).
Organizationally, NGOs in India rely heavily on the leadership, both in their capacity to
run an organization as well as to be able to fundraise for the NGO’s work using the leaders’
networks. This makes starting an NGO an attractive opportunity for people who have
access to such networks of power, such as retired bureaucrats who are able to make use of
their networks of power (Sheth & Sethi, 1991). Some studies also indicate that NGO
entrepreneurship seems to be an attractive alternative career for caste and class-privileged
women because of similar access to elite networks (Abichandani & Babu, 2018; Handy et
al., 2002). Thus, at a macro level, the NGO sector promotes the reinforcement of caste and
gender hierarchies and thereby paternalism wherein the leadership does not generally
include caste-oppressed people, who in turn predominantly constitute the population
targeted by the NGOs (Waghmore, 2002). On the other hand, however, there are those
among the caste oppressed, who may not have ready access to networks of power but are
able to use NGOs as a supportive space for activism in collaboration with social
movements, networks of grassroots NGOs, and coalitions to challenge caste and gender
hierarchies (Krishna Rao, 2007; McDougal, 2007; Smitha, 2018). The discourse around
“depoliticization” due to international funding needs to thus be complicated by paying attention to the power dynamics between NGOs led by caste-oppressed leaders with the Indian state and international donors (Waghmore, 2012). Such NGOs are constantly under government scrutiny, especially if they are seen as a threat to the political party in power.

**NGOs in Andhra under the Indian State**

There are very few academic studies on NGOs in Andhra that look into caste and gender hierarchies with a focus on leadership, positionality and discourse (see Navayan, 2014, 2015; T. L. N. Reddy & Reddy, 2010). Navayan (2014, 2015) analyzes in detail the prevalence of caste discrimination among international aid agencies in India that are headed by caste-privileged leaders based on his lived experience. Looking at the representation of women’s leadership in the NGO sector in Andhra, T. L. N. Reddy & Reddy (2010) indicate in their study of 29 women leaders of NGOs in Hyderabad, that 84% were from caste-privileged backgrounds and representation of caste-privileged women is greater in the NGO sector in comparison to the for-profit sector that they also study simultaneously in the same city. This finding resonates with other studies that point to the advantage of access to networks of power among caste-privileged women leaders in their pursuit to start NGOs (Abichandani & Babu, 2018; Handy et al., 2002). Many of these are Gandhian NGOs (Gangrade, 1991) that have direct access to networks of power within the state but which use the discourse of community participation to legitimize their work (see Jammulamadaka, 2014; Saharia, 2013). Such Gandhian NGOs may be narrow in scope and issue focused (Saharia, 2013) while they promote a paternalistic agenda (Jammulamadaka, 2014) reflective of Gandhi’s trusteeship model where in the privileged are justified in retaining their position in the caste hierarchy as long as they practice austerity and look
after some basic needs of the oppressed. Further, Gandhian NGOs, including those with feminist leadership, overlook Gandhi’s sexual abuse of young women in his ashram (Banerji, 2009).

Political parties in power have used NGOs to channel funding from overseas supporters in the diaspora. On the other hand, there are case studies by activist groups that throw light on the supportive relationships established NGOs have fostered with other smaller NGOs, social movements, and trade unions of landless caste-oppressed workers (Krishna Rao, 2007; Smitha, 2018; Vaddiraju A.K., 2014). These are mostly locally based NGOs that work from within the caste oppressed communities that constitutes both their membership and leadership. Solidarity across oppressed sections in the hierarchy while addressing internal contradictions is crucial for the success of these networks and it is well recognized in these spaces.

Discussion

In this study, I have reviewed literature that focuses on gender and caste in civil society organizing in modern Andhra from the late colonial period in the early 20th century to the early 21st century. Andhra has seen a variety of political changes amidst which vibrant civil society organizing has taken place. These include the spread of education, religious conversions, formation of caste associations, and social movements across the spectrum including leftist, Ambedkarite, atheist-rationalist and Hindu nationalist movements. Across these movements, there are patterns of caste and gender hierarchies being contested and reinforced at various times amidst political changes that presented different kinds of opportunities for the oppressed to organize and resist. Successful contestations of caste and gender hierarchies have been possible through inclusive,
democratic organizing with a representative leadership. Simultaneously, there have been attempts from the top of the hierarchy to start counter-movements, appropriate, and dilute existing radical movements. Despite this, new independent movements have emerged and the oppressed continue to use all the spaces available to organize themselves towards a fight for an egalitarian society.

This history of civil society in Andhra helps better understand and appreciate the current NGO sector in Andhra where the different kinds of NGOs draw inspiration from the models of organizing from the movements of the recent past. Notably, we see NGOs that are representative and led by the caste-oppressed that are able to work by building solidarity through networking with similar like-minded NGOs, trade unions, social movements, and coalitions at local, state, national and international levels. They continue to do so despite the forces at various institutional levels that are not in their favor.

On the other hand, there are NGOs led by caste-privileged leaders working predominantly with caste-oppressed communities without their representation in leadership, generally inspired by Gandhi’s trusteeship model that have been issue focused and well-recognized, given their proximity to the Indian state. While these spaces are not radical, history indicates that they have not stopped the oppressed from being able to use these spaces to organize and come together to eventually build independent radical movements. A major gap in existing literature is the negligible focus on leadership of caste-oppressed women in civil society organizing in Andhra. Future research in this area can contribute much to our understanding of how women have resisted Brahminical patriarchy in civil society, including spaces such as NGOs, social movements, and trade unions.
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CHAPTER 3

“ALL THE FINGERS OF A HAND ARE NOT EQUAL:” UNDERSTANDING “EXCLUSIONARY INCLUSION” THROUGH AN AMBEDKARITE ANALYSIS OF BRAHMINISM IN ORGANIZATIONS

(Co-authored with Maureen Scully)

Abstract

We contribute to emerging work on critical inclusion by examining encounters with exclusion. We reveal “exclusionary inclusion” through the distinctive experiences of South Asian organizational constituents in a South Asian context and explore what an Ambedkarite framework for understanding exclusion can add to organization studies. We probe subtle and overt signals of Brahminism in organizational spaces, prompted by everyday personal encounters in a prominent locally based NGO during field work in India. The term Brahminism signals taking a systemic view of practices based on the supremacy of Brahmins, as priests, scholars, and keepers of ritual purity, defined canonically in Hinduism. Brahminism is a practice of exclusionary social interaction in every sphere of life including the workplace. We use the term “Brahminism” in discussing caste, to recognize it as a politically meaningful term preferred by South Asian anti-caste activists from oppressed caste positions; it is used in a way similar to, but of course distinctive from, how African Americans might name “white privilege” or “white supremacy” to discuss racism critically and systemically in the United States. A senior Brahmin leader in the NGO explains caste inequality as being as “natural” as the unequal sizes of the fingers of a hand as a justification of caste privilege. Encounters provide critical moments to interrogate caste in organizational spaces, which can be traced to
the practice of caste in history, culture, and governance as informed by the scholarship and praxis of Dr. Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar. The framework we derive from Ambedkar’s body of work illuminates the cultural roots of everyday encounters of caste, the historic perpetuation of spaces that exclude “others,” and the need for governance that addresses exclusion. These concepts can inform emerging critical inclusion studies.

Introduction

The field of organization studies has recently begun to probe critical approaches to “inclusion,” a term often used in concert with diversity. Before theorizing about critical inclusion, we argue that it is necessary to probe exclusion. The experience of being “included” in organizations has value for historically excluded groups only insofar as inclusion does not leave them only partially invited into an organizational context while still exposed to traditional forms of exclusion. Critically understanding exclusion must be antecedent to a critical probe of how inclusion is enacted poorly. Critical diversity studies have expanded from early anchors in the Global North, and we join the call to value voices from the Global South, which can reveal how exclusion operates in context-specific ways (Barbosa & Cabral-Cardoso, 2010). Our study proceeds from encounters with caste-based exclusion in the everyday life of an NGO in India. Jolting personal encounters with symbols and statements of exclusion are often the starting point for inquiries into systemic inequality in organizational settings (e.g., Creed & Scully, 2011). Reactions to these encounters are anchored in our positionalities which we elaborate on in our approach.

To grapple reflexively with the deeper significance of these encounters, we look first for resources in organizational studies for interpreting caste-based exclusion, and finding a limited treatment of caste, we turn to the work of Dr. Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar. Ambedkar...
was a political philosopher, a critic of the inequality endemic in the caste system, an activist and politician who organized oppressed groups from 1920s to 1950s, and an architect of the Indian constitution after independence (Omvedt, 2004). He was born into one of the Dalit castes and his positionality and lived experience of caste oppression were influential in informing his resistance against caste. We review how Ambedkar’s work has been taken up in other disciplines, such as public policy and urban studies, and argue that organization studies could benefit from his framework to deepen the emerging theorization of critical inclusion. We draw the concepts of everyday exclusions anchored in systems, spaces that perpetuate exclusion of “others,” masked dimensions of privilege, and “exclusionary inclusion” from his work to inform future research on critical inclusion.

**From Critical Diversity Studies to Critical Inclusion Studies**

Critical diversity studies expose root causes of inequalities, by looking at history, naming dimensions of power and exclusion, and surfacing the normalized as not neutral (Nkomo & Ariss, 2014; Zanoni et al., 2010). Ignoring root causes of exclusion limits options for systemic remedies. Capitalism, patriarchy, and racism are shown to undergird everyday experiences of inequality and limit the efficacy of superficial organizational policies that remain endogenous to these systems (Edelman, 2008). Critical diversity management research reveals the contradiction that diversity management programs often worsen inequalities by failing to address power relations and track systemic implications (Romani et al., 2019). The idea of inclusion arose to signify more meaningful forms of belonging for historically excluded groups in an organization. Learning, integration, and appreciation across cultural differences (Ely & Thomas, 2001) are emphasized by adding inclusion to diversity. As stated in a pithy way in the U.S. business press, “diversity doesn’t stick without inclusion” (Sherbin & Rashid,
2017), and thus a critical approach to inclusion is adduced to examine where promises of inclusion fall short or create unintended consequences.

**Critical Exclusion from the Vantage of the Global South**

Insights from the Global South can give us new views on institutions that have historically operated to benefit one group over another (Grossman-Thompson, 2018). Diversity research taking a critical stance has expansively explored dimensions of social identity that have historically been stigmatized and/or made invisible, starting with pioneering work that theorized the importance of race (Cox & Nixon, 1990) and including sexual orientation (Creed & Scully, 2011), socioeconomic class (Scully & Blake-Beard, 2006), age (Collien et al., 2016) and disability (Beatty, 2012; Jammaers & Zanoni, 2020). In probing the lived experiences of members of these groups, these studies open windows onto broader systemic concepts including alliances, resistance to change, and critical reframing. Bringing in the South Asian vantage, caste is less commonly found among these works, at most listed as one more demographic variable to consider, for example as a moderating variable for gender in Indian workplaces (Böhmer & Schinnenburg, 2018), but not theorized systemically beyond an identity. The constitutional prohibition against discrimination on the basis of caste in India (Articles 15 and 17, Indian Constitution) is reviewed as a factor to consider as the diversity lens is expanded to ‘emerging economies’ (Bosch et al., 2015). In making links to the diversity literature as it is known in the West, the conclusion is that, “in India, unlike other countries, there is no formal definition of diversity encompassing the wider areas of the term, such as race, ethnicity, religion, age, sexual orientation, and so forth” (Bosch et al., 2015, p. 410). Examining the roots of caste in the Global South requires that we do more than repurpose Western notions of diversity to add caste to the list.
Approach

This study draws upon experiences in the context of an NGO. We focus on encounters within this context as our data. To understand and contextualize these encounters, we use iterations of interpretation, based on our positionalities, our reflexive dialogues, and our exploratory readings of the existing literature and its framings and silences. The first author is a South Asian cis woman who identifies as a Non-Brahmin/Dravidian. The second author is a cis woman from the U.S. who has studied religion in the workplace as an emerging dimension of inequality and the formation of employee affinity groups to express everyday inequalities at work, particularly since Muslims in American workplaces experienced micro-aggressions and discrimination after 9/11.

The Case and Its Context: Rural Development NGO

The setting for this study is a rural development NGO in Andhra Pradesh in India, which we give the pseudonym Agraharam Rural Development Trust (ARDT). “Agraharams” are exclusive villages of Brahmins formed on the basis of land grants made to Brahmins by erstwhile rulers of the region. To capture the exclusionary nature of the NGO, we call it ARDT. It is the largest of the forty-five NGOs that fall into the category of rural development NGOs in this region, a category defined by the state. ARDT is over forty years old, locally based, and not an arm of an international NGO. It has a mission to improve the quality of life for people in rural areas using a participatory approach to rural development through their own leadership, self-help, and efficient use of resources to sustain livelihoods within their villages. It has over fifty employees, was established with private family donations, and continues to be funded through private and government grants, with international recognition. ARDT was once
granted 100 acres of government land for a government project. ARDT engages in village outreach, offers training workshops for adults, and runs a school for school-age children.

The first author visited ARDT early in her exploration of whether and how oppressed caste members might have a role in the strategy and governance of NGOs with missions of addressing inequality. She engaged in observation at ARDT over a period of two days, held informal conversations with ARDT stakeholders including staff and board members, and conducted interviews with the chief functionary and two senior leaders who are Brahmin men. The first author kept detailed daily field notes, including observations of the setting and notes from informal conversations, and audio-recorded all interviews. Informal conversations were in Telugu and senior leader interviews were in Telugu and/or English, all translated and transcribed by the first author. The field notes capture experiences that were startling in the moment, and again upon reflection, and these constitute the encounters that are the data for this study. Additional re-reading of field notes and interview transcripts surfaces additional encounters or material for making sense of the encounters.

**Exploring Encounters that Signify Exclusion**

The concept of encounter comes from Goffman’s (1969) exploration of how individuals enact an identity in social spaces in ways that make them self-conscious of who they are and how they are greeted in that space. Encounters are sharply experienced moments that can reveal a hidden social identity and perhaps educate others about it in a workplace context (Creed & Scully, 2000). Encounters highlight the importance of “everyday practices woven into the fabric of organizations” (Holvino, 2003, p. 129) as access points to systemic levels. Attending to encounters has created a methodology of “being on the lookout” (McCoy, 2012, p. 763) or bearing witness to problematic moments during qualitative research.
Encounters are situated in a “psycho-social space” where sense-making happens through interaction (Gunaratnam, 2003). Encounters, problematic moments, and critical incidents sometimes happen in a group context, where a collective moment of silence or awkwardness signals that something has happened. In a diverse group, it may not immediately be clear the basis of the awkwardness of a ‘problematic moment,’ particularly to those from privileged positions, and the group may need to do some work to restore or further problematize inclusion (Kent & Cumming, 2008). Sometimes the "in your face" injustice of a collective encounter makes social injustice immediately evident and sparks mobilization (Gamson et al., 1982). In contrast, when an encounter happens for an individual, alone vis-a-vis a broader organizational or systemic context, it can be harder to do this post facto work and to "check in" on what just happened. Indeed, the retelling of the encounter may sometimes be met with attempts to diminish it, to make it seem "not so bad," or to show that it is explicable as a simple misunderstanding. Encounters with racism in the workplace, in the form of racial slurs, persist in part because of white denial, silence, and reassertion of privilege (Rosette et al., 2013). The interpretation and re-reading of encounters takes these dynamics into account.

**Analysis of Encounters**

We present the encounters in three segments: symbols, spaces, and leaders. After each of the three, we pause to do interpretive work, which we refer to as “unpacking”. We invoke our positionalities to see what is striking in the encounters with symbols. To probe encounters with spaces that exclude “others,” we consider the ways in which caste is invoked, or not, in organization studies. In reading and re-reading quotations from leaders, we ultimately turn to the necessity of Ambedkar’s framework as an anti-caste framework for systemic sense-making of the encounters with symbols, spaces, and leaders. Interpreting encounters requires “being
troublesome and being troubled” and involves “misreadings, co-readings, re-readings, some accidental or coincidental, some purposeful” (McCoy, 2012: 766). Understanding a variety of “critical incidents” as succinct in their retelling but large in their impact is a revealing lens onto broader systems through qualitative data (Bott & Tourish, 2016).

Encounters

In this section, we explore encounters organized in three layers, interactions with the symbols, the spaces, and the leaders of ARDT respectively. The encounters are written in the first person based upon the firsthand experience of the first author during field research at ARDT. Passages from field notes are shown in italics.

Hindu Gods and Temple Construction: What do Symbols Convey?

The ARDT office was located in a village a few hours away from the city. When I planned to visit ARDT, I was offered a ride in ARDT’s vehicle that was going to pick up a board member who lived in the city. The drive was meant to help with logistics but became my first encounter with ARDT. Upon getting into the car, I noticed:

“There were several pictures of Hindu gods inside the car that we were travelling in.”

These images of Hindu gods were part of a normalized background, but they were surprising to me as symbols of how Brahminism was intertwined with an everyday experience. I wondered if the car was just one transitional space and perhaps a singular example. The next stop was the board member’s home.

“After the driver from ARDT picked me up, he picked up an elderly board member of ARDT. His house had a name board saying ‘Brahmana Bhavan.’”
“Brahmana Bhavan” translates to “a Brahmin house,” which is an explicit display of Brahmin caste membership. During the ride to ARDT’s office in the village a few hours away, the board member and the driver, seated in the front while I sat in the back, conversed.

“For about half an hour, the board member spoke to the driver about constructing a two storied temple for a Hindu god in the ARDT campus as a replica of a well-known nearby Hindu temple to use it as a wedding hall and to perform Hindu religious rituals part of the life course of a Hindu family.”

The mention of a Hindu temple as something for which ARDT might contribute land, spend resources, and host events, with ARDT being an NGO working on rural development, was surprising. It was unclear how temple construction could have anything to do with rural development.

Next, after reaching the ARDT campus, while walking through the campus, there was frequent visual imagery with Hindu symbolism:

“There were very prominently placed pictures of Hindu gods in the room I was put up, at the training center and the dining hall.”

During my overnight stay at the ARDT campus, I had a chance to speak to a youth who worked in the training center run by ARDT and was an alumnus of the school run by ARDT.

“The youth mentioned to me that there are prayers every morning with the recitation of Slokas from the Bhagavad Gita before people started work, both at the NGO and the school run by the NGO.”

I visited the school run by ARDT and saw another cultural artifact, the formal timetable for students. I noticed that “Vedic chanting” was listed on the timetable for students as the first activity in the morning. These encounters with Brahminical symbols, and my observations of
how they were interwoven into many ordinary moments of the day, were very surprising to me.

**Unpacking Encounters with Symbols**

When the first author mentioned some of these examples to her colleagues in the U.S. who study diversity, including the second author, they did not immediately sense the basis for her surprise. The positionalities of the authors and the reflexive dialogues between us shaped our interpretive journey. Growing up in India, the first author noticed Brahmin exercise of privileged status, Brahmin symbols and how they seemed to be taken-for-granted, and the appropriation of what once were cherished local indigenous deities into Hinduism. She observed others of her positionality both tacitly conceding and resisting Brahmin dominance in the practice of their religious faith. The second author, anchored in a Global North perspective, initially greeted the fieldwork photos of gods and symbols in the workplace as an occasion to investigate further how religious diversity plays out in the workplace, adding Hinduism as a social identity dimension not given much attention in U.S. workplaces. The first author explained how these symbols were not an expression of wider tolerance for difference. Non-Brahmins have to go about their daily activities in these settings with symbols that serve as reminders of how those not in privileged castes are considered systemically less worthy and less welcome. Hence, the first author’s surprise – and anger and discomfort – at encountering these symbols at every turn. Reflexive dialogue across differences opens the door to deeper understandings of contested dimensions of inequality (Bell et al., 2003).

Only upon doing a critical reading of the history of Brahminism would it become clear to the second author and others hearing this story that temples are not simply places of spirituality but places of exclusion. To make sense of these encounters requires having at least
some minimal understanding of caste and how it operates in the lived experiences and inhabited spaces within India. People from Dalit backgrounds are excluded from temples, those from OBC (Other Backward Classes) have limited access within temples, and neither have the right to be priests, along with menstruating women who are also excluded. While the formal right to enter temples was granted in 1925 legislation, examples of exclusion in practice persist, and the matter of entering temples remains fraught in contemporary politics and activism (e.g., Christy K J, 2019; The Hindu, 2020; The Wire, 2020).

Explaining encounters can prompt pushback, perhaps that these symbols were occasional examples and not representative of the ethos of the NGO. Therefore, the first author consulted an interview with ARDT’s founder available online, in which he defines what he calls ‘spiritual poverty’ that needs to be addressed along with other kinds of poverty. This discourse and the daily prayer rituals that appear to propagate Brahminical culture at ARDT were incorporated quite deliberately to address as the founder’s concern about spiritual poverty and to offer the founder’s conception of what constitutes spirituality. The founder’s framing of spiritual poverty can be viewed as another form of paternalistic denial of spiritual equality disguised as a concern for spiritual well-being.

“Others are not Allowed” - How can Organizational Spaces Signify Exclusion?

In addition to encounters with symbols, there were encounters with spaces that were exclusionary. In spending two days at ARDT, I began to notice features of the physical space and the surroundings in the campus.

“On the second day, I was having tea in the dining hall when the chief functionary entered and went into an adjacent room with a curtain outside with a sign on the adjacent wall saying, ‘Others are not allowed to come inside.’”
It seemed to be an exclusive dining space that one would not expect to see in an NGO. When I stayed on the campus, I had my dinner and breakfast in the dining hall along with two other staff members. Both times, we sat on the floor on a mat and had our meals together. I only noticed the adjacent room, with the curtain and the sign, on the second morning when the chief functionary walked by and went into the room. The same day, I noticed a saffron colored van parked in the ARDT campus.

“I saw people in a saffron colored van come and meet with the chief functionary. The van had slogans saying, ‘Live as a Hindu; Be a proud Hindu; I am born a Hindu; I will live as a Hindu.’” (Translated from Telugu).

The chief functionary of ARDT hosted a meeting with the people who traveled to the ARDT campus in this van, and the board member who had shared a ride with me to the ARDT the prior day departed in this van. As my last activity as part of my visit I was taken to the school run by ARDT. Here, I noticed that

“The classrooms in the high school run by the NGO were used to accommodate adults who came to learn a folk art of storytelling.”

When I inquired about this of the driver during the ride back, he said that a Hindu organization was organizing these workshops. During the conversation, he also mentioned that there are some Christian organizations which try to convert people to Christianity, and he seemed to believe that they are mounting propaganda against Hinduism telling people not to go to temples. He said, “that is wrong, and we should oppose such organizations.”

*Unpacking Encounters with Space*

Again, the first author recognized the slogans on the van as part of contemporary Hindu fundamentalism that labels everyone, including caste-oppressed people, as Hindus, and
opposes their conversion to other religions such as Buddhism, Christianity, and Islam. A historically anchored exploration reveals the significance of religious conversion, which was a pathway of escape from oppression for caste-oppressed people. Ambedkar himself converted to Buddhism. The significance of these encounters is that they are happening in the workplace. People in positions of power in the organization signify the importance of these Brahminical beliefs by hosting meetings with those who arrive in vans bearing such slogans. The separate dining room can be read not just as some kind of executive dining room but a space of separation, because caste segregation has historically been enforced by eating separately.

We turned to the organization studies literature for insights on caste specifically in workplace settings, not as a social identity, but as a set of practices and processes enacted in organizations. However, caste is surprisingly absent. It is mostly used as a metaphor to convey a strong form of segregation, but not in caste-based settings per se. For example, in writing about bureaucrats, Ericsson and Nilsson (2008, p. 83) convey occupational class divisions as “they are a caste in their own right, the caste of clerks.” Studies drawing on ideas of soft power and control (Courpasson, 2000) use ‘caste’ to signal durable claims to superior status, such as studies of medicine showing how “doctors had been successful in establishing a legal monopoly with effective – ‘caste-like’….– workplace control” (Dent, 2008, pp. 101–102). The use of ‘caste’ in critical management studies signals privileges that are asserted and reinforced through managers’ claims to their own superiority bolstered by managerialist ideology (Clegg, 2014; Locke & Spender, 2011).

Caste has also been adopted as a provocative metaphor and a lens for systemic analysis in the study of racism. In advancing the study of racism and its persistence in the U.S., Wilkerson (2020) refers to race as a caste system as a way to make a strong point, evoking the
“eight pillars of caste” as: divine will and the laws of nature, heritability, endogamy, purity versus pollution, occupational hierarchy, dehumanization and stigma, terror and cruelty in enforcement and control, and inherent superiority versus inherent inferiority. This powerful tabulation names the injuries of caste but does not emanate from the study of South Asian organizational contexts. In the growing body of work on inequality in organization studies, caste in India has been added descriptively as a dimension with multiplicities of inequality in position and livelihood (Bapuji & Chrispal, 2018), but without an inquiry into the systemic bases of its reproduction. In contrast, scholarship anchored in Dalit studies and the legacy of Ambedkar documents severe and persistent caste-based inequality from the standpoint of enduring historic systems (Thorat & Kumar, 2008; Thorat & Joshi, 2015), akin in its spirit and purpose to Wilkerson’s (2020) exposé.

To further our interpretive inquiry as to how caste does or does not appear in organization studies, we found a review that identified “three dominant strains of thinking about caste” (A. Rao, 2011, p. 613). In this framework, the first approach is the postcolonial approach, the second is the view that caste is a matter for religious reform and increased tolerance, and the third is the view informed by Dalit studies of caste as an ongoing oppression perpetuated through Brahminism. Organization studies has hewed close to the first approach, with abundant postcolonial studies that draw attention to how colonizers transformed and mobilized caste to suit their purposes. It is the third approach that would yield insights for unpacking our encounters with Brahminism. Scholars from caste-oppressed backgrounds examine how caste pre-dated colonialism and lived on robustly afterwards, arguing that “postcolonial scholars, while implicating colonialism in the making of the modern caste structure, have failed to provide critical frames to unravel the epistemic violence ingrained in
Hindu Brahmanical ideology” (Jangam, 2017, p. 108). Scholarship from this standpoint abounds in history, literature, and public policy, but is not found in organization studies. A recent exception (Raman, 2020) considers the experiences of Dalit women from the perspective of exploring the intersectionality of caste and gender to advance postcolonial studies. Raman (2020) brings an important unexplored context of Dalit women’s experiences into organization studies, but as elsewhere in organization studies, does not draw upon Ambedkar for illumination of Dalit women’s historic and structural location. Further exploration would be enriched by Ambedkar’s analyses and from the standpoints of caste-oppressed scholars besides the approaches available in postcolonial studies, where anti-caste scholarship has as yet not found much attention. Jangam’s (2017:108) idea of an underlying ideology of Brahminism points to the significance of the final set of encounters in our study, the encounters with Brahmin NGO leaders who might advance such an ideology.

“All the Fingers of a Hand are not Equal” - How are Social Hierarchies Reproduced and Reinforced by Organizational Leaders?

During a conversation with a senior leader of ARDT, when caste-based inequality came up, it was described as a natural and organic division of labor by this senior leader who used a metaphor that reinforced difference:

“Now, all the fingers of a hand are not equal but only if all the five fingers work, the hand works. Similarly, we should make sure that all the classes and castes in a society work together.”

The senior leader went on to offer a religious justification for caste distinctions:

“If all these people co-operate, for any occupation to work, all occupations are needed. Each person is not an individual, but a part of the whole. I’m in everyone. Everyone is in me,
meaning, Vasudeva Kutumbakam [in Sanskrit from a Hindu scripture meaning “world is one family”].”

Talking about mobility within the NGO, this senior leader recounted his experience of upward mobility in ARDT from community organizer to joint secretary:

“So, even in the governing body, everyone gets a promotion and a raise and other benefits. There is recognition as well for what you do.”

He gave a contrasting account about the watchmen and carpenters working for ARDT who spent as much time at this organization from its founding days, yet remained in the same positions without upward mobility, that the senior leader saw no contradiction with while taking pride in their willingness to work in this organization for a long time.

“This boy [sic] has been working since 1976. He is a very old employee of ARDT … He used to guard the salt farms. He used to get Rs. 30 as salary. And then he retired. Besides, there is another watchman, there are some like them. Most recently, there is a carpenter who is retired but still working.” (Italics added)

I entered the field to probe how NGOs might address caste inequalities in their organizations through the leadership and representation of caste-oppressed people. I learned that ARDT explicitly avoids recognizing caste and does not have a social basis for identifying marginalized communities, as the chief functionary explained:

“We have, from the beginning, made a conscious effort not to say we work with a particular community. Depending on the need, we are there. So, we don’t know whether they are BCs [Backward Classes] or SCs [Scheduled Castes] or STs [Scheduled Tribes] or a community such as the fishermen, the goatherds etc. We work across the board. … Each village’s composition was different, that included
fishermen, goatherds, farmers etc. We also had the so-called scavengers. But we never used to discriminate them. We deal with a village as a whole.”

By treating the village as a homogeneous entity and not taking into account the nature and root causes of deprivation, the policy of this NGO sees rural development problems being independent of caste hierarchies. However, with respect to religion, the chief functionary talks about India as always being a “spiritual” hub but that “we are losing out on that as we are not propagating spirituality” and that “a lot of people should realize that we are majorly a Hindu country” with “many ancient temples”. In addition, he shares that their NGO is “trying for the revival of our folk arts,” which he claims, “are inherently tied to religion.” Finally, the chief functionary shares his admiration of Bal Gangadhar Tilak as an example of a visionary who popularized the public celebration of a Hindu festival. Both the chief functionary and the senior leader also share their admiration for Gandhi. The chief functionary shares that, “the genius of the man is being able to instigate people against the British in a non-violent manner,” while the senior leader identifies Gandhi as his sole inspiration in terms of values and lists out Gandhi’s eight principles for rural development. The views of these senior leaders matter, not as idiosyncratic individual expressions, but as statements from those whose structural location is to direct the largest, most influential, and most governmentally funded NGO in this category of 45 regional NGOs charged with advancing rural development.

**Unpacking Encounters with Leaders**

For both the authors, the justification of caste by the senior leader using the metaphor of the fingers of a hand was striking and seemed analogous to outdated arguments that inequality and hierarchy are naturally ordained, and that stratification is “functional and purposive” for all in a social structure (Davis, 1942, p. 309). We noticed in the leaders’
statements that castes and occupations are flattened as normal and natural differences rather than enforced by hierarchy. Further, the chief functionary invokes Indian history in three respects, i) India as a Hindu nation, ii) the need to propagate Hinduism through folk arts, and iii) his admiration of and inspiration from leaders associated with the Congress Party such as Gandhi and Tilak. The first author drew the attention of the second author to the association between the denial of caste hierarchy and the invoking of Vedic scripture and India’s identity as a Hindu nation to support the leaders’ vision and values. While the second author had an appreciative view of Gandhi as a leader of non-violent resistance against the British, as he is known in the Global North, the first author shared a critique of Gandhi as a caste privileged leader who was racist, casteist and sexually abusive (Banerji, 2009; OFMI, 2013). While it was not initially evident to the second author why organizational leaders’ mention of admiration for Gandhi would itself be a jolting encounter, for caste-oppressed groups the awareness of Gandhi’s stance of demeaning paternalism versus Ambedkar’s stance of emancipation and inclusion make mentions of Gandhi a moment of pain.

These jolting encounters in the interactions with symbols, spaces, and leaders of ARDT call out for a comprehensive theoretical framework to aid sense-making. To trace these encounters signifying exclusion to the larger context of history, culture, and governance, we propose to engage with Ambedkar’s work. Our reflective debriefing and dialogue as co-authors, following the first author’s encounters, led us to invoke varied understandings about caste, including ritual exclusion from temples, segregated dining, coded language around occupations that denies and even celebrates caste, and slogans to curb religious conversion. While our standpoints helped us engage in this dialogue, our political consciousness around caste largely draws from Ambedkar’s work. Our engagement with Ambedkar’s work took
place in the local community in the U.S. that had formed around anti-caste activism and that facilitated wider discussions on caste through reading Ambedkar’s work and continuing his legacy in both academic and community forums, which we attended regularly.

**An Ambedkarite Framework: Understanding Exclusion by Analyzing Brahminism**

Theorizing about critical exclusion can be triggered by the everyday moments that cause pain, signal exclusion, and beg for exposure and remedy. From that starting point, systemic explanations help in making sense of what has happened and the deep roots of exclusion. What we have done thus far is narrated our journey to how the full, in-depth, historic treatment of caste that Ambedkar offers became necessary for our interpretive work. The first author did not go into the field with an Ambedkarite framework in mind, but both of us felt the need for it as a comprehensive systemic sense-making tool as we debriefed about the encounters from our positionalities and felt the need for a deeper historical analysis to unpack the problematic nature of the encounters, that is as yet not represented in organization studies. We turn to an Ambedkarite framework that helps us further understand caste at a systemic level and use it for an inter-textual reading of the encounters discussed above. To give a full flavor of Ambedkar’s work, we retain historic examples and details that are the bedrock of understanding caste today, which is why Ambedkar’s work continues to animate contemporary scholarship.

We draw upon Ambedkar’s work in three steps. First, Ambedkar offers a lens through which to understand how encounters with Brahminism convey unproblematized dominance of privileged castes and ongoing exclusion of oppressed castes in the everyday culture of organizations. Second, this cultural reading continuously evokes historic texts and incidents, which undergird Ambedkar’s reading of the long history of caste. Third, Ambedkar as a
political philosopher and practical advocate was deeply concerned about possibilities for inclusion, which he envisioned as self-governance, equal representation, and the dignity of all persons around the principles of liberty, equality, and fraternity. Below, we present his framework as understanding exclusion through culture, history, and governance along with an inter-textual reading of the encounters discussed above.

**Understanding Exclusion through Culture**

Ambedkar’s writings offer a helpful approach for the project of theorizing critical exclusion aligned with other anti-caste scholars, activists, and leaders (Aloysius, 1997; Jangam, 2017; Mahalingam et al., 2019; Pal, 2011; Pal & Pradagna C., 2012; Teltumbde, 2018). Ambedkar writes with wide consciousness of multiple dimensions of exclusion, about representations that are framed neutrally as Hinduism, and he offers a critical re-reading of them as Brahminism. Ambedkar examines spatial divisions and occupational segregation to critically understand religious and spiritual markers that mask multiple elements of caste-based inequality and exclusion. Spatial segregation is a distinct feature of Brahminism. Ambedkar observes that the layout of villages permits a periphery that is stigmatized and shunned and reinforces hierarchical distance between castes.

Ambedkar’s (2014b) theorizing on spatial segregation has been employed by scholars in other disciplines to better understand the perpetuation of *untouchability* and the failure of democratic nation-building as a result of spatial segregation in India and other contexts (Cháirez-Garza, 2014). While this segregation is most visible in villages, urban areas are not immune to it (Pramod, 2020). Separation of castes is also enforced by food culture, where the *Manusmriti* prohibits inter-dining between castes (Ambedkar, 2014a, p. 292). Observing the curtain and the sign that separates the dining room of the Brahmin NGO leaders from the rest
of the staff of the NGO was a startling reminder of spatial segregation and prohibition of inter-dining. Ambedkar (2014a) notes that these divides are somehow made neutral and accepted in everyday life by the veneer of religious meaning. The Brahmin male self-proclaimed status of priesthood spills over into status in other domains (Ambedkar, 2014a; Ilaiah, 1996). Ambedkar examines how Brahminical culture is characterized by caste based occupational segregation, through which the most degrading and dehumanizing occupations such as manual scavenging are forced upon Dalits (Bathran, 2011; Mahalingam et al., 2019) while positions offering higher social status such as priesthood in Hindu temples are reserved for Brahmin men (Ambedkar, 2014a; Ilaiah, 1996). Ambedkar notes that occupational segregation, even in reference to the most demeaning and dirty jobs like removing human waste by hand, is where Brahmins invoke Gandhi who praised “scavenging as the noblest service to society!” (Ambedkar, 2014c, p. 291).

Many Non-Brahmin leaders have been explicit in resisting the imposed Hindu identity that seeks to enforce a subordinate status on caste-oppressed people as part of the hierarchical caste order (Ambedkar, 1944; Ilaiah, 1996) and preferred conversion to religions such as Buddhism, Christianity, and Islam. Conversion has been seen as a threat to the dominance of Hinduism. Returning to the encounters, the comment by the driver as well as the slogans on the saffron van that ask people to remain Hindu need to be seen in this context. We see in the Brahmin marker on the house of the NGO board member that this overt claiming of status is done as if it is unproblematic and legitimate. An NGO contemplating temple construction is startling because Hindu temple construction has been a way of expanding the cultural dominance of Brahminism and appropriating indigenous deities in the Dravidian states (B. R. Prasad, 1980; Sahu, 2016; Sarma, 2008). While the NGO board member imagines a place of
spiritual renewal, Hindu temples have traditionally denied entry to Dalits. Non-Brahmin leaders fought against this denial of entry into temples through movements such as the Vaikom Satyagraha (Periyar, 2005) and the Temple Entry Movement (Ambedkar, 2014d, p. 6). This denial of entry into temples for Dalits continues to this day in this district where ARDT is located. A Dalit leader from another NGO in the district shared an instance of such exclusion in a nearby village in this district.

While Brahmins and other oppressor castes are offered the flexibility to change occupations as needed, this choice is not the case for the caste-oppressed (Ambedkar, 2014a), as shown by the contrasting example of the upwardly mobile ARDT senior leader, juxtaposed to that of the watchmen and carpenters. In talking with the ARDT leader, it was striking how he discussed the roles of the watchmen as their appropriate places, in a division of labor as natural as unequal fingers on a hand. While defining each of the occupations that have been historically based on caste and appealing to “Vasudeva Kutumbakam,” the Sanskrit term from Hindu scripture, the hierarchical nature of these occupations in the Brahminical caste order is made invisible and rendered unproblematic in this leader’s narrative. Other terms are more evidently startling and othering. The leader used the term “boy” to describe one of the working men, a demeaning slur historically recognized as racist when used in the U.S. by white people referring to adult Black men. These terms are meant to keep people in their place, in the same job for many decades, legitimated by claiming all work is dignified, as the ARDT leader did. This is further justified by upholding inequality as natural as the unequally sized fingers of a hand. These justifications of inequality can be better understood by tracing them back to the history of exclusion. Invocations of Ambedkar’s theorizing and perspective rely heavily on understanding history and its long shadows, so we next consider Ambedkar’s work on the
history of exclusion to deepen our analysis and include a necessary element for a critical theorizing of exclusion.

**Understanding Exclusion through History**

We discuss here Brahminism as an exclusionary ideology from Ambedkar’s analysis of the history of its origins, features, and political power in the twentieth century. We then do an inter-textual reading of the encounters using Ambedkar’s outlining of the history of Brahminism. Ambedkar presented a detailed analysis of the origins of caste (Ambedkar, 1916) and explained the subordination of Shudras (Ambedkar, 1946), Dalits (Ambedkar, 1948), and women (Ambedkar, 1916, 2014e) in Indian society as a tenet of Brahminism. Ambedkar situates Brahminism in context with other groups and religions, stating that “the history of India is nothing but a history of a mortal conflict between Buddhism and Brahmanism” (Ambedkar, 2014a, p. 267), tracing the rise of Brahmanism to 185 BCE (Ambedkar, 2014a, p. 271) wherein “the creation of the caste system was the end and aim of Brahmanism” (Ambedkar, 2014a, p. 293). Ambedkar (2014a, p. 275) outlines the main features of Brahminism, as part of this history, including: Brahmins’ “right to rule and commit regicide,” making “Brahmins a class of privileged persons,” “making status and occupation hereditary,” bringing “conflict and anti-social feelings between different castes,” degrading “the Shudras and the women,” forging “the system of graded inequality,” and making this social system “legal and rigid.” He elaborates on the repercussions of the predominance of privilege by birth as a principle of Brahminism “to produce an unprogressive society which sacrifices the rights of intelligence on the altar of aristocratic privilege” (Ambedkar, 2014a, p. 290).

In the twentieth century, Ambedkar’s scholarship on the role of the ruling class Congress party, credited with the non-violent independence movement against British, helps
us understand the party’s position on the question of caste (Ambedkar, 1945; Pandian, 2007). On Gandhi, one of the most popular leaders of the Congress party, Ambedkar (2014c, p. 291) clarifies, “Gandhism is the philosophy of the well-to-do and the leisure class … to delude people into accepting their misfortunes by presenting them as best of good fortunes.” Ambedkar (1945) had critiqued Gandhi’s ideas on rural development for not being representative of the issues faced by people from oppressed castes and as having mere performative value without bringing any substantive change in rural India (Aloysius, 1997). Gandhian model of rural development can be understood by looking at Harijan Sevak Sangh (HSS), which translates to Organization for the Service of Harijans, started by Gandhi. Harijan is considered a derogatory and patronizing term and was recently ordained by the Indian Supreme Court as an offensive and abusive term (The Wire, 2017). HSSs were started by Gandhi to work against untouchability and were predominant since the early 20th century in preparation for the consolidation of power by Brahmins across India (Aloysius, 1997; Ambedkar, 1945). Ambedkar (1945) notes that HSSs were always led by people from the privileged castes while leadership was denied to caste oppressed people, reinforcing caste prejudice (Aloysius, 1997; Ambedkar, 1945). Gandhi justified this practice saying that the privileged castes needed to lead as penance for their practice of casteism (Ambedkar, 1945), a deployment of caste that perpetuates caste. While one of Gandhi’s principles was to remove untouchability, Ambedkar draws in Young India (1925) from Gandhi’s own writing to show that, for Gandhi, removing untouchability only meant that “the Hindus will not mind touching the Untouchables” but it “does not mean inter-dining or inter-marriage between the Hindus and the Untouchables” or freedom from hereditary caste-based occupations. Ambedkar (1945, p. 282) clarifies Gandhi’s position on the question of economic equality, wherein Gandhi
offered the rich “to declare themselves Trustees for the poor” and that they “need not deprive themselves of their property.”

Ambedkar’s work is helpful in understanding Brahminism in its current manifestation in organizations through the ARDT leaders’ appeals to history at an ideological level that informs their work. Ambedkar (1945, p. 461) talks about Tilak, who was mentioned by one of the senior leaders, in his analysis of leaders of the Congress Party, clarifying his position on caste,

“In 1918, when the non-Brahmins and the Backward classes had started an agitation for separate representation in the legislature, Mr. Tilak in a public meeting held in Sholapur said that he did not understand why the oil pressers, tobacco shopkeepers, washermen, etc.—that was his description of the Non-Brahmins and the Backward classes—should want to go into the legislature. In his opinion, their business was to obey the laws and not to aspire for power to make laws.”

More recent studies show how Tilak had advocated for the denial of education to Non-Brahmins and women (P. V. Rao, 2011). Ambedkar’s analysis of the politics of the Congress party and its leaders such as Gandhi and Tilak, helps us understand critically the ideology of an organization that draws inspiration from these leaders. While culture and history help us make sense of the foundation, the vision, values, and the day-to-day social life of an organization, these are in turn shaped and reinforced by the governance in organizations. We thus turn to concerns around governance when it is shaped by caste hierarchy and Ambedkar’s remedy to exclusion as a radical reconsideration of the governance processes that would scaffold full inclusion.
Understanding Exclusion through Governance

Ambedkar’s work on governance has had a macro level focus on equal representation in positions of power of all oppressed minorities in India so that every person be accorded dignity and rights as a condition of the formation of democracy. His concern is that the persistence of caste impedes this project: “the existence of a governing class is inconsistent with democracy and self-government” Ambedkar (1945, p. 203). He explains,

“what matters most in the consideration of any scheme of democracy and self-government is the social outlook and social philosophy of the governing class, for so long as the governing class retains its means to capture the power to govern, the freedom and the well-being of the servile classes must depend upon the social outlook, the social conscience of the governing class and its philosophy of life.”

Ambedkar fought to get formal representation of the caste oppressed in governance. His conceptualization of the governing class and the governed class helps us understand that a constitutional democracy alone is an insufficient condition to ensure true democracy as long as the lines between the governing class and governed class are clearly demarcated. His efforts spanned three key time periods, during British rule, during the effort to oust the British, and after British rule ended. In 1921, the Non-Brahmin/Dravidian leaders in the Justice Party had proposed the Communal Government Order to provide representation of Non-Brahmins in education and employment (Pandian, 2007; Periyar, 2005). In 1930, Ambedkar proposed separate electorates for the Depressed Classes during the Round Table Conferences. The British accepted this proposal, but Gandhi went to fast unto death in opposition. Ambedkar reluctantly relented, accepting the Poona Pact as a compromise, while arguing that it diluted the strength of representation possible through separate electorates (Ambedkar, 1945). In 1947,
after independence from the British, Ambedkar joined E.V. Ramasamy aka Periyar and Mohammad Ali Jinnah to discuss the possibilities for realization of sovereignty for different constituencies oppressed by caste and religion. These constituencies did not want to be under the dominance of the impending post-British Brahminical rule in India (Ramakrishna Rao, 2002). The idea of a governance regime without full and equal rights to participation illustrates the concept of “exclusionary inclusion.”

In writing the Constitution, Ambedkar enshrined the right to equality as a political safeguard that recognizes and seeks to redress inequality on the basis of caste and gender. In 1951, he resigned from the parliament in protest when the Hindu Code Bill upholding women’s rights faced opposition, largely from male caste-privileged members of the parliament (Ambedkar, 2014e). It is noteworthy that the first affirmative action policies were encoded into the Constitution of the new nation of India by Ambedkar many years before similar policies were seen in the U.S. (Myers, Jr & Radhakrishna, 2017). The constant struggle for equality in governance and the barriers to democracy at the macro level have been a consistent theme in his writings, which can help inform the barriers to democracy at an organizational level as well.

In the field encounters, we see that the espoused theories-in-use articulated by the Brahmin leaders of ARDT bring to light how Ambedkar’s principles can apply in contemporary organizations as representation is a key element of governance. Indeed, the presenting problem for the study that took us to the field was to understand whether and how oppressed caste members might have a role in the strategy and governance of NGOs with missions of addressing inequality. Enabling representation of the caste-oppressed requires seeing caste as a basis for privilege and exclusion. Yet, the ARDT leaders are in denial about
caste, or express a preference to imagine the world is free of caste now. Economic problems were highlighted primarily as historically persistent problems, while they mentioned social and caste issues only when probed further.

**Discussion**

Our study makes three contributions to locating and understanding exclusion and theorizing critical exclusion. First, we show that the rush to theorize critical inclusion may circumvent an important step of understanding exclusion more fully from the vantage of under-represented and under-explored forms of exclusion such as caste. One window into caste is the lived experience of its operation in organizational settings. In critical theorizing about diversity, diversity is shown to be an empty promise if policies and practices for inclusion do not realize change and redistribution. However, there are settings in which diversity and inclusion are not even promised and where arguments for separation and stratification are given in sometimes coded, sometimes direct terminologies that are anchored in a long history of exclusion. At the same time, it is critically important to state that it is not as though the Global South is in some way less committed to striving towards inclusion and therefore is a primary site for examining exclusion. Instead, we argue that the Global South is a font of insightful material for critical theorizing about exclusion, which has not been tapped by organization studies.

Secondly, we locate an important domain of exclusion, caste, which has not been given full consideration in organization studies in general and in studies of diversity in particular. We focused on the dynamics of caste – how it is signaled, explained, experienced, and reproduced – in society and in organizational contexts as a tenet of Brahminism. We draw upon the positionalities of researchers to reflect upon the gaps in critical diversity discourse in the
Global North, which is unable to capture exclusion in the Global South context. By studying the Global South, we identify the ongoing importance of caste, most notably by taking seriously the perspective of the caste oppressed. In the U.S., studies of diversity in the workplace often examine how people from historically oppressed groups take action in the workplace by linking to and drawing upon broader social movements, such as civil rights, anti-racism, feminism, or gay rights. Interestingly, there is a vigorous and ongoing social movement of people from Dalit and oppressed caste backgrounds (Omvedt, 2014). This active social movement is of globally vast scale, yet it has not been recognized by organizational scholars as a social movement context that might inspire parallel activism inside workplace contexts. Caste exclusion follows oppressed caste groups into organizations globally (Smith, 2020; Zwick-Maitreyi, M. et al., 2018a), but it is notable that organizations in the U.S. do not include caste as a basis for discrimination (with a recent exception of its addition to a university anti-discrimination policy (Liebowitz, 2019)). Our paper invites a more robust consideration of dimensions and experiences of caste oppression inside global workplaces.

Our third contribution draws attention to the significant scholarship of Ambedkar and demonstrates how it may critically inform our understanding of exclusion in modern organizations. Ambedkar has been surprisingly overlooked in critical management studies and postcolonial studies. We use Ambedkar’s work in three ways. First, we interpret why aspects of the field encounters were jolting by showing how they encode attitudes of Brahminism and exclusion through a reflexive dialogue between the authors from their standpoints. In doing this interpretive work, we draw upon Ambedkar’s analysis of caste as more than a position in a religion to see it as holistically a domain of social, political, and economic exclusion. These interpretations are anchored in history, so we turn to Ambedkar’s work as a historian, where
he traces the origins of caste in Brahminism and examines the role of the Brahminical ruling class in modern times in their subordination of the caste oppressed. The remedy to these exclusions is full inclusion through governance where we draw from Ambedkar’s philosophy of the governing and governed classes and the need for representation.

Our second move in introducing Ambedkar, drawing upon his theorizing and critical importation of history, is vital for critical theorizing of exclusion. History shows how forms of oppression are at once related and distinct. Historic context is vital to understand both the contemporary expressions and the deep and tenacious roots of exclusion. Much scholarship in organization studies is grounded in and committed to the value of historic perspective. For theorizing on critical exclusion, that move is especially vital.

Finally, a praxis of exclusion naturally includes ideas and actions on how to eliminate exclusion, or in the powerful phrasing of Ambedkar (1944), “annihilate” caste. Thus, we draw upon Ambedkar’s analysis of governance, and specifically of representation of excluded people in positions of power. Ambedkar’s commitment is that formal protections are needed rather than reliance on attitudinal shifts among the privileged. These three moves from Ambedkar – interpretation of encounters in everyday culture, anchors in history, and (as yet unrealized) prospects for governance – contribute to organization studies in general and to theorizing critical exclusion in particular.

We note four limitations of our study. First, we may have defined some terms in shorthand or mentioned key historical moments without full elaboration of context. Because we are opening up a new field of inquiry for organization studies, the necessity to define terms fell to us, as these terms and historic examples are not in wide use in organization studies in the Global North. We invite readers to explore further any unfamiliar terms. Second,
Ambedkar's commitments were widely inclusive of many people excluded or harmed by Brahminism, including Adivasis and religious minorities, whose experiences we recognize were not explored in this study because of its limited scope. Third, we were unable to explore the intersections of caste with oppression based on gender, sexuality, disability, and the differences across regional contexts. We made caste focal and not overshadowed by dimensions of social identity more often covered in diversity and inclusion research in the Global North, but of course caste is necessarily intersectional. Fourth, theorizing around the workplace may also be inappropriate, as regular employment in workplaces – our initial research quest – is not likely to be provided to excluded groups. Exclusion from work itself and relegation to demeaning tasks in the informal economy (Singh, 2014) is a foundational and persistent aspect of caste exclusion, which warrants further theorizing on critical exclusion.

For future research, an Ambedkarite anti-caste lens of critical exclusion can be useful to understand caste in a range of settings such as commercial firms, multinationals, other exclusionary caste systems like the Burakumin in Japan, the South Asian diaspora, and the robust tenacity of caste in the U.S., as witnessed in the recent lawsuit in California filed by an engineer on the basis of discrimination from ‘higher’ to ‘lower’ caste members in a high tech company (Dave, 2020). The ongoing politics of caste globally include moves from both the privileged and the oppressed. Brahmins in the U.S. fought to eliminate caste from textbooks in California (Zwick-Maitreyi, M. et al., 2018a). Indigenous peoples globally have mounted resistance to Gandhi statues, in Ghana (Al Jazeera, 2018; Sagar, 2019), Malawi (Luedi, 2018), Canada (OFMI, 2018), the U.S. (OFMI, 2019), and the U.K. (Press Trust of India, 2019). Future research can consider how these social movements inform both how people work inside
organizational contexts as well as outside them, to understand where and how “exclusionary inclusion” is experienced and where and how it might be contested.

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CHAPTER 4

CASTE AND WOMEN’S LEADERSHIP IN NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS IN ANDHRA

Abstract

In this study, I use an Ambedkarite framework to analyze how organizations challenge or reinforce social hierarchies based on caste and gender by unpacking the narratives of women as founders and leaders of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in Andhra. Drawing from Ambedkar, I critically analyze how lived experience, leaders’ positionality and their reflections of it, leaders’ analysis of social hierarchies, and their access to resources play a role in how women leaders envision their organizations. The sample for this study includes leaders of four NGOs led by women from diverse castes and socio-economic backgrounds located in the same district in Andhra. Ambedkar’s analysis of society offers a critical framework for analysis that I define and apply at the individual, organizational, and macro levels. Drawing upon interviews and observations in the four NGOs, I explore these three levels. Firstly, at an individual level, I analyze how leaders who are part of a hierarchical society are motivated to initiate change through the creation of an organization. Secondly, at an organizational level, I analyze how social hierarchies are understood and addressed by NGO leaders within their organizations, what shapes this understanding, and their organizational policies relevant to these hierarchies. Thirdly, I analyze how NGOs’ access to resources facilitates or hinders the emergence of leaders and organizations that can challenge social hierarchies. Organization studies has historically mostly attended to class as a dimension of inequality in South Asia to the relative lack of attention towards caste and it is more recently starting to understand caste critically.
This study contributes to organization studies by illustrating the use of an Ambedkarite framework to examine caste critically and systemically at individual, organizational, and macro levels. It is also a call for organizational studies to engage more substantively with Ambedkar’s work. He studied systems of oppression globally to understand both how stratification is reproduced and how it can be interrupted and ended, which provides a rich approach to the overarching research question in my work.

**Introduction**

Several studies have called for using intersectionality to examine the social, historical, and political context and the embedded social identities of professionals in organizations to better understand the simultaneity of multiple social identities they hold (Acker, 2006; Carrim & Nkomo, 2016; Holvino, 2010; Rodriguez et al., 2016). Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989) coined the term intersectionality in 1989 to signify the simultaneity of oppression based on race and gender experienced by Black women. For a long time, legal categories did not account for such simultaneity and understood them separately by lumping together both Black and White women in cases based on gender and lumping together Black women and men in cases based on race, which made Black women’s oppression invisible in the way it simultaneously involved race and gender (Crenshaw, 1989). Intersectionality is thus useful in complicating and differentiating the understanding of experiences of women who occupy different positionalities in the multiple intersecting hierarchies of a society (Bunjun, 2010; Luna, 2016; Pio et al., 2013). The socio-historical-political context is not only significant in the understanding of societies but also within organizations as social units. Intersectionality has thus been useful in the study of organizations as well (Carrim & Nkomo, 2016; Pullen et al., 2019; Rodriguez et al., 2016; Ruiz Castro & Holvino, 2016; Zanoni & Janssens, 2015).
I conceptualize organizations as social units constituted by leaders who are part of the same hierarchical society that they work to intervene in, which calls for reflection upon one’s own positionality and life experiences while constituting oneself as a leader of change. In organization studies, this may broadly be viewed as a problem of embedded agency where in agents are embedded within institutions that have an impact on their change agency (Battilana, 2006; Seo & Creed, 2002). However, the embeddedness of agents through the socialization based on their social identities has not been considered using the concept of embedded agency. While considering social identities and embedded agency, intersectionality is further useful to complicate how agents are embedded in their multiple social identities. The study of caste hierarchy as an institution within which organizational leaders are embedded can thus expand the literature on both embedded agency and intersectionality in organization studies. Overcoming the challenge of embeddedness in social identities necessitates leaders’ reflection upon their positionality and their analysis of the social hierarchies that they are part of while constituting themselves as change agents and formulating a theory of change. In this study, I focus on the narratives of four founding women leaders of NGOs and how they bring their lived experience, positionality based on caste and gender, and social analysis into their NGOs in a district in Andhra.

In the following sections, I provide a brief introduction to caste, its origins and manifestation in India followed by a review of literature in organizational studies on caste and gender. I then argue for the need for an Ambedkarite framework for a critical analysis of organizations. Following this, I present the empirical data from the women leaders’ narratives and show how an Ambedkarite framework can be gainfully applied for critical insights into
organizational analysis, specifically along the lines of leaders’ positionality, life experiences, and their social analysis in the context of the organizations that they run.

**Caste, its Origins, and Manifestation in India**

The rise of Brahmanism can be traced to around 185 BCE when Pushyamitra Shunga, a Brahmin general in the Mauryan empire killed Brihadratta, then king of the Buddhist kingdom of Mauryas and made *Manusmriti* the rule of law (Ambedkar, 2014a, p. 271). Caste stratification has the religious sanction of Hinduism through the Brahminical scriptures, most significantly as a creation myth in the Purusha Sukta in the Rig Veda, that dates back to 1500 BCE. These scriptures are invoked to define the *chaturvarna* system as four hierarchically ordered classes with Brahmins (priests) at the top of the hierarchy followed by Kshatriyas (warriors), Vaishyas (traders), and Shudras (peasants or the servile class). Ambedkar (2014b, p. 160) further notes the hierarchal nature of caste:

> “Castes form a hierarchy in which one caste is at the top and is the highest, another at the bottom and it is the lowest and in between there are castes, every one of which is at once above some caste and below some caste. The caste system is a system of gradation in which every caste except the highest and the lowest has a priority and precedence over some other caste.”

Castes relegated outside the caste system as outcastes are Dalits (or Scheduled Castes) and Adivasis (or Scheduled Tribes). Dalit literally translates to oppressed. It is a term used for assertion that became popular with the Dalit Panther movement in Maharashtra in the 1970s. Adivasi translates to original inhabitants and is a term that became popular through indigenous peoples’ self-determination movements. The existence of outcastes is an important feature of maintaining the institution of caste. Outcastes have been historically those who did not accept
Brahminical culture or the supremacy of Brahmins (Ambedkar, 1948). In contemporary India, under the allocative affirmative action defined by the Government of India known as the reservation policy, the first three castes named in the Brahminical hierarchy (Brahmins, Kshatriyas, and Vaishyas) are considered “Forward Classes” while Shudras are included among “Other Backward Classes” (OBC) with some exceptions regionally. Outside the caste system, Dalits are called Scheduled Castes (SC) in the Indian constitution and constitute about 16.6% of the population; and Adivasis or indigenous peoples are called Scheduled Tribes (ST) and constitute about 8.6% of the population (Census of India, 2011).

Caste based oppression is not simply a historic practice but is ongoing. Segregation in a society can be well understood by looking at areas such as marriage, housing, and education. The following statistics are telling about the prevalence of caste-based segregation in India. Endogamous marriage within caste is ordained by Brahminism to maintain caste distinctions, and even today only 5% of marriages are inter-caste, according to the India Human Development Survey (Desai & Vanneman, 2018). Untouchability is admittedly practiced by 30% in rural areas and 20% in urban areas (Desai & Vanneman, 2018; A. Thorat & Joshi, 2015). The number of crimes against Dalits or Scheduled Castes keep increasing every year (by 12% from 38,670 in 2015 to 43,203 in 2017), and constitute 21% of all crimes, according to the National Crime Records Bureau (Ministry of Home Affairs, 2017, p. 509). Many caste oppressed people converted to Buddhism, Jainism, Sikhism, Islam, and Christianity to escape the “watertight compartment” (Jangam, 2017, p. 109) of caste, although discrimination nonetheless followed them in these adopted identities. New studies show that caste stratification spills across the Indian diaspora (Zwick-Maitreyi, M. et al., 2018b).
Caste and Gender in NGOs

Caste has only recently emerged as a topic of interest in management and organization studies scholarship (Bapuji & Chrispal, 2020; Raman, 2020) while it has, for very long, been thoroughly analyzed in other disciplines in the social sciences as a basis of stratification and oppression in South Asia. Most recently, Raman’s (2020) study shows how the intersectionality of caste and gender is experienced and resisted by Dalit women workers in a tea plantation in Kerala in India. Zulfiqar (2019) details how caste hierarchy is a defining feature of employment relations in domestic work in Pakistan through what is known as the beradiri system among Muslims in the Punjab region of Pakistan. This system ties caste oppressed people to a loyalty/patronage relationship with caste privileged employers/landlords along with notions of purity and pollution around work. Heaton-Shrestha (2004) talks about how caste functions in NGOs in Nepal among NGO professionals and their interactions with people from the target groups of their NGOs, “it was little disputed that the larger donor-funded NGOs were run and staffed by high castes and Newars (a privileged ethnic group) with notable exceptions” like “FEDO (Federation of Dalit Organizations) and BASE (Backward Society Education)” (Heaton-Shrestha, 2004, p. 43). She notes that “staff were also outsiders” to the areas where the NGOs worked and they did not have relations outside work with the beneficiaries, such as visiting each other’s houses and they saw their work as service to people who were outsiders with respect to their own community. They also sought to make the difference of caste between themselves and the beneficiaries “less visible but not invisible” (Heaton-Shrestha, 2004, p. 49). Other scholars have noted that the caste privileged are simultaneously invested in both perpetuating caste through organizations and denying the macro level need for policy interventions towards equality such as affirmative action.
These studies tend to take a critical view of how caste operates in everyday organizational relationships. They open the door to understanding the more systemic aspects of caste and the complicity of the caste privileged in maintaining caste hierarchies within organizational and workspaces (Heaton-Shrestha, 2004; Zulfiqar, 2018). This calls for a greater focus on organizational leaders’ role in addressing caste within their organizations in South Asia. Through this study, I focus on organizational leaders in the NGO sector and illustrate the use of an Ambedkarite framework as a critical lens to understand caste in organizations in a systemic way.

The NGO sector in India is interesting to study because it falls outside what might strictly be considered public sector or the private sector and is not legally obligated to follow the reservation policy. While the term NGO is more popular in India as is elsewhere outside the US, the issues of representation and inclusion within these organizations are not very different from those seen in non-profits in the US. Villanueva (2018, p. 121) points out the need for those with lived experience in marginalized communities to have “representation, shared ownership and full inclusion” within non-profits that claim to work for them in the US, in order to decolonize them. The number of NGOs in India has been rapidly rising with a 2015 figure being 3.1 million approximately, which is “more than double the number of schools” in India (Anand, 2015). Studies on development NGOs are often conducted from a project evaluation perspective to see whether the target group is properly served by the NGOs. For instance, in his analysis based on four case study evaluations of poverty alleviation programs, Robinson (1992) points out the inability of NGOs in reaching out to the poorest and most marginalized, especially among the Scheduled Castes (Robinson, 1992). Studies on accountability of NGOs (Ebrahim, 2003) have also admittedly fallen short of analyzing
accountability in terms of NGOs’ ability/inability to represent the marginalized groups. Some studies view NGOs as co-opted by capitalism or the state by funding, design, or managerialism (Roberts et al., 2005; Tembo, 2003) in the critical management studies and the critical development studies literatures (Srinivas, 2009). However, there has been little research on the leadership of NGOs, who they are represented by in terms of social identities and how this impacts their agency as NGO leaders. Navayan (2015, p. 220), in his efforts to gather information on diversity in 34 international NGOs in India using the Right to Information Act 2005, finds that only two NGOs provided information on diversity and that too by gender but not caste.

Talking about NGO leaders, Gladson Dungdung (2013, p. 267), an Adivasi scholar and activist, points out that “the elite heads of these organizations treat their colleagues – mostly the Adivasis, Dalits and women of the d-section [deprived section] as their slaves”. They “advocate for promotion and protection of Adivasi languages,” but “they cannot bear to see an Adivasi in the driving seat of their organization” (Dungdung, 2013, p. 268). Handy, Kassam and Ranade (2002) show empirical evidence of how caste and gender together play an important role in influencing who can become an NGO leader. From their sample of 20 women-headed NGOs in Maharashtra, they found that 19 out of 20 women entrepreneurs are from Brahmin, Kshatriya and Vaishya castes which are the dominant castes in the caste hierarchy of India constituting less than 15% of the population. These women come from middle- and high-income families, with available workforce for childcare, disposable family income for entrepreneurship, and networks to tap into. Guérin and Kumar (2017) analyze the linkages between caste and gender background of NGO leaders in the context of NGOs associated with microfinance in Tamil Nadu and how microcredit reinforced or strengthened
pre-existing hierarchies. They highlight how the macro context and social networks facilitate or hinder the success of NGOs led by leaders from different castes in the following excerpt:

“an NGO created and managed by a single protestant Dalit woman does not have the same access to resources as an upper caste businessman, nor even of a Catholic man from a middle caste background. Alliance networks and dealings between NGOs are facilitated or blocked by personal relationships, but are often mediated through kinship, caste or religious membership, which people draw upon differently based on their circumstances and the opportunities open to them.”

The literature thus indicates that caste privilege offers advantages in the NGO sector in terms of access to networks and resources. Organizationally, NGOs in India rely heavily on the leadership, both in their capacity to run an organization and to be able to fundraise for the NGO’s work using the leaders’ networks. In this study, I look more deeply into the contrast between women leaders across caste positionalities and unpack how they address caste within their own organizations using an Ambedkarite framework. This helps contrast leadership from a position of privilege with leadership from the margins among women.

While representation within leadership is one important aspect of understanding how social hierarchies are reinforced or challenged, there are other dimensions within an organization where social hierarchies can manifest. For instance, Heaton-Shrestha (2004) points out the paternalistic attitude that can be observed among NGO staff towards the NGO’s target marginalized community when the NGO staff come from caste-privileged groups and are not representative of the community that the NGO works with. Thus, recruitment of staff and policies to promote leadership of the oppressed groups that an NGO serves is another area that can generate insights around how hierarchies are being challenged or reinforced. Pless and
Appel (2012) talk about a well-known award-winning NGO in Odisha, India where the NGO’s leader talks about their recruitment strategy in terms of what they value in staff with an emphasis on “education standards”, in the following excerpt:

“As of 2011, GV employed 353 people (288 men and 65 women) and was further supported by several volunteers at the village level. Due to Orissa’s low education standards, many employees are hired from other regions. However, attracting and retaining staff has become a key challenge for GV due to the competitive labour market and relatively higher salaries paid for well educated people in India. GV’s unattractively remote location does not help. Well-educated graduates generally prefer the bright lights and amenities of the cities, where they can earn a much higher salary in either the public or private sectors. While a number of graduates are willing to work for GV for a few years, they quickly yearn for city life after a brief spell in rural Orissa. This makes it difficult to build a management and leadership ‘pipeline’” (Pless & Appel, 2012, p. 401).

The leader, who is himself from outside Odisha, talks about difficulties faced in recruiting staff locally from Odisha, attributing it to low education standards in the state and to a pipeline problem. What the leader refers to as being “well-educated” here may be deconstructed to unpack assumptions around meritocracy and who is qualified to be leaders and managers in an NGO. In an educational system that has inbuilt inequities, especially in higher education, people from oppressed communities are often labeled as less qualified, and not good enough to be leaders, while their unpaid services are utilized as volunteers in NGOs. Instead, “well-educated” people from outside the local area of operation of the NGO, without lived experience or any stake in the interests of the local community are considered better
suited for leadership positions. Similar is the justification offered for the under-representation of women in leadership positions in the NGO:

“Another issue is the under-representation of women in the organisation. Women only make up about 20% of the total workforce and there are none at the middle management level (all regional co-ordinators are men). Recruiting local women has proved difficult to date given low education standards and traditional mindsets. Recruiting well educated women from other regions or from abroad is often difficult for several reasons. The idea of a single woman living on her own is very unusual in Orissa’s traditional rural society and in the case of a married woman, it is often hard to move the family to Orissa and find job opportunities for the spouse.” (Pless & Appel, 2012, p. 401)

Similar to the justification offered for lack of local leadership, the leader considers women from the local area not good enough to be in leadership positions based on their lack of access to higher education. It is notable that there is no consideration from the leader for the need for representation of the local community or of women in the NGO staff. In India, caste can be a facilitator or barrier to access higher education, especially in professional courses such as management. The faculty composition in business schools is skewed in favor of the privileged castes as a result of their resistance to implement reservations in faculty recruitment and doctoral program admissions (Joshi & Malghan, 2017; Thakur & Babu, 2017). Further, admission processes in higher education often involve steps that have in-built inequities and scope for caste based discrimination (Kumar, 2016a, 2016b). The discourse of diversity is gaining ground in
companies in the private sector in India but there continues to be a strong opposition to affirmative action policies around caste (Buddhapriya, 2013).

While there are studies that looked at caste and gender in organizations in general (Raman, 2020; Zulfiqar, 2018) and a few in NGOs in particular (Guérin & Kumar, 2017; Handy et al., 2002; Heaton-Shrestha, 2004), there is a need for a critical framework of analysis of the manifestation of caste and gender in organizational spaces. For epistemic justice to the study of organizations in the context of India where caste has been a dominant basis for social stratification and oppression for thousands of years, attending to the significant body of scholarship by Ambedkar can be a useful starting point. Ambedkar’s systemic analysis of caste and gender in the social, historical, political, and economic context of India can provide a critical lens for understanding how social hierarchies are challenged or reinforced in organizations. While intersectionality as a concept was not named as such in Ambedkar’s time, he studied and theorized caste and the subordination of women as co-occurring as part of Brahminism and not as separate or independent of each other (Ambedkar, 1916; Tamalapakula, 2011). Drawing from Ambedkar’s vast body of work and other historical and contemporary anti-caste scholarship can add much to organization studies in the context of South Asia.

**Drawing from Ambedkar**

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar is well known as the chief architect of the Indian Constitution. He has written across disciplines such as economics, history, religion, sociology, philosophy, political science, law, human rights and language, which are documented into 17 volumes of writings and speeches by the Government of Maharashtra, India. He constantly strived for
social justice throughout his lifetime, fighting for the rights of the most oppressed people in Indian society by caste, class, gender, religion, language and region. Born on April 14th, 1891, Ambedkar comes from one of the most oppressed castes. His positionality and lived experience of caste oppression have been influential in informing his resistance against caste. His research and scholarship spanning disciplines was driven by his mission to annihilate caste and draw connections through the analysis of oppressive hierarchies and stratification across the world. He proposed and fought for progressive legislation in the interest of oppressed people across the spectrum in India. The recent emerging interest in caste in organization studies (Bapuji & Chrispal, 2020; Raman, 2020) is yet to engage with Ambedkar’s comprehensive work on caste and gender in a substantial manner while other disciplines in social sciences are far ahead in their engagement with his work. This study hopes to generate further research in this direction in organization studies.

In one of his earliest theses on caste, Ambedkar points to subordination of women as integral to caste and essential for caste to prevail as a social system. He notes the “absence of intermarriage-endogamy” as the “essence of caste” which is upheld by the disposal or regulation of the “surplus woman” outside of marital bondage through enforced suicide or widowhood (Ambedkar, 1916). Further, child marriage is used to enforce this system, as children are forced into a caste based endogamous marriage before their age of consent. The “surplus man” outside of marital bondage is not accorded the same fate because of the patriarchal foundations of caste but is afforded the right to remarry minor girls. Thus, hetero-endogamous marriage exclusively within a caste along with mechanisms for regulation of children and women helps uphold caste. Ambedkar traces the origins of endogamous marriage to what was a practice prevalent among Brahmins and later spread to Non-Brahmins to varying
degrees where some “enclosed” themselves while others found themselves “closed out”. He further explains how this relates to the hierarchical nature of caste, “the status of a caste in the Hindu Society varies directly with the extent of the observance of the customs of Sati, enforced widowhood, and girl marriage” (Ambedkar, 1916, p. 13). This hierarchy further applies to women in ways that they are subjected to subordination in Brahminism and is graded by their location in the caste hierarchy. Caste and gender thus cannot be understood in isolation as they operate simultaneously and together privilege or marginalize people.

With these foundations of hierarchies based on caste and gender, Ambedkar’s analysis of society offers a critical framework for analysis at individual, organizational and macro levels. Firstly, at an individual level, his analysis of how caste influences a person’s social conditioning can be usefully applied to how leaders reflect upon their positionality in the social hierarchies and their understanding of caste and gender. Secondly, at an organizational level, his analysis of the politics of representation of caste and gender in leadership can help analyze the recruitment and promotion policies within organizations. Lastly, at a macro level, his analysis of social hierarchies in terms of social networks and resource distribution can help understand how leaders from different caste and gender backgrounds possess or lack access to networks of social power and resources for the work of their NGOs.

At an individual level, Ambedkar’s analysis of who constitutes the governing class and who constitutes the governed or servile class in India can be a starting point in understanding the deep-rooted social hierarchies in India, within which individuals are socialized. “The governing class in India consists principally of the Brahmins,” states Ambedkar (2014c, p. 204), and that they are conscious of it whether or not they claim to be (2014c, p. 206). He then points to the barriers of progress due to the “internal limitations [of the governing class] born
out of [their] outlook, traditions, vested interests and [their] social philosophy.” He identifies this governing class of Brahmins as “the most inveterate enemy of the servile classes” (Ambedkar, 2014c, p. 215). He describes the social philosophy of the governing class as Brahmanism, wherein inequality is the official doctrine and outlines its five cardinal principles as follows:

“(1) graded inequality between the different classes; (2) complete disarmament of the Shudras and the Untouchables; (3) complete prohibition of the education of the Shudras and the Untouchables; (4) ban on the Shudras and the Untouchables occupying places of power and authority; (5) ban on the Shudras and the Untouchables acquiring property. (6) complete subjugation and suppression of women.” (Ambedkar, 2014c, p. 215).

The severity of this Brahminical doctrine is most evident in how it ordained exclusion rather than it being a mere unintended consequence.

“There are countries where education did not spread beyond a few. But India is the only country where the intellectual class, namely, the Brahmins not only made education their monopoly but declared acquisition of education by the lower classes, a crime punishable by cutting off of the tongue or by the pouring of molten lead in the ear of the offender.” (Ambedkar, 2014c, p. 215).

In contemporary times, this exclusion manifests in the form of outright vocal opposition to affirmative action in education and employment by the caste privileged, exclusionary policies in the admission process and inequities in access to education (Joshi & Malghan, 2017; Kumar, 2016a, 2016b; Subramanian, 2019; Thakur & Babu, 2017). In general, individuals socialized into caste-privilege are more likely to internalize these beliefs in exclusion as normal, which then manifests in the organizations that they lead when there is no active effort
to unlearn these exclusionary beliefs. For organizational analysis, applying Ambedkar’s framework may thus be useful in understanding how leaders reflect upon their positionality within social hierarchies and how this informs their organizational policies. This brings us to the second level of analysis around representation in leadership in organizations. Ambedkar’s analysis of the politics of representation derives from the identification of the governing class and the servile class as distinct and with conflicting interests. Given this conflict of interest between them, he delves deeply into the question of representation and how it is often opposed in the name of merit by the governing class. He questions the over-representation of Brahmins as the governing class in positions of power in light of their conflict of interest with the servile class. He notes that class interests make the best among the caste-privileged incapable of representing the interests of the caste-oppressed, given their history of practicing exclusion against the caste-oppressed.

“The governing class in their attempt to ridicule the demand also forget by what means it has built up their power. … A reference to Manu Smriti will show that the view that Brahmins, the chief and the leading element in the governing class, acquired their political power not by force of intellect—intellect is nobody’s monopoly—but by sheer communalism. … The reservations do no more than correlate the constitution to the social institutions of the country in order to prevent political power to fall into the hands of the Governing class” (Ambedkar, 2014c, p. 234).

Second, the distinction that Ambedkar draws between the governing class and the servile class can be applied to organizations by looking at representation within the organization’s leadership, the organization’s staff, the communities that the organization serves and how they are different or similar in comparison to those represented in the
organization’s leadership; leadership promotion mechanisms as channels for upward mobility for members from the marginalized communities; and the recruitment policies of the organization. This is particularly relevant for NGOs that claim to work with predominantly marginalized communities but do not have representation of the marginalized community members within their leadership or staff. Where members of the governing class are over-represented within the leadership of an organization that primarily serves oppressed communities with no mechanisms for upward mobility within the organization, it may result in the reinforcement and reproduction of social hierarchies through the organizational space.

Third, on the question of access to resources and networks of power and how caste impacts it, Ambedkar points to how caste as a social system plays out in the various spheres of power such as land, the economy, and the state (Ambedkar, 2014c, p. 422). Explaining how the graded hierarchy plays out in the economy, he notes that the distribution of resources is based on nobility or caste precedence rather than on a principle of equality or need,

“The principle of graded inequality has been carried into the economic field. … The principle of the Hindu social order is: “From each according to his need. To each according to his nobility.” … The Hindu social order does not recognise equal need, equal work or equal ability as the basis of reward for labour. Its motto is that in regard to the distribution of the good things of life those who are reckoned as the highest must get the most and the best and those who are classed as the lowest must accept the least and the worst” (Ambedkar, 2014a, p. 111).

Ambedkar is pointing here to the skewed distribution of resources within the economy and the principle of graded hierarchy through caste that promotes and perpetuates it. This can be helpful in understanding how the macro environment within which NGOs
work can privilege or undermine access to resources based on the positionality of the NGO’s leader in the caste hierarchy. Access to resources may also be understood as access to networks of power that are in turn mediated through caste. Particularly in case of NGOs, fundraising is a constant requirement as NGOs cannot engage in profit-oriented activities. The systemic bias in the distribution of resources based on caste grants greater access to resources to caste privileged leaders who are deemed more deserving and capable while caste-oppressed leaders may have to deal with barriers to accessing such resources. Thus, leader’s positionality also has an impact on the access to resources. This skewed access to resources by caste has been pointed out in some studies of NGOs reviewed earlier (Guérin & Kumar, 2017; Handy et al., 2002).

To sum up, I looked at Ambedkar’s work to distill a critical framework for analysis across three levels - individual, organizational and macro levels - that can be useful for the analysis of organizations with respect to how they challenge or reinforce hierarchies. This Ambedkarite framework will be used as a critical lens to analyze the findings of this empirical study of NGOs as social units founded and led by leaders in a society with ingrained hierarchies of caste and gender. In the subsequent sections, I will discuss the methodology of this study, report the findings, and discuss them using a critical Ambedkarite framework as outlined above.

**Methodology**

This study explores caste and gender hierarchies within organizations by looking at four NGOs led by women leaders from different caste backgrounds. The research question that this study attempts to answer is how NGOs challenge or reinforce social hierarchies based on caste and gender. There could be several approaches to answer this question using quantitative,
qualitative, or mixed methods approaches using surveys, large samples, comparative samples with women and men intersecting with caste, textual analyses of NGO reports/websites, etc., to usefully probe the topic. But I have chosen a particular, focused, and somewhat exploratory approach by going in-depth with four NGOs that offer contrast by caste while gender is constant across the leaders. These four NGOs are located in a district in Andhra.

When the study was initially designed to answer the research question of how NGOs challenge or reinforce social hierarchies based on caste and gender, the sample was much larger and included NGOs led by men. However, it so happened that the larger sample included only four NGOs led by women from diverse caste backgrounds which made these organizations interesting to study. This is not to say that women leaders need to be studied in order to understand gender but that gender is often more consciously understood and discussed in women-led organizations compared to those led by men. Also, having gender as the common denominator among the leaders helped explore similarities and differences by caste across these four NGOs and thus complicate their positionality as women leaders. In the subsequent sections, I will discuss the sampling plan, data collection, and data analysis for this study.

**Sampling and Data Collection**

The sample for this study includes four NGOs led by women from different caste backgrounds. These were the only four women-led NGOs in the district in Andhra from a larger sample of 33 NGOs that worked on rural development and poverty alleviation in this district. The larger sample of NGOs working on rural development and poverty alleviation was drawn for the district in Andhra from state and central government portals, and referrals from faculty in the social sciences departments at the local public university in the district. While all
the NGOs in the study were founded and headed by women, comparing the responses across these four NGOs was useful to notice patterns of similarity and contrast along the lines of caste.

Data from these four NGOs were collected through surveys, interviews, and field observations. IRB approved protocol was followed in the recruitment and conduct of data collection with all participants. Firstly, the surveys were used to gather demographics of leaders and staff working in the NGOs. The survey questionnaire was designed in English and Telugu (see Appendix I (English) and Appendix II (Telugu)). The questions in the questionnaire were adapted with modifications based on the India census survey and data gathered in similar studies (Nafziger, 1978). The survey was used to get information on age, gender, caste category (SC/ST/OBC/OC), role in the NGO, highest level of education attained, income level, parental educational status, work history, size of the household, and number of breadwinners in the household. The information collected through surveys was used only as supplemental material to help provide more context and background of the interviewees and the four NGOs as presented in Table 1. Interviews constitute the primary data analyzed for the purpose of findings.

Nine interviews were conducted with the leaders of the four NGOs as well as with the leader’s family members in three NGOs, and with a community leader in one NGO. The number of interviewees varies across the four NGOs because of their size. In NGOs where the leader’s partner or other family members were actively involved, they were interviewed. Only in the case of Humanity-NGO, a young community leader who was also a part-time staff member for the NGO was interviewed based on the suggestion of the NGO leader. This was not possible at the remaining NGOs as their staff members did not indicate interest though they had an option to do so when they participated in the survey nor did their leaders recommend
any staff members for interviewing. Progress-NGO had no staff. Having access to interview staff members in Women’s Voice-NGO and Wave-NGO would have definitely added more richness to the data and is thus a limitation.

Each interview was 40 minutes to an hour long. I conducted the interviews in person in English and/or Telugu, and then transcribed and translated them to English. The questions for the interviews are available in Appendix III. The location and time of the interview was decided based on the interviewee’s convenience and preference. Care was taken to choose a location that allowed privacy to the interviewee. One- to two-day visits to each of the NGOs were made for conducting interviews and brief paper-based surveys with staff in person. During these visits, field observation notes were also taken that help provide contextual information; these play a supplemental role as in the case of the survey data and were not the primary data for analysis in this study. All four NGOs are small and locally based. All the interviews were conducted in person, which involved one to two visits to the NGO’s office, the NGO leader’s home or field site in different cases. I believe my gender, age and language fluency in Telugu presented an advantage in data collection as I was younger in age compared to most of the interviewees, many of whom were also women and felt more comfortable speaking in Telugu.

The interviews were aimed at understanding what motivated them to start an NGO or work in an NGO, their recruitment channels and networks, the efforts of NGOs towards leadership promotion among communities they worked with, the degrees of mobility within an NGO at different levels for staff from diverse socio-economic backgrounds, the leaders’ understanding of caste and gender both broadly and in relation to their poverty alleviation and rural development interventions, and their NGO’s theory of change. Through these questions,
four broad themes of interest were explored in the interviews with the nine interviewees in the four NGOs. These are, firstly, ‘motivation to start an NGO and role models’; secondly, their ‘understanding of caste and gender’; thirdly, ‘community leadership and representation’, and lastly, ‘access to resources’. In the subsequent section, I will discuss the data analysis process.

**Data Analysis**

Following the organization of responses under the four themes of interest for each of the four NGOs, these responses of interviewees from different NGOs were compared to find patterns of similarity and contrast across the four themes (Maxwell, 2013). Using intertextual analysis (Fairclough, 1992), these patterns of similarity and contrast were then analyzed with an Ambedkarite framework at three different levels – individual, organizational and macro – levels. ‘Motivation to start an NGO and role models’ was analyzed at the individual level, ‘community leadership and representation’ was analyzed at the organizational level, and finally, ‘access to resources’ is analyzed at the macro/systemic level. Understanding of caste and gender is a cross-cutting theme that can be seen at all levels in different ways.

Thematic analysis is a commonly used method in qualitative research (Maxwell, 2013). The four themes described earlier were built into the interviews as themes of interest to be explored across different interviewees. I then compared these themes across interviewees for similarities and contrast. Next, I conducted intertextual analysis using the theoretical lens for this study which is the Ambedkarite framework discussed earlier. Intertextual analysis is part of critical discourse analysis where connections are drawn between text and context through interpretive analysis (Fairclough, 1992). Texts used for intertextual analysis can include interviews that may be considered as spoken texts. These texts “selectively draw upon orders of discourse” in a social context and history where “intertextual analysis crucially mediates the
connection between language and social context, and facilitates more satisfactory bridging of
the gap between texts and contexts” (Fairclough, 1992, p. 194). Fairclough (1992) recommends
intertextual analysis particularly while dealing with social identities. He offers intertextual
analysis as an effective way to connect macro context, for instance, here, caste and gender
relations, to micro context, for instance, here, the narratives of leaders about their motivations
and their policies for their organizations. Further, he points to the usage of this tool to
understand the production, reproduction, or transformation of “social structures, relations and
identities” (Fairclough, 1992, p. 211). The Ambedkarite framework used as the theoretical
frame provides the socio-historical-political context for conducting intertextual analysis at the
three levels of analysis. In summary, thematic analysis followed by intertextual analysis of
interviews using an Ambedkarite framework is thus helpful in addressing the research question
on how NGOs are challenging or reinforcing social hierarchies based on caste and gender. In
the next section, I briefly share the profiles of the four NGOs before reporting the findings
across the four themes.

**Context: Profile of the NGOs and leaders**

The four NGOs are located in the same district in Andhra Pradesh. The four NGOs will
be referred to using pseudonyms, *Humanity-NGO, Progress-NGO, Women’s Voice-NGO* and
*Wave-NGO*. Pseudonyms have been used for the names of all the interviewees as well to
maintain anonymity. I briefly introduce the four leaders, their NGOs and the interviewees from
each of these organizations in Table 1 and below based on my field notes. Table 1 includes a
summary of characteristics of these four NGOs.

Firstly, the leader of *Humanity-NGO*, Latha, was from the local region, with a
background in social work, and nearly three decades of experience working in an NGO on
rural development in a neighboring state among Adivasi communities, along with her partner. She then moved to her hometown to work in the surrounding rural areas as her children were growing up. Her NGO has worked on issues of untouchability, food security, child labor, child rights, climate change and youth environmental activism in their field area. I visited this NGO thrice, the first time to interview the leader, the second time to visit their field office where I interviewed a young community leader upon Latha’s suggestion. Lastly, I made another visit to interview Latha’s partner who is also an NGO leader and activist but working at a different NGO with headquarters in another state. Their office was located in an apartment across their residence in an apartment building. They also had a field office, a two-story building, in one of the villages.

Second, the leader of Progress-NGO, Vani identified as a Dalit woman. She runs this organization along with her partner, Venkat. They operated from home with very modest means and did not have a separate office. They worked along with other NGOs in the region. They showed me pictures of their activities which consisted of rights-based work with women and Dalits. For instance, they worked to eradicate manual scavenging and almost completely eradicated it in that area. They had much lower resources to operate compared to the other three NGOs. For instance, they did not have access to a personal computer. The day I visited them, they went to the Mandal Parishad Development Office (MPDO office) to give the public official there a letter describing how under-resourced they are for an NGO. They allowed and encouraged me to join them. The letter asked the MPDO to support them with some basic facilities like an office space, commuting allowance, a bus pass to enable them to do their work without having to bear such expenses out of pocket as they did not have any other source of income and were working full-time for their NGO.
Third, the leader of *Women’s Voice-NGO* heads a smaller organization whose name spoke of women and was explicit about representing women. The leader of this organization, Lakshmi, mentioned that she was married at the age of 17 which was an early marriage, but she had support from her family to work on issues that interested her. She identified as a BC woman. She started her work with women in a slum in the city and mainly works with girls who are school dropouts in the slums by conducting bridge classes for them to graduate from high school. She also works with survivors of domestic violence. One such survivor who also belongs to Backward Classes works for their organization in a leadership position. They also work in the adjacent rural areas on a few projects. Their office mostly had women staff with a few male staff members. Two other women staff members who participated in the survey identified as belonging to OBC and SC respectively. Also, while talking about caste, the leader reiterated a few times that none of them benefited from reservations or affirmative action. Their office was about 15 kilometers away from the city in a single floor with a few rooms.

Lastly, the leader of *Wave-NGO*, Jasmine, was previously a lecturer at a university outside Andhra Pradesh, in a different region in western India and shifted to the location of study because of her student who was working there and had invited her to work with him. She moved here along with her partner and son. Her partner mentioned that he was initially not keen on this field of work but chose the profession when he went to volunteer after a cyclone where he met his future partner. He is now retired but has a cubicle in the office right beside the director’s in their office. They started to work with Adivasi people in the district. On the question of representation, she expressed that the affirmative action policy should have an expiry in due course as equal opportunities are created. When asked about women’s representation in the organization, she mentioned that they had a good number of women in
the organization doing good work, but she emphasized on merit and given two equally qualified people, she mentioned preference would be given to recruit women compared to men.

The office of this organization was a three-story building located about 10 kilometers from the center of the city and seemed to be constructed recently. It was painted in white and had pictures of Adivasi women and men with the backdrop of a village hanging prominently on the walls of their office building, which one could look at as one climbed up the staircase that runs inside the office. The organization had several other field offices in the villages where they worked. The name of the organization was an abstract word.

**Table 1: Summary Characteristics of the Four NGOs**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NGO (Pseudonyms)</th>
<th>Humanity-NGO</th>
<th>Progress-NGO</th>
<th>Women’s Voice-NGO</th>
<th>Wave-NGO</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Interviewees (Pseudonyms) and Caste</strong></td>
<td>Leader: <em>Latha</em></td>
<td>Leader: <em>Vani</em></td>
<td>Leader: <em>Lakshmi</em></td>
<td>Leader: <em>Jasmine</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Leader’s partner: <em>Lawrence</em></td>
<td>Leader’s partner: <em>Venkat</em></td>
<td>Leader’s partner: <em>John</em></td>
<td>Leader’s partner: <em>John</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Youth Community leader: <em>Usha</em></td>
<td></td>
<td>Leader’s son: <em>Gautam</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Caste: SC</td>
<td></td>
<td>Caste: OC</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>NGO established in the year:</strong></td>
<td>2002</td>
<td>2002</td>
<td>1995</td>
<td>1989</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Leader’s Place of Origin</strong></td>
<td>Local-urban</td>
<td>Local-suburban/rural</td>
<td>Local-urban</td>
<td>Metropolitan city in western India</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Education</strong></td>
<td>Postgraduate</td>
<td>Undergraduate</td>
<td>Postgraduate</td>
<td>Doctorate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Staff’s caste distribution (not exhaustive of all staff)</strong></td>
<td>SC 1</td>
<td>SC 4</td>
<td>SC 1</td>
<td>SC 0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ST 0</td>
<td>ST 0</td>
<td>ST 0</td>
<td>ST 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>OBC 1</td>
<td>OBC 0</td>
<td>OBC 2</td>
<td>OBC 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>OC 0</td>
<td>OC 0</td>
<td>OC 0</td>
<td>OC 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Do not wish to answer/No Response 1</td>
<td>Do not wish to answer/No Response 0</td>
<td>Do not wish to answer/No Response 0</td>
<td>Do not wish to answer/No Response 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td># Total respondents 3</td>
<td># Total respondents 4</td>
<td># Total respondents 3</td>
<td># Total respondents 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Staff’s gender distribution (not exhaustive of all staff)</strong></td>
<td>Male 0</td>
<td>Male 0</td>
<td>Male 0</td>
<td>Male 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Female 2</td>
<td>Female 1</td>
<td>Female 3</td>
<td>Female 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Transgender 0</td>
<td>Transgender 1</td>
<td>Transgender 0</td>
<td>Transgender 0</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No response 0</td>
<td>No response 2</td>
<td>No response 0</td>
<td>No response 1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Staff’s Annual Household Income Distribution (not exhaustive of all staff)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Income Range</th>
<th>NGOs 1</th>
<th>NGOs 2</th>
<th>NGOs 3</th>
<th>NGOs 4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Less than Rs.1,00,000</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rs.1,00,001 – Rs.3,00,000</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rs.3,00,001 – Rs.6,00,000</td>
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<td>0</td>
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<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More than Rs.10,00,000</td>
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<tr>
<td>No response</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Office Space
- **NGOs 1**: An apartment unit in a building (district office) and a two-story field office
- **NGOs 2**: No separate office, operating out of home
- **NGOs 3**: An apartment unit
- **NGOs 4**: Three-story building and multiple field offices

### Annual Funding from Donors
- **NGOs 1**: Approx. Rs.5,000,000
- **NGOs 2**: Not available (No FCRA)
- **NGOs 3**: Not available (FCRA registered)
- **NGOs 4**: Approx. Rs.40,000,000

### Media Presence
- **NGOs 1**: Website and a social media page
- **NGOs 2**: Newspaper articles only; no website or social media presence
- **NGOs 3**: Social media and news articles only; no website
- **NGOs 4**: Website, social media, publications, and videos

### Target Group
- **NGOs 1**: Adivasis, Dalits, Fisherfolk; Women and Children
- **NGOs 2**: Adivasis, Dalits; Women and Children
- **NGOs 3**: Women and Children
- **NGOs 4**: Adivasis

### Findings

The findings are based on the analysis of nine interviews from the four NGOs. Pseudonyms have been used for the names of the NGOs as well as for the interviewees as mentioned in Table 1. The following four major themes were explored across the interviews in the four NGOs, namely 1) motivation to start an NGO and role models; 2) understanding of caste and gender; 3) community leadership and representation; and 4) access to resources. In this section, I present a summary of the four themes explored in the interviews and then analyze patterns of similarity and contrast in these four themes across the four NGOs using intertextual analysis and an Ambedkarite framework.

### Thematic Analysis

**Motivation to start an NGO and role models**

In their narratives about their motivation to start an NGO, leaders from the NGOs, *Humanity, Progress, Women’s Voice*, and *Wave*, namely Latha, Vani, Lakshmi and Jasmine
respectively share experiences involving their family, neighborhood, community, or professional relationships that they are part of that inspired them to get into this work and later start an NGO. Latha, Lakshmi, and Vani are all from the local area around where their NGO is located, while Jasmine is from a metropolitan city in western India. Their families had a significant influence in the work that these leaders did.

Latha shares that her family has been service-oriented from the beginning through their work with missionaries and her father has been her inspiration. When Latha was a child, her father told her the story of her grandfather who struggled with lack of health facilities in the village they lived in, particularly during a health emergency and had to travel a far distance with limited transportation facilities to access healthcare, “He [had] to carry him for many miles [and] walk to reach the hospital.” This was part of her early influence. Her partner, Lawrence, is from an adjacent state in south India and they both met as he was also in the same field of work. Latha and Lawrence were working together in an adjacent state in the east coast of India for 28-30 years before Latha moved to her native state. Her people were asking her to come work there and their children were also growing up and her parents helped raise them. She then started an NGO in the area so she could continue the work. Lawrence was motivated by some of his relatives to start working in villages soon after his graduation when he was looking for work. Witnessing the issues in rural areas around caste discrimination, the oppression and exploitation of landless workers by the local landlords, and his exposure to popular leftist leaders at the time raised his political consciousness.

Vani shares, “I used to have a desire since childhood to work in a voluntary organization” when she was exposed to people doing service through their work in voluntary organizations. She started working as a tutor and then as a teacher after graduating from high
school to meet her expenses. She and her partner worked at another voluntary organization before they decided to work together independently by starting their own organization so they could work at the grassroots. She shares that their NGO provides them a good space to work on Dalit women’s empowerment, against atrocities, for awareness, and legal advocacy. She thought it would be challenging to do this work individually without an organization but through an organization, it was possible to work on these issues collectively and also have the opportunity to interact with public officials and government departments. Her partner, Venkat, who co-founded the NGO with her, shares various examples of role models of organizations that he admires mainly for how inclusive they are, and how they provide resources and opportunities for growth. One of them is a larger NGO that works across states, “They consider gender, they have a Dalit wing. They are very inclusive of all sections of people in their work. People can choose to work on what they’re interested in. They initially support for 10 years, and then for another 15 years,” he shares. At the district level, he admires a membership-based network of voluntary organizations which he also considers to be inclusive. At the local level, he admires an NGO whose leader’s motive is to train staff such that they develop useful skills to survive anywhere and gain better opportunities.

Lakshmi narrates an incident from her childhood, where a pregnant teenager from a slum in her neighborhood died while trying to get an abortion and Lakshmi enquired her mother about this. She describes her mother’s response to her question, “My mother hit me saying, ‘you are asking very big things. You shouldn’t be talking about such people.’” She shares this incident as a significant influence on her motivation to work in this sector and for working with women and children through her NGO. She was also inspired by a female relative who was a professor and a social worker. She further shares that she was married against her
will when she was only 17 years old when she instead wanted to continue her education. Given her persistence, her family allowed her to continue her education in social work and when she started gaining recognition for her work, only then started to support her work.

Jasmine is from a metropolitan city in western India, which is far from the area where the NGO is situated in Andhra. It was through her student who she taught as a lecturer in social work that she was inspired to move to the area to work with tribal communities, where she later started an NGO with her partner, as she shares,

“And we had one of our students who started, <short pause> who we helped to start an organization, a rural organization. He was from this part of the country so to speak. We, actually, after a couple of years, decided to quit teaching and get involved ourselves, both my partner and myself, have taken this as our profession. Social work has been our profession. And we felt that it would be good to go to those areas which are really marginalized. Tribal society is very marginalized. So, we landed in this particular area because our student was there.”

Her role model, she shares, is then Vice Principal of her college where she taught, who was also her mentor. She particularly admired her ability to see good in everyone, including those who were radical and those who were conservative, and thereby, admired her positive attitude and her ability to handle differences and nurture an institution. Her partner, John, also refers to the same Vice Principal as his role model and mentions learning about the work of Paulo Freire and Ivan Illich. Their son, Gautam, mentions Gandhi and Marx, as people he has read and admires in terms of role models, but he says, since he knows them only from books, it is incomplete, and he does not idealize Gandhi. He also refers to some professionals, who he was exposed to early in his career from whom he got to learn, as role models.
**Understanding of Caste and Gender**

Latha, Vani and Lakshmi emphasize that there is a lack of representation of caste-oppressed people and particularly of women among the caste-oppressed communities in the leadership of NGOs. Usha, the young community leader who works with Latha’s NGO, also talks about persistent caste and gender-based issues in their area of work. Latha talks about the caste and gender-based domination in the district and the prevalence of child labor, food insecurity and shares instances of struggle against untouchability, tracing it to the historical dominance and oppression of a caste of landlords in the area.

“Historically persistent problems were, when we began [the] project, there was a problem of Dalits, untouchability. This was existing because it was kings who were ruling that area and Rajulu community (caste of local landlords) is there. Most of these people are working under them. Dalits don’t have land. At least, tribals have the land, the forest and little bit patches there. Dalits were not even allowed to drink tea [from] the same glass which is used by the higher caste. When a Dalit was going for tea, immediately the shop-owner was saying, you bring your own glass. So, whenever the Dalits are going, they were drinking in the glass and breaking the glass, because nobody will drink, why you want the glass back? This was the struggle, began like that and there were some police cases from here. And then, lastly it was given up now. Children are now sitting together and eating food. And women were not walking with chappals (footwear) in front of the landlords earlier. Now, no more issues like that. There is a strong Dalit network we initiated. It’s independent. We developed, we opened an office and we handed over. Now, the Dalit network is running their own office there.”
Latha further points out that even when in leadership, many a times, women do not enjoy any decision-making power, but are represented as tokens by men who continue to hold sway,

“The man who talks on the stage about women, women’s leadership, women’s empowerment, women’s promotion, women’s visibility; many things they talk, but you see their own home, you know pretty well. I need not tell you. Very exactly, this is what is happening. But I can say, very less leaders of NGOs, [among] women particularly. They will employ as a staff or second line leadership. But the primary leadership will only be men, I can say. They keep women for certain benefits but the one ruling is the man there.”

She further shares how men do not like to work under women’s leadership. Secondly, she highlights the challenges with recruiting women in field level positions, regarding concerns around safety, as they would need to conduct programs through the night in villages and that can bring up cultural challenges, particularly for married women. In their field office, there are many women staff members. For instance, one of them shared with me her story as a survivor of domestic violence, separated from her husband and lost family support, lives near the office while working for the NGO. Latha’s NGO, Humanity, had every employee and guest acknowledge and agree to follow the code of conduct with children by signing it before they can have any engagement with the NGO, since they were working with many children in their programs. I was also asked to read and sign it when I visited their field office. It is during this field visit that I interviewed Usha, the young community leader, who has been participating in Humanity-NGO’s programs since childhood. Usha talks about the issues around caste and gender in her village and neighboring villages,
“In terms of issues, in our village, there is child marriage mainly. Because, when we see any village, there is caste. There is OC, BC, SC, like that. There is a high prevalence of child marriage among OCs. In our village, once a girl completes class 6 and has reached puberty, that’s it, by that year or the next, they get her married without considering her age.”

Usha shares the example of one of her schoolmates from a privileged caste who experienced teenage pregnancy as a result of child marriage and talks about the high prevalence of child marriage among privileged castes and the mindset of parents, against which Latha’s NGO conducted awareness programs.

“She was in class 7 and she got pregnant. Her baby died in her belly itself and they found out when they got the baby out. If you study any village, this is more prevalent among OCs. There is a lack of awareness. How parents think is, if the groom’s family is wealthy, their daughter will be fine. Through Humanity-NGO, we have conducted several programs there in the village.”

After discussing child marriage and its association with caste, and the awareness programs their NGO conducted, Usha elaborates on other impacts of their awareness campaigns alongside progressive legislation against caste discrimination which helped reduce the usage of caste slurs in their local area.

“Previously, there’s also caste and there was usage of caste slurs. Now, it is not there because they will be put in jail. There is some change these days mainly because of awareness campaigns, through TV, and because of legislation against caste discrimination.”
Similar to Usha, Vani from *Progress-NGO* also points to child marriage in addition to superstitions, human trafficking, atrocities, lack of safety for women and institutional discrimination in the government against women and Dalits as historically persistent problems in their area. She further points to the lack of support to work on these issues when leadership does not include Dalit women, the persistence of caste and gender based discrimination experienced by women, violence against children, girls and women. Finally, she notes the pushback against women’s leadership in NGOs.

“If the woman head is a Dalit, she [the Dalit woman leader] might support, but if it is anyone else, they won’t support. Even now, there is discrimination. On one hand, based on gender, and on the other, based on community [or caste] is also there. In villages, the superstitions are continuing. There are child marriages, trafficking, there are atrocities that are happening. From [the age of] 3 years, there is no safety for girls. It is the government’s responsibility to give importance to the issue of women’s safety. They themselves are looking down upon girls, and on Dalits, they look down upon further. And when it comes to other NGOs, they feel that “if she gets to become a bigger leader than me, she might dominate me”, [thinking like that] they don’t let us come up.”

Vani’s partner, Venkat, also highlights the caste and gender divide in the NGO sector, the inadequacy of efforts to address this divide and further elaborates on how gender influences opportunities for women vs men, starting from home.

“My wife belongs to Scheduled Caste community. Scheduled Caste Dalits, and then, Adivasis constitute the most backward class and within that, women are further marginalized. So, we work with Dalit and Adivasi women. In that direction, we have formed Dalit women’s associations, Dalit youth associations. Adivasi youth associations
and we work with the community. At present, if we look at the representation in voluntary organizations, whether we see at the rural level or at the community level, gender issues are not being addressed because, there is this feeling of, “what can women do, they sit at home and cook or do the dishes, how will they come out into the society and work?” that’s one. Secondly, there is no encouragement at home too. Once class 10 is over, they are ready to get her married. “Why do you need to study? You can stay at home.” [they say]. And then, what’s also happening is that girls have no safety these days. Secondly, they think that they will get them married and they [daughters] will leave the house, why spend a lot of money on their education? Once women are married and sent away, they feel relieved. If the son is educated, he might get a good position like an IAS or an IPS and “he will take care of us”; that kind of discrimination is very visible.”

Lakshmi shares about her NGO’s work at the intersections of caste and gender, pointing out the vulnerabilities particularly faced by Dalit and Adivasi women, which exposes them to greater violence.

“Women and children are always facing problems. Those in tribal areas and those in slums are always highly vulnerable. So, of course, in that, there are many issues related to caste, Dalit issues. They are more vulnerable because they think they can behave any way with these women.”

She then talks about the violence of adults against children and the court cases Lakshmi’s NGO has fought for children.

“Coming to children, it is a much bigger problem. Adults play with the weakness of children. We took a lot of cases to court and are fighting them even today.”
Lastly, she talks about domestic violence and their work against it through mobilization, legal awareness in Telugu and training of paralegal workers.

“Even today, if a man gets angry, it is considered acceptable for him to raise his hand [to hit]. ... we have been able to work in the slums to build some defense mechanisms.... Then, there are paralegal workers. So, they all know the basic legislation. We translated them into Telugu.”

Coming to Wave-NGO, both Jasmine and her son, Gautam, express their opinion against the need for affirmative action based on caste and feel that it needs to be phased out and instead replaced with capacity building and that “the focus should be more on competence”. The question of representation of oppressed communities is seen by them as a problem of lack of competence in contrast to Latha, Vani and Lakshmi, who talk about the historical roots and persistence of exclusion and discrimination based on caste and gender that is very prevalent in the district.

“See, in time, I think that reservations should be there, to be there, and is there, but should be timed out. Because, ultimately, reservations do not resolve the issue. I would go in more for, like, capacity building, so that somebody can compete. So, if you have reservations for a time because of creating an opportunity, not for a group to to to...to make, utilize that opportunity but the focus should be more on competence and developing and nurturing competence to those marginalized communities because of various reasons, or so called, you know, do not have opportunities, missed out opportunities, or do not have access, to education etc., to enough quality level, promoting that, you know, so that people can compete in time, you know, on their own terms.”
Gautam further believes Brahmins are denied help because of their caste identity. He then contrasts this logic of identity with their work around tribal rights to land as a way to protect the environment and its significance but is opposed to affirmative action for Adivasis based on their identity.

“I’m a Brahmin and I’m poor, I may still have a need. That’s my little caveat. You can’t deny it on caste. I mean, that’s a little. I mean, certainly, we are also working in a situation where there is a cultural logic. But here, it is a very different logic. Here, we are protecting land from exploitation. Tomorrow, if fifth schedule is changed and tribals don’t have the same rights on land as they have now, then we will not have any forest, we will not have ..., that’s the last sort of invisible line that protects, a wall that protects nature. Once that goes, we are pretty much screwed. That’s where there is a little different logic there. But in terms of allowing somebody with 35% marks to become a doctor just because he’s a tribal is nonsense, for hundreds of years.”

With regard to gender, Jasmine shares that she prioritizes women’s representation “with all things being equal” between candidates. Her son, Gautam, doesn’t believe in prioritizing gender, when it comes to business and gives the example of a mother with a three-year old who he refused to recruit because he felt she will not be able to perform her job alongside her maternal responsibilities. However, he believes in having 50% representation of women from the target community in their programs.

“Sometimes, what happens is that we are also being very practical and business oriented because I’m in that sort of situation, where we are not looking at the social angle at all. Doesn’t matter it’s a woman, where’s the money, that’s it. But in terms of our
programmatic design, we have always tried to keep it fifty-fifty, where there is equal number of men and women, participating in whatever programs we are doing.”

Community Leadership and Representation

Latha shares that she gives preference to local people for recruitment for sustainability and in order to promote ownership for the work and only looks to hire from elsewhere when professionals are not available locally,

“[Humanity NGO] is not very permanent organization. This, we know, very clearly. We don’t want to bring from outside, train them, after that, they go back. Local people will have nothing to continue this. So, local people only, first, we recruit. If the professionals are not available in the local communities or local area, we go for outside. We contact universities, particularly MSWs, and we also contact the NGOs who are experienced. These are the two areas I prefer if I’m not getting professionals. Like, you need English speaking people for writing reports. Now, you know, all NGO funding partners are all high standards.”

She also believes in the need for transfer of power to leadership among Dalits, Adivasis and fisherfolk instead of NGO leaders’ passing on leadership to their next of kin.

“See, Pujari [priest] is there. Pujari’s son has to become pujari. Like, actor’s son has to become actor only. Like, nowadays in the NGO field also, most of the NGOs also, their children also now coming into the same field. That’s what we are observing [in the] last 10-15 years. Of course, my case is different. My children are entirely different people, independent people. But many areas, actually, their own people are moving. It’s good one way. [As long as] they help the poor, they work with commitment, they wanted to see some changes and transformation, into the society, okay, whether child or grandchild,
nobody bothers. But power is something else. The power should be transferred. But the power [transfer] is, let [there be] tribal leadership, let [there be] Dalit leadership, let [there be] fisherfolk leadership, whoever it is, indigenous community, because they are [the] weakest and the most backward communities in India. So, those are the communities where we need leadership. That is very important.”

Latha’s NGO has been implementing programs on child rights and involving children in all their programs. Latha shares, “This, promotion of child leadership, why we felt is very important is, because as a woman director, I wanted to see that girls should be promoted.”

Usha is one such leader who she groomed over the years. Usha has been participating in the NGO’s programs since childhood and is now working as a part-time coordinator for the NGO while pursuing her studies. She enjoys the work, particularly, participating in children’s campaigns and meetings across different cities, and speaking to media. She wants to be a teacher one day and support her family.

“Since childhood, I am habituated to this, so I like it. I will go anywhere for this work. If children are doing any activities, I go. For me, the motivation is they brought me here, so I should do well and when I grow up, I should work like our madam. I like doing campaigns very much, speaking to media, I enjoy these. I go to meetings in Chennai, Bangalore, Odisha. Even if I have to go alone, my parents don’t object. They trust [Humanity NGO] that they’ll take good care of us. Many people do not prefer to send their daughters out of town. Now, if my mother needs to go anywhere, I take her. Since I have been traveling since childhood [through Humanity NGO], I got used to it.”

Recounting the beginning of her journey of participating in Humanity-NGO’s work since childhood and seeing Latha as the leader of Humanity-NGO makes her see Latha as a
role model. Her participation and leadership development through Humanity-NGO. Venkat and Vani started working with self-help groups when they first started and then with federations and village level groups.

“We have formed Dalit women’s associations, Dalit youth associations, Adivasi youth associations and we work with the community. And then, in rural areas, we make them aware of the schemes, be it through SC corporation, or ST corporation, or for Backward Classes, and then, on environment, on child rights, legal advice center, providing counselling, we organize these kinds of programs.”

Lakshmi emphasizes that she only hires vulnerable women from minority communities who are survivors of gender-based violence and does not know any big people.

“Actually, I’m a BC woman. In my office, I don’t ask caste because I already take vulnerable women, as I told earlier. ... We are working with the minorities. We don’t know any big people. All our work is with minorities. That’s our world.”

Lakshmi’s NGO helped organize a Mutually Aided Cooperative Society (MACS) of women which now has a 3-crore turnover, she says, and is considered one of the best and independently managed. She shares this as an example of how they promoted women’s leadership, particularly from caste oppressed communities, “We brought them up, handed over to them and came out. In that, there are many Dalits and BCs, not upper caste BCs. So, we are very keen about these things.”

In contrast, in Wave-NGO, Jasmine, John and Gautam share that they have an explicit policy not to recruit members from the tribal community they work with into their NGO because they believe it involves a conflict of interest and questionable loyalty of community members towards the NGO.
“Long back, we took the decision that community leaders must not be absorbed within the organization, because then there is a conflict of interest, whether they have loyalty to the community of which they are a part or whether they have a loyalty to the organization. That was not the right thing to do. So, for us, when we nurture leadership, we nurture leadership to meet the groups and communities of which they are a part.”

She elaborates on their emphasis on competence for recruitment and clarifies that while they have some local employees, they are not from the tribal community that their NGO works with.

“[Recruitment is] based on competence. In the organization, we have various units over time which we have established. Now, people are leading these and they are actually from, some of them are from local areas, they are not tribals. So, they are not in that sense, the target group with whom we work.”

She then gives the example of a policy level network that her NGO is part of and re-emphasizes competence for recruiting employees to be part of this network.

“So, if we are recruiting somebody for that network, it has to be a person, with a policy level, you know, let us say, theoretical, sound theory and practice, who has the initiative, who can connect with the CSO at the Delhi level, the type of skills are quite different. And then, accordingly, we will go out to those target groups from whom we can draw people based on competence.”

Her son, Gautam, further elaborates on the mutual loss of identity that they fear if the tribal community members were to be part of their organization, to explain their explicit policy decision to not employ them.
“So, [Wave-NGO] has taken a conscious policy decision not to employ tribals within our area. So, we don’t have community representatives in the organization. It’s not <short pause> discrimination. It’s kind of an understanding. The reason is, essentially, we do not want to eliminate the very people that we work with. We are not tribal. And when they work with us, along with us, then somewhere their identity gets destroyed. Along with it, our identity as well. So, that is something that we don’t encourage. We also had experiences where people have worked with us. Our experience has not been good. So, from that perspective, we do not encourage the concept of Adivasi community ... directly. [boldface added]”

Gautam further notes that hundreds of tribal community members play the role of volunteers for their NGO but are not present in their rooms. Wave-NGO might encourage their leadership within their own communities but in the ranks of the NGO.

“All our work is with them. They may not be in our rooms, but almost all our volunteers across whichever unit, the foot soldiers basically, it is them. We employ them indirectly through various indirect methods of payment, remuneration, compensation, at any given time around four to five hundred people. Each of us has around 40-50 volunteers. … We do not encourage direct leadership in this sense. But where they need leadership, they need to set up something, on their own, we encourage them. [boldface added]”

It is notable that Jasmine and Gautam are in complete alignment on this policy of not recruiting tribal community members or having them play any leadership role directly within Wave-NGO.
**Access to Resources**

Latha’s NGO has been able to get some funding over the years to continue their work with support from funding partners in the Global North who evaluate their work every four years. Latha’s partner, Lawrence, locates the problems in recent times with NGOs being able to receive funding from donor agencies in developed countries and that people in developed countries are starting to see India as a rich country with a rich upper middle class and are thereby not interested in funding NGOs in India as they previously did.

“The funding agencies are stuck up. They are having bad times in their own system. The usual donations they get from public is reducing because the young people in those countries are now questioning, why should we give money to India? They are rich people. They are coming and buying our companies. Why can’t they pay for their own people? Why should I pay? Today, that is the motivation in other so-called developed countries. 30-40 years back, the people, they said, okay, charity, I have so much, let me give something, so they gave. That’s where all these schools, hospitals and services came. Today, it is different. It has completely changed.”

He also points out that the Indian government is wary of NGOs who believe in justice of any form, sees them as a threat and has them under surveillance.

“And government is another area trying to control whether the funds are mis-utilized, whether the funds are misappropriated or the funds are diverted to a kind of a threat where these NGOs will be a threat to our government because they’re working against a nuclear power plant; they’re working against mining; they’re working against felling of the forest. So, these are instruments destroying the government. So, they are to be
controlled. They should be under surveillance. That’s every government. So, NGOs have become a threat, NGOs who believe in justice, justice in all forms: social justice, cultural justice, economic justice, political justice, environmental justice, ecological justice, climate justice.”

While there is pressure from the government when it sees NGOs as a threat on one hand, there are contradictions between donor agencies and NGOs on the other hand, that Lawrence relates through their struggle of working in the NGO sector where staff are exploitatively under-paid by donor agencies in the name of commitment to the work.

“... younger generation who needs to work with the people for rural development or eradicating poverty must be paid well. They cannot be paid less and that is pure exploitation in the name of NGO sector by the funding agencies. ... Sometimes, we now recollect, what mistakes we have done in the name of NGOs to our own stuff. I remembered very much of that because that could have been easily done by the funding agencies who were supporting us. They were living in comforts over there, but they were always calling us, [that] we are all having commitment, we are all dedicated. Why these words?”

The struggle to get funding for work is more severely experienced by Progress-NGO. Vani shares that they are struggling to get funding and since both she and her partner are in the same field with no alternative livelihood, they find it very challenging. Others had to decide to leave the sector for this reason. Vani recounts a few instances of support they had through small scale programs and the National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (NREGS), a central government program to promote rural employment, but largely no support otherwise from any big NGOs.
“Doing awareness camps by ourselves, we are earning our livelihood. There are people who have left this field because it is becoming challenging for their livelihood. It is difficult when there is no funding. But we never left this because both of us are in the same field, we have the same interest, we encourage each other when we feel demotivated that there’s no work. We are part of some networks in the district. But there is no support from the big NGOs even though they see us. [XXX] supported us for 2 years. The district convenor at that time was supportive. For small-small programs, [An NGO leader, president of the NGO network] used to support a little, he used to come, to support any women headed NGOs in the district and would discuss how to do things. Right now, there’s nothing, it’s very silent, no one is in touch with anyone. When there was NREGS, we used to together pool to go to the district, or the state, we used to be active.”

While Progress-NGO has been doing the work, and has published some of their work in newspapers, they are unable to present it at a larger level due to lack of access to minimum resources like a computer, which makes it hard to document their work. This has been the case since their NGO’s inception in 2002. There is a dearth of funding agencies that come to see the work before funding.

“In the future too, not having the support of donor agencies and not being able to document has pushed us back a little. We are able to do 50% documentation but beyond that, we do not have access to the required resources, such as mainly, a computer, microphones while conducting meetings, etc. We are unable to fully achieve. Firstly, funds are in shortage, and secondly, we are fully dependent on this work, on this organization, without taking up any other work. We want to develop the work through our organization. Though we started in 2002, not having background support and then,
unless we work somewhere, we cannot earn our livelihood. Secondly, there are those who work very well but are unable to document it. We talk, we go house to house, we do the work, all that is fine, we have photographs too, it comes in the news too. But taking that and presenting is something we don’t know. Thirdly, there are NGOs which are able to get money without doing any work. Showing a movie, making a presentation, and backhand transactions of money. But also, in terms of skill, like I was saying, if we need a computer or a system, we must go elsewhere. There is a dearth of such funding agencies too [who actually see the work and fund].”

Pointing to the inequities in funding based on caste, Venkat shares that NGOs run by people from privileged castes have networks of power, political background and greater access to information.

“Coming to funding agency networks, among women headed organizations, there are Dalit NGOs and there are upper caste ones too. The upper caste ones mostly have some political background, they have power in their hands, they have officials in their hands, and they also have greater access to information about where what is.”

In contrast to Vani and Venkat’s experience, Lakshmi feels she has been successful in finding resources for her work on different projects and has had a chance to meet with people at various levels including donors, officials, and intellectuals.

“Slowly, some funders approached me. I never approached any funder. Small funders approached me. Then, I was with a [Donor_Name1], Japan based organization. With [Donor_Name2], I had almost 15 -17 years association on different projects. Whenever I feel emotionally challenged, I meet so many people, intellectuals with knowledge, depth
and maturity. So, I had a chance to meet many people, like good officers, officials, people with great ideology.”

Further in contrast, most successful in securing funding among the four NGOs, Wave-NGO run by Jasmine has had an FCRA registration since 1994, which is a regulatory requirement for receiving funds from donors outside India. They have managed to secure funds, but the leader believes it’s always an uphill task and common within the NGO sector.

“So, initially, we did not have enough, first we were associated with other organizations with whom we worked because the money did not come to us directly from any of these agencies, which we knew personally but they could not give us money because we did not have an FCRA. Now that we have our FCRA, since 1994, we got an FCRA. But still, it is an uphill task, getting funding is not easy. ... But we have lasted since 89, we managed, and we are happy.”

Jasmine notes the above with a sense of pride and relief that their NGO has been able to survive through the challenge of securing funding from donor agencies and being able to do so over the long-term since their founding.

The four themes presented above are summarized in Table 2 followed by an intertextual analysis using an Ambedkarite Framework in the subsequent section.
### Table 2: Thematic Summaries

**Theme 1: ‘Motivation to Start an NGO’**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interviewees (Pseudonyms) and Caste</th>
<th>Humanity</th>
<th>Progress</th>
<th>Women’s Voice</th>
<th>Wave</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Leader: <em>Latha</em></td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>Leader: <em>Vani</em></td>
<td>Leader: <em>Lakshmi</em></td>
<td>BC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leader’s partner: <em>Lawrence</em></td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>Leader’s partner: <em>Venkat</em></td>
<td>SC</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youth leader: <em>Usha</em></td>
<td>SC</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Motivation to start an NGO**

- Social work degree
- Family history of service and struggle with health access
- Partner in the same field of work
- Early experiences as a teacher
- Awareness of problems faced by Dalit women and Dalits in general, atrocities, and need for legal aid.
- Partner co-founded the organization
- Social work degree
- Childhood exposure to violence against girls
- Early marriage and identification with women’s issues
- Social work degree
- Inspired by her student to work in tribal area.
- Partner co-founded the organization

**Role models**

- Leader’s father in community service with missionaries
- Leader’s partner’s exposure to left wing leaders
- A multi-state NGO with an inclusive approach incorporating caste and gender; offers funding to smaller NGOs
- Membership-based networks
- Local NGO offering capacity building
- A female relative who was a professor and a social worker.
- Female Vice Principal where she previously taught, was a mentor, good leader capable of handling differences.
- Gandhi and Marx based on reading, some professionals exposed to early on in career
**Theme 2: ‘Community Leadership and Representation’**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NGOs (Pseudonyms)</th>
<th><strong>Humanity</strong></th>
<th><strong>Progress</strong></th>
<th><strong>Women’s Voice</strong></th>
<th><strong>Wave</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Interviewees (Pseudonyms) and Caste</td>
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<td>Unknown</td>
<td>Leader: <em>Vani</em></td>
<td>SC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interviewee’s partner: <em>Lawrence</em></td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>Leader’s partner: <em>Venkat</em></td>
<td>SC</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youth leader: <em>Usha</em></td>
<td>SC</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Community leadership and representation**

- Locals preferred for recruitment
- Supports transferring leadership to Dalits, Adivasis, and fisherfolk
- Grooms youth leaders from the community
- Formed associations of Dalit women, Dalit youth, Adivasi youth and work through them on their programs
- No staff or resources to recruit
- Only recruit vulnerable and oppressed community women
- Formed a cooperative society independently run with local women’s leadership
- Don’t employ tribal community leaders in NGO, conflict of interest between community and NGO, risk loss of identity for tribals and themselves; hundreds of tribals work as volunteers
- Believe community leadership should be limited to community
- Recruitment based on competence and ability to engage at policy level
### Theme 3: ‘Access to Resources’

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NGOs (Pseudonyms)</th>
<th><strong>Humanity</strong></th>
<th><strong>Progress</strong></th>
<th><strong>Women’s Voice</strong></th>
<th><strong>Wave</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Leader: Latha</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>Leader: Vani SC</td>
<td>Leader: Lakshmi</td>
<td>BC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leader’s partner: Lawrence</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>Leader’s partner: Venkat SC</td>
<td>Leader: Jasmine SC</td>
<td>OC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youth leader: Usha</td>
<td>SC</td>
<td></td>
<td>Leader’s son: Gautam OC</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Access to Resources

- Funding drying up from donor agencies in the Global North as India is seen as a rich country
- Government increasing scrutiny on social justice-oriented NGOs
- Struggling to get funding and earn livelihood.
- No access to a computer
- NGOs run by people from privileged castes have networks of power, political background and greater access to information
- Publish some of their work in local newspapers, but unable to present to larger audience
- Successful in finding resources for different projects
- Able to network with donors, officials, and supporters
- Had contacts with donor agencies before registration for receiving foreign donor funding for over 25 years
### Theme 4: ‘Understanding of Caste and Gender’

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NGOs (Pseudonyms) and Caste</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
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<td>SC</td>
</tr>
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<td>Lawrence</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>Leader’s partner:</td>
<td>SC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Youth leader:</strong></td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>Venkat</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| **Gender** | - Identifies lack of women's representation and tokenization  
- Identifies high prevalence of child marriage among privileged castes in the field area. | Gender | - Identifies high prevalence of child marriage, superstitions, lack of safety for women, and institutional discrimination  
- Identifies lack of support on these issues when leadership excludes Dalit women. | Gender |
| **Caste** | - Struggle against untouchability, landlessness in the field area, and oppression by a caste of landlords  
- Identifies lack of Dalit and tribal representation as problematic.  
- Points to usage of caste slurs in the field area | Caste | - Identifies high prevalence of atrocities and institutional discrimination against Dalits. | Caste | [Gender]  
- Several women in leadership positions in main office, less in field level offices.  
- Prioritize women with “all things being equal”  
- Believe women not suitable for certain roles  
- Believes programs should include 50% women from the target community.  
- Disagrees with affirmative action, believes Brahmins are denied help because of their caste, favors caste-blind selection based on merit or competence  
- Agrees with land protections for tribals to protect nature and land from exploitation. |
Intertextual Analysis using an Ambedkarite Framework

There are noticeable patterns of similarity and contrast along the lines of caste across the four NGOs. In this section, I present an intertextual analysis of these patterns across three levels of the Ambedkarite framework, namely, the individual level, the organizational level and the macro level. At the individual level, I compare responses across the theme, ‘motivation to start an NGO and role models’. At the organizational level, I compare responses across the theme, ‘community leadership and representation’. At the macro level, I compare responses across the theme, ‘access to resources’. The responses across the theme, ‘understanding of caste and gender’ cut across the three levels of analysis.

Individual Level

Jasmine and her family have a privileged caste positionality while Vani and Lakshmi are from caste-oppressed positionalities; Latha’s positionality by caste is not known or is ambiguous, and it did not come up in her interview or during our interactions. Also, noticeable is the difference in the place of origin of the leaders. Except Jasmine, the remaining three leaders were local to the area of their work. For Jasmine, her student inspired her to move to the area to work with the marginalized tribal/Adivasi community in the area. She quit her job along with her partner to do so and later started an NGO. Latha and Lakshmi are from and located in an urban area while Vani is situated in a suburban town in closer proximity to the villages where her NGO works. Vani and Lakshmi very clearly recognize the caste and gender hierarchies that they are part of through their own life experiences, motivation to work in the NGO sector, and to start and lead an NGO to work on these issues. Vani and Lakshmi refer to community as a social space that they are part of or directly relate to for the most part. In contrast, Latha and Jasmine use the word community to describe the target community that
they work with. However, similar to Vani and Lakshmi, Latha recognizes caste and gender hierarchies in her area of work as well as the NGO sector broadly where she points to the lack of representation of caste-oppressed communities, and particularly, of women in leadership positions in NGOs. Lastly, in terms of education, Latha, Lakshmi and Jasmine are postgraduates in social work and Vani has an undergraduate degree.

**Organizational Level**

Latha worked with her partner in an adjacent state for almost three decades, learning the local language of the communities she worked with and living in rural areas before she started an NGO in her home district. Latha’s partner is not officially a part of the NGO but plays an advisory consulting role through his work in another organization that works across different states and collaborates with different smaller NGOs. Latha has actively made efforts to build community leadership and ownership for the work that her NGO does. Usha, a young leader from a local caste-oppressed community, is an example of these efforts as well as another woman, who is a survivor of domestic violence, working in Latha’s NGO. Usha’s observation about the higher prevalence of child marriage in her village and adjacent villages among privileged castes is in line with Ambedkar’s thesis on the origins of the hierarchical nature of caste where those with greater privilege are the ones who adhere more to Brahminism. Latha’s example of a Dalit network that their NGO helped promote to work against caste discrimination, untouchability, and oppression of landlords in the area, also stands testimony to the work of building local community leadership. Further, their conscious policy decision to give preference to local members of the community to be hired as staff in the NGO recognizes the stakes that oppressed community members have in this work and helps promote their leadership, with the potential for challenging social hierarchies based on caste and gender.
This process further facilitates a transfer of power or a move towards equitable distribution of power. Representation of oppressed classes in governance through constitutional safeguards was proposed as an essential measure by Ambedkar to ensure the interests of the oppressed class are represented through their own leadership.

**Macro Level**

Similar to Latha in some respects, Vani and her partner previously worked together in different NGOs before starting an organization to work independently. However, they have found little support to operate independently and have been struggling. Vani relates to her work strongly through her own positionality as a Dalit woman and her awareness of the problems faced by Dalit women, the atrocities in her area and the need for legal aid to fight against them. Vani’s NGO is noticeably severely under-resourced, with no staff and little funding if any. Vani and Venkat are struggling to earn their livelihood through this work yet continuing to work through collaboration with community leaders who are also running different small local NGOs in the area and are advocating for themselves together by petitioning to local public officials. Venkat looks up to larger NGOs and NGO networks that are inclusive and promote capacity building of smaller NGOs as role models. While their NGO is working on important issues in the local community, for instance, it made significant progress in eradicating manual scavenging in the area, their NGO finds little support from the larger NGOs in the area or the NGO network in the district. This lack of support has a magnified impact, particularly in the current regime of the right-wing government’s opposition to NGOs doing social justice work with tight scrutiny and surveillance. Their battle to fight against social hierarchies is not limited to their NGO but also their personal sphere that overlaps largely with the same struggle against
caste and gender-based oppression. While they continue to challenge social hierarchies, their ability to do so is severely constrained by lack of access to resources.

Like Vani, Lakshmi relates to her positionality as a caste-oppressed woman, her experiences of vulnerability as a woman and having witnessed the vulnerability of other caste-oppressed girls at a young age, that motivate her to work through her NGO. She predominantly recruits caste-oppressed women who are survivors of gender-based violence and has men playing only peripheral roles in the NGO, which is by a conscious choice that she makes. Her social world and the organizational space of her NGO significantly overlap as she shares that she only works with minority women and that’s her world, and she does not know any big people. Her NGO has promoted the leadership of caste-oppressed women through a mutually aided cooperative society that now functions independently and has been very successful. She has also been successful in finding resources and support for her NGO’s work over the years. She is very conscious about challenging social hierarchies by gender and caste, by working with children and women from caste-oppressed communities, promoting their leadership both in her NGO’s work as well in hiring staff in the NGO. Oppression of children and women is at the foundations of caste and essential for its maintenance as a hierarchical system, as Ambedkar (1916) notes and is thus important to address in order to challenge caste and gender hierarchies. Further, promoting the leadership of survivors through her organization and of caste-oppressed women broadly through mutually aided cooperative societies are priorities that are aligned with the importance that Ambedkar attached to the need for representation of oppressed classes. Lakshmi’s family supported her through an office space free of rent once her work started being recognized. Her access to post-graduate education in social work, being based in a city and her family’s relative class privilege in being able to support her work, seems
to have helped her navigate the constraints imposed by social hierarchies that she’s part of to some extent, unlike in the case of Vani, who does not enjoy similar support or privileges.

While leaders have agency through the organizations that they run, their agency is significantly moderated by their access to resources or the lack of it. Across the four NGOs, I noticed the contrasting access to resources, which overlaps with the hierarchy of caste positionalities of the leaders whose caste positionality is known. Jasmine’s NGO is the most well-resourced among the four NGOs while Vani’s NGO is quite poorly resourced, for instance, not having access to a computer. Access to networks of power and information seem to be also constrained by caste, as Venkat notes. While gender is often recognized and women’s leadership is promoted by donors’ policies, caste seems to be an overlooked basis of social hierarchy as a result of which the agency of NGOs run by women leaders from caste oppressed communities are severely under-resourced. In contrast, Jasmine mentions knowing international donor agencies at the very beginning of her NGO’s work in the area and later, being able to get FCRA to access funding from these donor agencies. She also mentions having staff members as part of policy networks in the national capital. As Ambedkar points out, and as it seems to manifest in this contrasting pattern, resources are not distributed by the principle of equality or need but by caste precedence in a hierarchical society, where members of the governing class have closer proximity to networks of power.

Cross-Cutting Understanding of Caste and Gender

For Jasmine, her own life experiences in terms of any vulnerability to social hierarchies, be it by gender, caste or any other basis, did not come up in her narrative around her motivation to pursue education and a career in social work or to later start an NGO. Her caste or gender positionality are similarly not part of her narrative or life experiences in her motivation to start
an NGO. In fact, responses around caste and gender came up only when explicitly probed or asked about. Her education and career in social work are the main themes constituting her motivation. Based on survey responses from staff members in their main office, Wave-NGO predominantly constitutes caste-privileged staff members while there are a significant number of women in important roles.

Jasmine’s narrative reflects her pursuit of finding marginalization outside of her immediate world of family, social circle, and place of origin which she then hoped to intervene in through her education and training in social work. There seems to be a deep disconnect in terms of her own social world from that of the marginalized world that she sought to intervene in. This divide seems to have been consciously maintained throughout her work in the area and is reflected in the narrative of her son, Gautam, as well, indicating how this dichotomy of separate worlds of existence has passed on to her next generation. This dichotomy is most evident in the following perceptions: firstly, in their perceptions of separate interests, a conflict of interest and loyalties between the target community and the NGO, and thereby their conscious policy of not hiring community leaders as part of the NGO; and secondly, Gautam’s belief in the need for the maintenance and preservation of separate identities, that absorbing Adivasi community members into their NGO will lead to a mutual loss of identity and thereby, poses a threat to the maintenance of their separate identities. Further, engaging community members in the work of the NGO only as volunteers in large numbers of a few hundreds may be seen as indicative of a deep disregard or lack of value for the knowledge, time and contributions of Adivasi community members to the NGO. Adivasi communities thus have no apparent long-lasting stake in or decision-making power in the organizing processes of the NGO. Lastly, Jasmine and Gautam are very strongly opposed to affirmative action for
oppressed communities, including for Adivasi communities who they work with, which they see to be in conflict with the need for competence, thus rendering them unfit to occupy the same spaces. This clear division between the NGO leaders and the target community and the distinction made around their different interests that are in conflict may be understood along the lines of the differences in interests of the governing class as against the servile class in a hierarchical caste society as defined by Ambedkar. This resonates with the sentiments outlined by Ambedkar among members of the governing class and their ridicule of affirmative action policies while disregarding that their organizations are predominantly constituted by privileged caste members.

In outlining the larger purpose of the NGO’s work with Adivasi communities, Gautam sees the protection of forests and the environment as the larger goal that tribal communities are helping them achieve, while the empowerment of tribal communities is seen as only a means to do so. The social marginalization of Adivasi communities as part of a larger hierarchy that even the NGO leaders are part of does not figure in the understanding of the purpose of their work. Taking these strong positions into account together, NGO Wave’s organizing process may be seen as upholding the maintenance of a caste hierarchy between an organizational unit primarily constituted by caste-privileged leaders operating out of their privileged location and those who are marginalized and are not seen as competent enough to be part of the social world of the caste privileged leaders and their NGO. These contradictions have parallels with and replicate the division between the governing class and the servile class in the society, as defined by Ambedkar.

While their intended stated purpose is social change, the process of organizing in Wave-NGO, replicates long persistent hierarchical patterns while Humanity-NGO, Progress-NGO
and Women’s Voice-NGO indicate greater awareness of historically persistent hierarchies and direct their work towards challenging them. The NGOs, Humanity, Progress, and Women’s Voice in the same district help hold a mirror to contrast and examine the blind spots in Wave-NGO. Further, a critical Ambedkarite framework as used in this study can help understand how organizations challenge of reinforce hierarchies based on caste and gender.

**Discussion**

In this study, I illustrated the use of an Ambedkarite framework as a critical lens to do an intertextual analysis of the narratives of NGO leaders in order to understand how NGOs are challenging or reinforcing social hierarchies based on caste and gender. I did so at the individual, organizational and macro levels using four thematic categories namely motivation to start an NGO, community leadership and representation, access to resources and understanding of caste and gender. Social hierarchies may be perpetuated or challenged at the individual, organizational and macro levels. At the individual level, organizational leaders socialized into caste privilege may normalize hierarchical discourse around caste and meritocracy to exclude caste-oppressed communities from leadership or representation within an organization that is meant to serve caste-oppressed communities. This socialization can also create a strong need for maintenance of separate identities of caste in the hierarchy which manifests within hiring practices in their organizations despite a mission to work with marginalized communities. In contrast, for organizational leaders from caste-oppressed communities, awareness of positionality in the hierarchy is a constant reminder in organizational life. Their organizations serve as an instrument to challenge social hierarchies that oppress them but they suffer from barriers to access to resources and networks needed for their functioning.
Without Ambedkar’s critical lens, the analysis of social hierarchies within organizations may miss a socio-historical understanding of caste and gender, how they manifest in organizational life, and how they are reproduced through leadership and organizational policy. NGOs in rural development in India are a particularly interesting case to illustrate this because they have an explicit mission for social change and work predominantly with oppressed communities. However, caste leads to contradictions within these organizations that are better understood through the socio-historical lens of Ambedkar. Ambedkar’s work offers an intersectional understanding of caste and gender and helps complicate embedded agency of organizational leaders situated in a caste hierarchy. This study finds that caste-privileged women leaders are more likely to normalize and reinforce caste hierarchy within their organizations in comparison to caste-oppressed women leaders who tend to challenge it with greater awareness based on their positionality and life experiences. Further, caste privileged women may have greater access to resources for the organizations that they lead in comparison to caste oppressed women. The study thus complicates the understanding of women's leadership through caste and contributes to the field of studies in intersectionality (Carrim & Nkomo, 2016; Pullen et al., 2019; Rodriguez et al., 2016; Ruiz Castro & Holvino, 2016; Zanoni & Janssens, 2015) and embedded agency (Battilana, 2006; Seo & Creed, 2002) in organizations.

Scholars who have studied caste and gender have pointed to patterns of inequities within (Gladson Dungdung, 2013; Guérin & Kumar, 2017; Handy et al., 2002; Heaton-Shrestha, 2004) and beyond the NGO sector (Joshi & Malghan, 2017; Raman, 2020; Subramanian, 2019; Thakur & Babu, 2017; Zulfiqar, 2018). This study explores such inequities in depth by focusing on four NGOs led by women within a district in Andhra using...
a critical Ambedkarite framework which helps identify and unravel the systemic nature of the manifestation of caste and gender within organizations. The inequities of caste have parallels with patterns of colonization and a savior complex (Straubhaar, 2015) in non-profits in the US, where there have been calls for equitable representation and redistribution of resources for decolonization (Villanueva, 2018).

Conclusion

Through this study, I aim to contribute to organization studies by illustrating the application of Ambedkar’s interdisciplinary scholarship to critically analyze the reproduction of social hierarchies within organizations in the context of South Asia. As there is emerging interest within organization studies towards caste, this is an invitation for future research to engage more substantively with Ambedkar’s work as a critical theoretical lens.

Implications for NGO Leadership and Policy

Leaders of NGOs who do not represent the communities that their organizations serve may need to reflect on their positionality and socio-cultural baggage of privilege and access to social networks of power and resources. Their mission may be better served by sharing resources equitably with community-based NGOs while also relinquishing power to promote leadership of marginalized community members. There is a vast amount of cultural wealth and knowledge in the community among smaller community-based NGOs with whom the bigger NGOs need to find ways to be allies and collaborate through an inclusive process. For instance, the bigger NGOs can redirect funding to which they have privileged access to, allow access to professional development trainings, and have leaders from caste-oppressed communities be part of meetings with policy makers so their perspectives are heard. The process to facilitate this needs to be collaborative and not top-down or through one-time token efforts. Long-term
power-sharing practices can be developed through ongoing dialogues starting with existing platforms such as the local network of NGOs. Leadership of networks of NGOs needs to also examine the hierarchies of caste and gender within them and promote inclusive leadership and equity within the network with strategic long-term policies. For instance, caste-oppressed women leaders can be supported by the network to form a strategic group to suggest measures to the NGO network to become more inclusive and work on gender and caste with accountability and social audits.

Equal representation by gender in NGOs’ community programs is usually followed because it is required by donors. Representation within leadership of NGOs needs to be recognized as well, particularly of caste oppressed communities, beyond gender, in the policies of donors to challenge modes of organizing that reinforce social hierarchies. Diversity and equal representation of oppressed and under-represented communities in organizations is not yet a commonplace norm in India (Buddhapriya, 2013) unlike in the US, and there is in fact significant open resistance against the constitutional safeguards to oppressed communities. This may be due to the longer history of social stratification based on caste that is normalized and openly practiced in both personal and professional spaces in India. Donor agencies and government departments that fund NGOs need to take cognizance of the issue of representation of under-represented caste-oppressed communities in leadership positions in NGOs with guidelines and directives to promote their implementation as a requirement to secure funding.

**Limitations and Future Research**

The sample for this study includes small locally based NGOs where the founders have been the leaders from the beginning and have a significant influence on the organization. To clarify the use of the term leadership in this study, leaders have been interviewed as
representatives of or spokespersons for the organizations they are leading and not necessarily
to examine their personal leadership styles as individuals. It is noteworthy that, the sample of
four NGOs in this study does not include Adivasi women leaders. There was only one Adivasi
woman leader who I was referred to but was unable to establish contact after several attempts.
Future research including greater diversity of leaders may contribute to further insights on how
organizations challenge or reinforce social hierarchies.

This study was motivated from a larger study to understand how NGOs are challenging
or reinforcing social hierarchies, as part of which a sample of 31 NGOs were contacted.
Besides the four NGOs discussed in this study, the sample included men leaders from diverse
caste and religious backgrounds with distinct experiences and motivations to join the NGO
sector. It was beyond the scope of the current study to include them here, but it might be
interesting to explore this data to further complicate understanding of caste, religion, gender
and leadership within the NGO sector. It may be interesting to study patterns of similarity and
contrast in organizing across these organizations. The hierarchy based on caste also overlaps
significantly with religion as religious minorities tend to be largely constituted by caste-
oppressed communities. Further, there were a few NGOs in the sample working with queer
communities and people with disabilities, who may also be viewed as highly invisibilized
minorities in the region. Lastly, it is useful to also study larger NGOs with an organizational
structure that has rotating leadership, and with a larger geographical footprint across different
states in India. Further, representation at different levels of leadership in large organizations
and how leaders at each of these levels understand the significance of caste and gender
hierarchies can yield deeper insights into how organizations challenge or reinforce social
hierarchies.
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Appendix I: Survey Questionnaire (English)

Thank you for taking the time and interest to participate in this survey. After responding to this survey, if you would like to participate in an interview, please call or message me on 9493886871. All the information shared will be strictly confidential and used only for academic purposes. Any findings from this study will not reveal any identifying information and care will be taken to report only those identifying categories that more than 5 people have reported on. You can skip any of the items that you do not wish to answer.

1. Briefly describe your role in your organization (2-3 lines)
___________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________

2. Number of years you have worked here in this organization

3. For how many years have you been working since the beginning of your first job?

4. What type of organization have you worked with previously? (check all that apply)
   - I have worked for a company
   - I have worked for an organization similar to my current organization
   - I have worked for a government organization
   - Other (please specify):________________________________________

5. How were you recruited to this organization? (check all that apply)
   - Referred by a friend or a family member
   - Referred by a colleague or mentor
   - Applied through an online portal
   - Applied based on an advertisement in a newspaper
   - Campus Placement – from the university
   - Other (please specify): __________________________________________

6. To make a difference in rural India, one needs to
   - have an advanced degree
     - Strongly agree☐ Agree☐ Neutral☐ Disagree☐ Strongly disagree☐
   - have been born and brought up in a rural area
     - Strongly agree☐ Agree☐ Neutral☐ Disagree☐ Strongly disagree☐
➢ have connections for fundraising
  Strongly agree □   Agree □   Neutral □   Disagree □   Strongly disagree □

➢ have experiences of discrimination
  Strongly agree □   Agree □   Neutral □   Disagree □   Strongly disagree □

7. The best leaders in this field are those who

➢ have given up lucrative opportunities elsewhere
  Strongly agree □   Agree □   Neutral □   Disagree □   Strongly disagree □

➢ have the ability to speak fluently in English
  Strongly agree □   Agree □   Neutral □   Disagree □   Strongly disagree □

➢ belong to a community that has faced discrimination
  Strongly agree □   Agree □   Neutral □   Disagree □   Strongly disagree □

➢ have an experience of poverty
  Strongly agree □   Agree □   Neutral □   Disagree □   Strongly disagree □

8. I am consulted before important decisions are taken in my organization
  Strongly agree □   Agree □   Neutral □   Disagree □   Strongly disagree □

9. I have enough opportunities to grow in my organization
  Strongly agree □   Agree □   Neutral □   Disagree □   Strongly disagree □

10. Do you have family members who are working or have worked with organizations similar to your current organization?
    a. Yes
    b. No

11. In your opinion, what do you think are some of the historically persistent problems in rural India?

___________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________

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12. Who are some inspirational figures or role models for you in the line of your work or in general?
___________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________

13. How old are you (in years)?
☐ 18-25
☐ 26-35
☐ 36-50
☐ 51-65
☐ Above 65

14. What is the gender that you identify with?
☐ Female
☐ Male
☐ Transgender
☐ Please specify in your own words ___________________________

15. What is the highest level of education that you had access to?
☐ Did not have access to schooling
☐ Primary School
☐ High School
☐ Diploma
☐ Undergraduate
☐ Post-graduate
☐ Other (please specify): _______________________________________

16. What is the annual income of your household from all sources of income?
☐ Less than Rs.50,000
☐ Rs.50,001 – Rs.100,000
☐ Rs.1,00,001 – Rs.3,00,000
☐ Rs.3,00,001 – Rs.6,00,000
☐ Rs.6,00,001 – Rs.10,00,000
☐ More than Rs.10,00,000

17. What is the highest level of education attained by either of your parents?
☐ Did not have access to schooling
☐ Primary School
☐ High School
☐ Diploma
Undergraduate
Post-graduate
Others (please specify):

18. Are you the primary breadwinner in your household?
   - Yes
   - No

19. How would you describe your marital status?
   - Single
   - In a live-in relationship
   - Married
   - Separated
   - Others (please specify):

20. Which is the constitutional caste category that you are identified under?
   - Scheduled Tribes
   - Scheduled Castes
   - Other Backward Classes
   - Other Castes (other than the above)
   - Do not wish to answer

21. How would you describe your caste identity in your own words (optional)?

___________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________

22. Please check if any of the following disabilities apply to you (check all that apply)
   - Disability in seeing
   - Disability in speech
   - Disability in hearing
   - Disability in movement
   - Other (please specify):_________________________
   - None

23. Do you or your family subscribe to any of the following religious/other beliefs? (check all that apply)
   - Atheism
   - Buddhism
   - Christianity
   - Hinduism
   - Islam
   - Sikhism
☐ Other (please specify): ________________________________
☐ Do not wish to answer

24. Comments (if any)

___________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________

Thank you for taking the time and interest to participate in this survey. If you would like to participate in an interview, please call or message me on 9493886871.
Appendix II: Survey Questionnaire (Telugu)

24. మీ సంస్థలో మీరు చేసే పని గురించి కుంచి పంచగా వివరించండి (2-3 వాకాలు)

___________________________________________________________________________

___________________________________________________________________________

25. మీ సంస్థ నిత్యాయంలో మీరు ఎలాంటి సంస్థలలో పనిచేసారు?

☐ నేను ఒక కంపని కోసం పనిచేసాను
☐ నేను పరిస్థితి సంస్థలో పనిచేస్తున్నాను
☐ నేను ఒక పరిస్థితి సంస్థలో పనిచేసాను

☐ వేర్వేరు ఈ నాల పద్ధతిలో పనిచేసినవి 

26. మీరు పని చేయడం మొదలు పట్టిక నుంచి ఎనిమిది సంవత్సరాలు పని చేసారు?

27. ఇంతకు ముందు మీరు ఎలాంటి సంస్థలలో పనిచేసారు? (వరించి అనినా ఆపించి ఆపించి ఆపించి)

☐ నేను సేనహితులు లేదా కుటుంబ సభులు ననును ఈ సంస్థ కు రిఫర్ చేసారు
☐ నేను తొలి పనిచేసే వారు లేదా నా పై అధకారి ననును ఈ సంస్థ కు రిఫర్ చేసారు
☐ నేను ఈ ఉద్యగానికి అనన్న పార్ట్ ను నపుండున ఈ ఉద్యగ కూడా ఎదిరుంది

28. మీరు ఈ సంస్థ లో ఎన్ని రెక్సట్సు అయయంయా? (పాదాలు వంటి అందాలం నాలుగు సంఖ్య) 

☐ నేను ఎన్ని చివర కంపనీలకు రెక్సాస్ బిద్దులు నాలుగు సంఖ్యకు రెక్సాస్ బిద్దులు నాలుగు సంఖ్యకు
☐ నేను ఎన్ని మధ్యపరిస్థితి సంస్థలకు రెక్సాస్ బిద్దులు నాలుగు సంఖ్యకు రెక్సాస్ బిద్దులు నాలుగు సంఖ్యకు

☐ నేను బిస్మిల్ లో వాయువ్య పరిస్థితి సంస్థలకు రెక్సాస్ బిద్దులు నాలుగు సంఖ్యకు

☐ నేను బిస్మిల్ లో చివర కంపనీలకు రెక్సాస్ బిద్దులు నాలుగు సంఖ్యకు రెక్సాస్ బిద్దులు నాలుగు సంఖ్యకు

☐ నేను రెక్సాస్ బిద్దులు నాలుగు సంఖ్యకు రెక్సాస్ బిద్దులు నాలుగు సంఖ్యకు రెక్సాస్ బిద్దులు నాలుగు సంఖ్యకు

☐ నేను రెక్సాస్ బిద్దులు నాలుగు సంఖ్యకు రెక్సాస్ బిద్దులు నాలుగు సంఖ్యకు రెక్సాస్ బిద్దులు నాలుగు సంఖ్యకు

☐ నేను రెక్సాస్ బిద్దులు నాలుగు సంఖ్యకు రెక్సాస్ బిద్దులు నాలుగు సంఖ్యకు

________________________________________

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29. భారతదేశం గా మాలలో మారుతే తేవడానికి ముఖ్యంగా గుణాలు ఏవి?

➢ అతుయన్నన్న డిగ్రీ పొందటం

30. ఈ రంగాలలో గాయన నాయకతే వహించవస్తుంటే నిరాకరించే ఎవరు?

➢ పేదరికం అనుభవించిన వారు

31. మాసంథలో ముఖ్యమైన నిరాకరణ సంస్థలు తీస్తాలని ననున సంపరిదిసారు?

32. మాసంథలో నాసియల్ నాయకతే అధికరణ పనిచేస్తున్న వారు

33. మీ కుటుంబ సభాలలో ఎవరూ ఇదే రంగంలో మీరు పనిచేస్తున్న వారు?

ఉనారా ఉనారు లేరు
34. మీ మంచించే వ్యతిరేకంలో మనం ఉండాలి ప్రత్యేకంగా, మీరు అనుకున్న నాణాలు?

___________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________

35. మీరు మంచించే వ్యతిరేకంలో మనం ఉండాలి ప్రత్యేకంగా, మీరు అనుకున్న నాణాలు?

___________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________

36. మీ వయస్సు ఎంత (సంవత్సరాలలో)?

☐ 18-25
☐ 26-35
☐ 36-50
☐ 51-65
☐ 65 పైన

37. మీరు ఏ లింగం తో గురించబడిందంటే పడిన ప్రత్యేకం?

☐ స్త్రీ
☐ పురుషుడు
☐ టార్జాన్‌డర
☐ మీ సంతాపాలాలు

38. మీకు లభించిన అతిప్రత్యేకం విద్య ఏమిటి?

☐ నాకు బడికి వళ్ళు అవకాసం కలదు
☐ పారథమిక పాథశాల
☐ ఉననత పాథశాల
☐ డిపొయండ్ డుయాట్
☐ పోసారబడిన (దయచేసి వివరించండి):_________________________________________
39. మీ ఇంతి యొకక అని ఆదాయ వనరులు కలిపి ఆదాయం ఎంత?

- రూ.50,001 రూ.1,00,000
- రూ.50,001 – రూ.1,00,000
- రూ.1,00,001 – రూ.3,00,000
- రూ.3,00,001 – రూ.6,00,000
- రూ.6,00,001 – రూ.10,00,000
- రూ.10,00,000 కనాన ఎకుకవ

40. మీ తలి తండు రెండు లో ఎవరెండు నాపొందిన అత్సయధక విదయాంటి?

- ఏఒకరికి బడి కి వళ్ళు అవకాసం కలగులేదు
- పాథశాల
- ఉననతి పాథశాల
- డిపొండుడుయాడు
- పోస్ట్ గాూడుయాడు
- ఇతర (దయచేసి వివరించండి):

41. మీ కుటుంబం మీ ఆదాయం మీద పాథమం గా ఆధార పడి ఉందా?

- అవును
- లేదు

42. మీ పోషణ గురి మీ విశ్లేషించండి?

- నేను ఎటువంటి సంబంధం లేను
- నేను ఒకరితో కలిసి జీవిస్తున్నాను
- నాకు పళ్ళ అయింది
- మేము విడిపోయా ము
- ఇతర (దయచేసి వివరించండి):

43. మీరు రాజ్యంలో ఏకుచేసిన కుంచి ఉందా?

- అనుసూచించిన జనజ్యతి
- అనుసూచించిన జ్యతి
- వనుకబడిన వరారులు
- ఇతర జ్యతులు (పైగింది రెండు)
- సమాధానం ఇవేడం ఇష్టం లేదు
44. మీ కు గురించి మీకు మాత్రం మీ సంత పదాలలో ఎలా వివరిసారు? (అంచనా)

___________________________________________________________________________

___________________________________________________________________________

45. మీకు విగ్రహాలను చాలా వివిధ పదాలలో ఎలా వివరిసారు? (అంచనా అంచనా దండయాక వివరిసారు)

☐ మనస్తత్వం
☐ పాలనలో అనుబంధం
☐ సిద్ధాంతాలో అనుబంధం
☐ ధర్మం అనుబంధం
☐ ధర్మం అనుబంధం
☐ సిద్ధాంతాలో అనుబంధం
☐ మనస్తత్వం

46. మీకు మనస్తత్వ వివిధ పదాలలో ఎలా వివరిసారు? (అంచనా అంచనా దండయాక వివరిసారు)

☐ నాసికత్తత్వం
☐ బౌద్ధం
☐ కృపా విశ్వాసం
☐ హిందూ మతం
☐ ఇసలాం
☐ సిక్కా
☐ ఇతర (దయచేసి వివరించండి)

☐ సమాధానం ఇవేడం ఇష్టం లేదు

24. ఆయా మనస్తత్వం అంచనా వివరిసారు?

___________________________________________________________________________

___________________________________________________________________________

ఈ సర్వేలో పాల్గొని మీ విలువ మనస్తత్వం నందించనం మరియు మీ సమయం గదిపినందుకు మరియు మీరు చూపించిన ఉత్సాహానికి చాలా ధనయవాదం. ఈ సర్వే పూరి చేసిన తరువాత మీరు ఈ పరిసోధనకు సంబంధంచి ఒక ఇంటర్వ్యూలో పాల్గొనాలను కనుగొనండి దయచేసి 9493886871 ను సంపాదించండి.
Appendix III: Interview Questions

i. Socio-economic characteristics of staff at different levels in NGOs
   • What is your motivation to work at this NGO?
   • What personal attributes make you successful in the field of NGOs?
   • What are some of your significant experiences working in the NGO sector?
   • How does your family perceive your work?
   • How does the work at the NGO impact your personal life?
   • What are some of your beliefs regarding rural development and poverty alleviation?
   • Who are some of your inspirational figures or role models?
   • How do you evaluate the structure of the NGO in its ability to work towards its mission?
   • What do you think are the essential characteristics that NGO workers should have?
   • What do you think about the community that your NGO works with? What are the problems that they face and why do you think they are marginalized/poor?

ii. Recruitment channels and networks used by NGOs
   • How do you recruit staff for your NGO?
   • Where are vacancies advertised?
   • Among the current employees, can you give an example at each level in the organization and how they were recruited to get a sense of what is typical?
   • What are the minimum and recommended requirements for various levels?
   • Are there any networks that you prefer to recruit from? (e.g. particular universities or institutes?)

iii. Efforts of NGOs towards leadership development from marginalized communities
   • Are there any community leaders that your NGO highly values? Can you describe why they are highly valued?
   • Are there any training programs for community leaders to take greater responsibilities? What are the short and long term goals of such programs?
   • What are the roles that community leaders play over a period of time?

iv. Degrees of mobility within an NGO at different levels and across staff from diverse socio-economic backgrounds
   • What are the opportunities for promotion or pay rise for different levels of employees in the NGO?
   • Can you give examples of staff who worked for the longest duration in the NGO at different levels?
CHAPTER 5

EPILOGUE

The data collection for this dissertation research has been possible through an international seed funding research grant from the Office of Global Programs at UMass Boston for four months from June to September 2017 in a district in Andhra Pradesh, India. This grant helped me travel to several villages in the district where NGOs were working on rural development. I have had the privilege to meet several leaders in this sector doing grassroots organizing work and experience their kindness first-hand as they generously offered me rides and shared meals with me, besides their time and stories, when I visited them. This dissertation would not have been possible without their trust and candid sharing of their stories of their work with me, for which I am grateful. While I was able to share some of their voices in the two empirical papers, there were others that I was not able to include due to limitations of scope. Here I present a glimpse of the voices of minoritized leaders of NGOs in the region, including men from the Scheduled Tribes (ST) and Muslim communities. Below, I refer to their quotes, using a numeric code for their NGO. They note the prevalence of systemic caste prejudice among government and donor agencies in the rural development sector.

An Adivasi leader recounts their experience with the Project Officer (PO) who is in charge of the government agency meant to work for tribal development who prefers to work with NGOs led by non-tribals working on tribal development rather than NGOs led by tribal communities.

“Previous PO [Project Officer] was very close to us and supported us. But the current one is not like that. He is not ready to listen. If we dress up in suits and invite him for
some big functions, like some big NGOs do, invite him for the inauguration of buildings, maybe he will value us. Because of such POs, those of us among the tribal NGOs, who want to do something, feel restricted. He is not giving us the time he is giving to non-tribal NGOs. When we invite him, he will not come, saying he does not go to private organizations. The same person, on the very next day, goes to the function of a big non-tribal NGO and has biscuits at their function. I feel this is the kind of discrimination. Previous PO was very supportive. We don’t even need economic support, just moral support. He [current PO] is not even making eye contact with us. While talking with us, he is doing something on his computer.” [NGO27 leader, Scheduled Tribes]

The leaders also point to the socially segregated networks that adversely impact smaller NGOs that do not have access to networks of power.

“Among the NGOs, there are groups based on caste, religion, geographical areas and donor-NGO partners. Suppose one big NGO is Brahmin headed, he uplifts small Brahmin NGOs to come up and won’t allow other NGOs to come up. Small NGOs are suffering. If they send a project to Delhi, there is a lot of red tape-ism. For big NGOs, it doesn’t matter. For small NGOs, it is a problem.” [NGO65 leader, Muslim]

“It is possible that we have limited connections and there are gaps in communication. They might also neglect us because of our lack of infrastructure. There might also be lobbying [for government projects]. We are not getting information about the projects.” [NGO27 leader, Scheduled Tribes]
These leaders highlight the need for representation and self-determination for oppressed communities in the NGO sector.

“There is no proper support for tribals to run their own NGOs. Government should have this policy and consciousness that projects [for tribal development] should be given to tribal people. But government is not trusting our ability to take up projects and giving it to others. They should first consult tribal NGOs, but they are not doing that.” [NGO27, Scheduled Tribes]

“There is no political will for providing equal representation. District and state governments need to collaborate to create a platform through periodic meetings and partnerships, but it is not a priority for the government. There is a huge resource gap. Whoever is the leader needs to prioritize Dalits and women.” [NGO11 leader, Muslim]

Future research on this topic can benefit from engagement with a greater diversity of leaders in the NGO sector.

Being a Dravidian/Non-Brahmin/Shudra cis woman with access to doctoral education in a public research university that is a majority-minority campus in the US has helped me draw parallels across the struggles of oppressed peoples, represented in the UMass Boston community. My political consciousness around the social hierarchies that I am situated in has been and will be an ongoing work in progress. Consuming the normalization of hierarchies can happen effortlessly and it has required me unlearning at several stages of life, looking both outwards and inwards. Learning about my positionality in the context of the history of caste has helped me unpack layers of my experiences in family and social life, some of which I am
still processing. I witnessed and experienced the hierarchies of caste, gender and religion most viscerally in my own family space and looked outwards for egalitarian alternatives. I have come across hope and challenges through this journey. This dissertation represents an inquiry triggered by bearing witness to contradictions and the need to make sense, contextualize and engage with history. As Resmaa Menakem puts it best, “Trauma in a person, decontextualized over time, looks like personality. Trauma in a family, decontextualized over time looks like family traits. Trauma in a people decontextualized over time looks like culture!” Hope as a society we can recognize social hierarchies as historical wrongs perpetuated intergenerationally and move towards healing.

I have had this access to education because of the ancestors who came before me and paved the paths to resistance and equality such as Savitribai Phule, Jotiba Phule, Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar and E. V. Ramasamy Periyar.