



Research Article

***Kuchh toh Kar Lenge* ‘We will Manage Something’: Classroom as a Space of Diminishing Aspirations for Adivasi Students**

Bhawna Parmar
Independent Researcher
Email: bhawna.parmar21@gmail.com

This paper is based on the experiences of students of the Santhali community in a classroom in a village in the Dumka district in the Santhal Pargana region of Jharkhand. I draw attention to the aspirations of Santhali students by emphasising their everyday interactions and negotiations with the state and the education system. While juggling between manual labour and the pressures of early marriage, Santhali students strive to acquire educational capital that promises them symbolic distance from manual labour. The spatial practices of schooling emphasise a ‘decontextualized modernity’, which scholars have noted, deems Adivasis as non-modern and hence in need of reform. The hidden curriculum of the school is Foucauldian, aiming to impose values of mastering self-discipline, and this value becomes central to the relationship Adivasi students have with the education system, embodied by the classroom. This article argues that while the classroom urges Adivasi students to leave their identity outside the school, under the garb of equality, it still others them through pedagogical practices, teacher-student interactions, and a curriculum that defines what is and what is not attainable for them. Employing ethnographic methods, this paper extends Dost and Froerer’s (2021) idea of *aage badhna* (progress) that education promises but makes ‘almost impossible’, by disallowing Adivasi students the promised social mobility that shapes their aspirations. In its exclusion of the Adivasi identity, the state education thus excludes and fails Adivasi students.

Aspirations, Adivasi, Education, Reproduction, Santhali

Introduction

Rueben,¹ a 13-year-old Christian Santhali student studies in a government school in a village in Jharkhand. While sitting in his classroom, he talks about the level of education that he can attain. Rueben wants to go into the army, and imagines himself protecting his country. But sitting in the 8th grade, he finds it difficult to actually learn and attain the skills he would need to reach his goals. Rueben feels he will not be able to stay in school for long, because he eventually has to financially support his family by finding work. He says staying in school till the 8th is still easy but after that he will have to enrol into a secondary school that is 12 kms away from home. He imagines travelling by bicycle which will consume two hours each day, leaving him less time to fulfil responsibilities at home. He thinks the demands of the 9th grade would be much higher and feels that he does not have enough knowledge to understand the topics that are taught in the 9th grade. Even though he has managed to come to school on most days, he says he does not know many topics well because the teachers do not teach properly in school. He does want to move forward in life but the chances of this happening, according to him, are almost next to nil. He explained in an interview:

Sister, I don't think I will be able to study much. But I will try to at least finish 12th grade. I think I can try studying till the 12th on my own by figuring out my own

¹ Names of all the students in this article have been anonymised.

finances. But from 9th onwards, one needs to study with a lot of discipline. I will have to enrol myself into tuition classes. I will have to buy books. That school has a different kind of education. I will have to work really hard. My parents will let me study further but for them work is more important. If I get to study after this school, I will.

This vignette shows how the lived realities of Santhali students clash with the aspirations they hold. Rueben, like everyone else, has been promised opportunities by means of education, but the way he experiences education and the factors that shape his aspirations, simultaneously render his possibility of achieving his goals impossible. By studying Rueben's experiences within the classroom, I want to delve deeper into how the aspirations of Adivasi students are formed through classroom interactions, specifically in relation with their Adivasi identity. This article will bring forth the experience of Rueben and Sunita, both Santhali students, along with others studying in the schools of Dumka, to explore their relation with education. For Santhali students, there are four ways of relating to the education system within a classroom: First, the promise of progress or *aage badhna* through education. Second, financial realities that hinder their *aage badhna* that the education system fails to acknowledge. Third, the elimination of Adivasi identity, culture and the customs of students, through the education system; and fourth, the punishment they incur for the very Adivasi identity that imposes 'civility' on them, creating a citizen-subject relationship that the hidden curriculum of the education system forces upon Adivasi students. Highlighting student experiences within classrooms, and their understanding of education and *aage badhna*, this paper foregrounds how the education system offers a tantalizing glimmer of progress but simultaneously actively obstructs the facilitation of this progress for Adivasi students.

The research will extend the idea of *aage badhna* as laid out by Dost and Froerer (2021) to outline the role of education. Building on the idea of *aage badhna*, this article explores and foregrounds the interaction between the Adivasi identity through the case study of Santhali students and the education system within a classroom. Taking into account the fact that education does play a role in enhancing dignity (Jakimow 2016), it equips people with literacy and numeracy skills, and helps to negotiate their agency and autonomy, enhancing confidence and banishing inferiority (Jeffrey et al. 2004). I lay special emphasis on how the Adivasi identity gets understood within a classroom and how this understanding reshapes Adivasi aspirations and ensures the continuity of their current realities. The research for this paper is based on field insights from two schools in two villages in the Dumka Sadar subdivision of Dumka district in the Santhal Pargana region of Jharkhand in Eastern India where Santhals live in the largest numbers (Biswas 1956). There, I conducted a series of workshops to understand Adivasi aspirations and their idea of education. Carried out through an ethnographic lens, the methodology involved a mixed approach, with workshops being carried out in two schools with students from the 7th and 8th grade in upper primary schools. 18 students participated in the workshops from each school, apart from which information was collected through semi-structured interviews and conversations that took place over a period of time (2022). The activities in the workshops included students making a timeline of their own lives, their daily tasks and making images of their future selves. Further, to understand their relationship with each other, and the surroundings, they were asked to map their own villages in terms of access, and map their relationships with others in terms of familiarity and closeness. Other activities included having them chart out pathways for different career options. They were also provided with mobile phones and asked to interview each other. Students, in one school, were provided with mobile devices for 3 days and were asked to click pictures and make videos as per their own choices. This was to enable them to exercise some control over their narrative. These methods, by privileging experiences and feelings, helped students to transcend the boundaries of 'one correct answer'. By allowing them to decide what they wanted to capture

on the devices and enabling them to design questions according to what they wanted to ask each other, students could go deeper into aspects they wanted to explore. Further, by including game-based activities, students could move away from the rigid structure of the classroom, in which the workshops were being facilitated. Both schools, where workshops were held, had a student base that was predominantly the Santhali and Mundari Adivasi population with a small number of students from OBC backgrounds. The research focused only on Santhali students. One of the largest tribal groups of India, the *Santhals*, reside predominantly in Jharkhand, Bengal, northern Odisha, Bihar and Assam. They speak an Austro-Asiatic group of languages, and their values and way of life are different from Hindus (Carrin 2015). Both the schools were situated in Santhal Pargana, where Santhals have landholding due to the Santhal Pargana Tenancy Act (1949), but the district now has many stone quarries which offer livelihood options to the Santhali (Rao 2005), along with daily wage labour and masonry.

Development discourse is abundant with references to aspiration. There has been a growing corpus of literature, trying to understand the aspirations of Adivasi students. Finnan et al. (2017) focuses on how schools as a social space affect tribal students' aspirations and imagined futures and provides opportunities to hope. Froerer (2011), while comparing the aspirations of Christian and Hindu Adivasis in Chhattisgarh, demonstrates the role of church as a form of acquired social capital for the young, converting their educational qualifications into viable livelihood options. Whereas Ansell et al. (2020) in the Indian context focus on Adivasi students' experience with education in Chhattisgarh, revealing that aspirations that education promises become true only for a few, Dost and Froerer (2021) focus on the relational approach to understand how Adivasi students create viable aspirations for themselves. Morrow (2013), taking case studies of Adivasi and marginalised caste students, explores the gap between international neo-liberal policies for the youth and the complexities of young people's lives in the continuous diminishing of aspirations, especially in regard to the structural constraints of poverty. The present article builds further on this, by emphasising the Adivasi identity and how it informs aspirations. Since research on Adivasi identity and aspiration is inadequate, it is at times clubbed together with other marginal groups and their aspirations, and presented as a monolith. The article moves away from the discourse that suggests that classroom spaces provide possibilities for a better future, regardless of who is entering it, as corroborated by state discourse and existing literature. Instead, this paper emphasises the relational comprehension of classroom spaces vis-a-vis the Adivasi identity.

Before plunging into research findings, it is important to understand the educational background of the field area: Dumka in Jharkhand. Jharkhand was declared a separate state in November 2000. With 26.2% of its population falling under the Scheduled Tribes category, according to the 2011 census, Jharkhand is home to 32 different tribes (Census of India 2011). Carved out of Bihar in 2000, the state houses 8.29% of the total tribal population of the country with 13 districts fully covered within the schedule V areas,² and three districts partially covered by the same schedule. The new state, located in an important mining and industrial zone, has not been able to implement radical reforms, but it has tried to extend education among the Adivasis (Carrin 2015). But even though the state boasts of being resource rich, 37% of the population of Jharkhand is below the poverty line (World Bank 2016). 78% of the marginalised tribes in Jharkhand live in rural areas of which 51.6% of STs are again below the poverty line (Ministry of Tribal Affairs 2013). This begs the question why are marginalised tribes systemically excluded from the development discourse, and stuck in the vicious cycles of

² The fifth schedule of the Indian constitution deals with the administration and control of certain areas inhabited by tribal people, in 10 states in India that are called schedule V areas, and subject to special governance mechanisms.

poverty? The education level of tribal students of Jharkhand points towards the same systemic exclusion. The net enrolment ratio for scheduled tribes in Jharkhand at the higher secondary level has dropped from 90.1% to 26.9% at the primary level, suggesting a high dropout rate by the time students reach 11th grade (Government of India 2022). Jharkhand, ranks at the bottom in the large states category, in the School Education Quality Index. It has a literacy rate of 66.41% which is much lower than the national average (Census of India 2011). A glance at the learning outcomes of students in Jharkhand indicate the to the experience of education on the ground. In government schools in Jharkhand, only 11% of students in Grade 3 and only 29% in Grade 5 are able to read Grade 2 level texts (Gurdatta 2022).

Classroom as a Space for Facilitating *aage badhna* through Education

Education has been seen as an equalizing force and as a symbol of national progress since India's independence. Sen, among many other scholars, has spoken ardently about the power of education, that has the power to improve quality of life, and increase a person's capability to earn and be free of income poverty (Sen 1999). In the national development discourse, education is seen as a means for the poor and the marginalized to 'get ahead' and get a chance to live the 'good life', sought to be actuated through state policies, and communicated through normative aspirations (Jakimow 2016). This discourse is reiterated through the calligraphy on one of the walls of a classroom, in one of the schools I visited in Dumka. This inscription eloquently reads: *Siksha hi safalta ki kunji hai* (education is the key to success).

The New Education Policy of 2020 confers on education the power of being a great leveller and defines it as the best tool for achieving economic and social mobility, inclusion, and equality (Government of India 2020). For students like Rueben, government schools are, arguably, the only gateway through which to access education and hence, the only way to get ahead, at least according to dominant discourse. Dominant discourses of education that promise a good life, offer hope to the marginalised but do very little in actually to provide students with realistic opportunities (Jakimow 2016). Jakimow (2016: 26) writes, how this hope instead ends-up coercing the marginalized to invest in the promise of education which comes with a condition that only those who have the will to invest in education can get ahead. In short, investment in education reformulates the aspiration to succeed. I follow Huijsmans et al.'s (2021: 3) definition of aspiration, in my analysis, to mean "an orientation towards a desired future". These futures can be either individual or collective; they can be short-term or long-term, and they can include imagination, affect, and material practices (ibid.: 3). But aspirations are also socially produced, and never completely individual. They are produced through an interaction with the social life, and can be seen as a cultural capacity (Appadurai 2004). "The sociological and anthropological conceptualisation of aspirations situates its production as part of the social" (Huijsmans et al. 2021: 5). Aspirations, according to Dost and Froerer (2021), are produced relationally as part of the social, through dialogues with parents, peers, and through the dominant narrative perpetuated by the educational system (Dost and Froerer 2021: 15). Many of these dialogues and hopes are formulated through interactions that take place in the classroom, or through interaction with what the classroom symbolizes. Aspirations can hence be situated within a doxic social logic: ones that fall under the dominant discourse and thus, have a "taken-for-granted status" (Zipin et al. 2015, Huijsmans et al. 2021: 5). Or they can be situated within habituated logic—the social structures that decide what is possible (Zipin et al. 2015). This can be seen as Froerer (2012) further questions education as a social good and shows how it plays a role in diminishing the aspirations of Adivasi girls, because of a lack of social and cultural capital. These aspirations take shape within the classroom, even though media, parental outlook, upbringing, and inputs from the larger society. But when students enter a classroom, the classroom becomes a space and foundation that moulds and provides them with viable pathways to their aspirations. The third conceptualisation of

aspirations as per Zipin et al. (2015) explained by Hujismans et al. (2021: 6) is the idea of emergent aspirations, the ones which are not situated in the other two but are “agentic impulses towards alternative futures”.

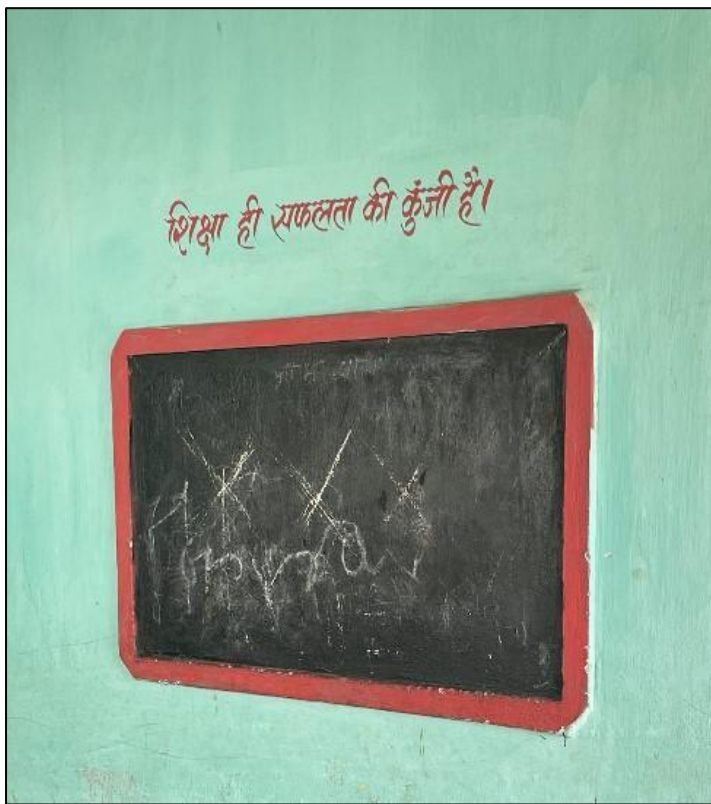


Image 1.1: A Classroom Wall at Rueben's School (source: author).

A vital aspect of *aage badhna*, as Dost and Froerer (2021: 15) expound through their study of Chhattisgarh, is to move away from *peeche rehna* (lagging behind). Not being a part of the education system, hence, means that you will lose out on the opportunities it promises. Dost and Froerer place the aspirations of Adivasi youth in the category of emergent aspirations, where students reimagine their futures by conceptualising more viable pathways in the face of structural constraints (ibid.: 125). Based on their research, they further propose that the school is a space that simultaneously plays a “transformative and limiting role”: transformative because education provides students with opportunities that may not present itself otherwise, conveyed by instilling the unidirectional logic between hard work and success (ibid.: 121).

Limiting, on the other hand, because of the narrow range of occupations that are described as available and possible to achieve through the school curriculum, accompanied by a lack of discussion about this by the teachers (ibid.: 121). Research shows that even if students finish schooling, their chances of securing employment remain low as there are not enough jobs for the educated young, resulting in an increase in the number of the educated unemployed (Jeffrey 2010: 467). But because of the prospect of gaining educational capital through education, this has not stopped the marginalized from subscribing to education. The lack of education is seen as a reason for poor livelihood outcomes, and education is seen as a pathway to a better life for the next generation (Jakimow 2016: 15). Jakimow (ibid.: 20) elaborates on how education fails to live up to its promise for students from Scheduled Caste communities in rural Telangana, and also comments on how hope for a better life is upheld, notwithstanding the failure of education. Further, Jakimow is of the opinion (ibid.: 21) that education provokes the building of aspirations that are “not objectively realizable”. Even if hope is deemed lost for the present generation, it gets transferred to future generations as a possibility. Jakimow concludes (ibid.: 27) that holding on to hope is almost an obligation, because the thought of a future where the next generation remains equally entrenched in manual labour, is also unbearable. Hence, it is the “almost impossibility” of reaching aspirations that students set out with, which is the reason why most people hold on to education (ibid.: 12).

While holding on to hope might be true for all students, the hope held by the students from different communities interacts in a special way within the same classroom. While certain students come closer to realizing their hopes, others do not. Even though Adivasi students do

not survive the promises of education, they nonetheless gain educational capital, accruing confidence, language, and the etiquette to make important social connections with outsiders—something that contributes to the rise of meaningful alternatives, and often, even more viable future trajectories (Dost and Froerer 2021: 125). Dost and Froerer thus take on a more constructive approach to understanding how young people reframe their aspirations. Reframing aspirations from a relational lens, they posit that the marginalized youth distinguishes itself in the face of depravity. Through acts of agency, they reconstitute their aspirations even when the futures promised through education prove unsustainable. Dost and Froerer (2021: 111) view their “orientation” towards the future as “assertions of identity” that transcend the current present. While Dost and Froerer (2021) ascertain that hope forecloses achievements for Adivasi students, they do not speak of the influence of interactions within the classroom that informs the formation of aspiration. Even though the forming of aspiration is theorised through a relational approach, the influence of the Adivasi identity and its role in the (re)framing aspirations remain unsubstantiated. What is lacking is: how does the Adivasi identity and its historicity interact with the design of the education system to inform aspirations? I argue that the Adivasi identity has been overlooked in prior conceptualisations of aspiration and its formation. This research delves deeper into this question of identity, describing how this identity is constructed and reinforced as inferior, which again, informs Adivasi aspirations.

The Adivasi Experience of a Classroom

The construction of a separate ‘tribal’ identity was undertaken as a colonial project (Kuper 1988) which attempted to define and classify the demography of India, where Adivasis were seen as the “living remnants of Europe’s evolutionary past” (Desai 2013). Adivasis are often referred to as *jangli* (wild), with wildness being defined in opposition to civilisation, or something that precedes, or is outside civilisation (Skaria 1988). Santhals in many colonial accounts have been called ‘savages’ and ‘primitive’ but good workers, with Canney (1928) calling for a careful study of whether Santhals are not a ‘degenerate’ but rather just ‘a backward race’. This discourse has facilitated a stereotype about ‘tribals’ as backward, and in need of upliftment and evolution. This continuing stereotype endures as a value in the upliftment projects conducted by the Indian government. Almost all developmental projects on Adivasis seek to propel them towards civilisation, which includes education. As part of the same argument, it is rebelling against the colonial state and the national elite, as response to subordination, that also gives rise to a distinctive Adivasi identity (Desai 2015). Adivasis have thus had a troubled relationship with the state-led education system. Having the lowest literacy rate in the country, the census of 2011 reveals that the literacy rate among Scheduled Tribes stood at 59% against an overall literacy rate of 73% in the country (Census of India 2011). Veerbhandranaika et al. (2012) illuminates the two interrelated reasons for this: one, the state fails to ensure that schooling reaches the Adivasi child, and two, Adivasis have perceived schooling as a tool of colonial and nationalist oppression, and have hence demonstrated limited engagement with it. The state education system and the classroom aims to treat each pupil as equal, and hence propagates a universal curriculum, a uniform way of teaching, pedagogy, and design. Balagopalan (2003) outlines the experiences of the first generation Adivasi learners and their parents within the system, of their negotiation of existing in a space of formal schooling that privileges particular ways of being, and generating specific forms of knowledge. The spatial and temporal practices of school conveys a ‘decontextualized modernity’ (Maithreyi et al. 2022), that does not representatively include Adivasi ways of living. Defined through a fixed pedagogy, it is designed at creating ‘separations: separation between home and school, between manual, household labour and economy, and intellectual labour’ (Maithreyi et al. 2022, Balagopalan 2003). An Adivasi child finds herself in a space that rejects her way of life, and moulds her instead, into becoming a subordinate citizen. The aim of

modern schooling and its hegemonic practices in creating a 'rational, homogenous citizen-subjects' out of diverse populations thus tries to reform Adivasi populations, and this marks the experience of Adivasi students with discrimination (Balagopalan 2003).

There have been several calls to revise school curricula from an Adivasi perspective, to reassess its relevance for them, but this has been to no avail (Kumar 1983). Velaskar (2010: 67) points to how, apart from rhetorical advocacy and theoretical emphasis on the education of marginalized groups in the 1968 educational policy,

...the education of Dalits, tribals and girls was almost a non-issue in the policy which made no special financial, curricular or pedagogic commitment to their education....Dalit and Adivasi dominated areas suffered sustained exclusion or piecemeal inclusion.

Many research endeavours have highlighted the need for schools that are more open to tribal culture, taught by Adivasi teachers, and an indigenized curriculum as expressed by *Santhals* themselves (Carrin 2015). But the tribal lifestyle is rejected by the mainstream and the non-tribal elite, including the ones who design the education system, making Adivasis feel excluded and punished for their cultural difference. State education, as it appears to them, is a means to destroy their social fabric and cultural heritage (Kumar 1983). Even though Adivasis perceive education as not the only priority and an unwelcome imposition in the present condition (Desai 2013), they acknowledge the cultural changes that are introduced by modern education in their community life. The inescapability of their existential situation renders them choiceless, as the option to depend on earlier forest-based livelihoods are also now, increasingly precarious (Maithreyi et al. 2022). The importance of education is understood as enabling a move away from manual labour to jobs that are inside rooms and are not as arduous (Jakimow 2016, Froerer 2021). However, the Adivasi acceptance of schooling as a means to get ahead in life does not mean that the education system itself creates any space for them to access the benefits it promises.

The Value of *Mehnat* (Hard work)

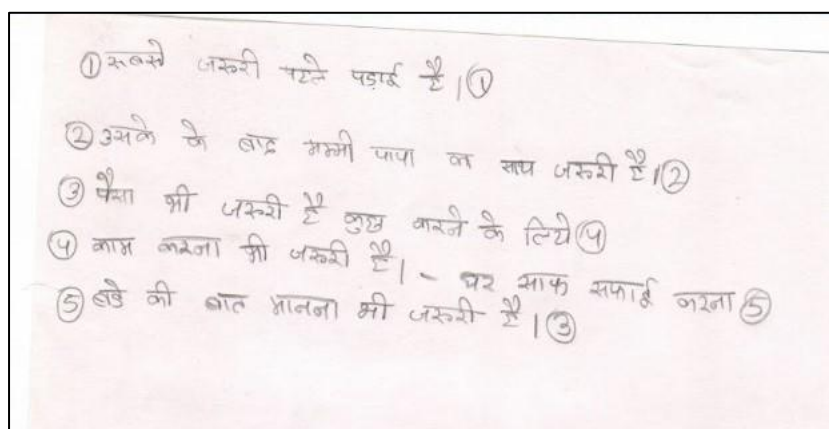


Image 1.2: A Santhali Student marking what is Important for them. The numbers on the Right indicate that Education comes First (source: author).

The education system opens up the possibility of nurturing different aspirations among students, and aspirations situated in the doxic logic of 'you can achieve anything if you work hard enough' is a powerful message for students within workshops. Almost everyone says: *padhai karna bohot zaroori hai* (it is very important to study).

Rueben wishes to be an army officer, whereas Sunita aspires to be a teacher. When asked what steps Rueben would take to enlist in the army, he says he would first have to finish school. He has little idea about life after school, and says that he will figure it out once he has finished his 12th grade. For him, the important thing currently is to focus on his studies, and finish schooling without further

hurdles. In one workshop activity, Rueben drew himself as he wanted to see himself in the future, as an army officer with the flag of India in one hand and a flower in the other. He says he wants to be of service to his country, and the flower represents the love he feels for it. In his quest to realize his dream, he says he will have to do *mehnat* (hard work) in the classroom. Many children in both schools in Dumka where workshops were held, repeated that education was very important to them, and if they wanted to realize their dreams, they would have to do *mehnat*. But the question of what *mehnat* entails, confuses them; they look down and repeatedly mutter under their breaths: *ache se padhai karni padegi* (we must study hard). This statement, which is not their own, seems to echo what the teachers constantly tell students. The statement emphasizes the onus of succeeding in the education system to lie on Adivasi students themselves.

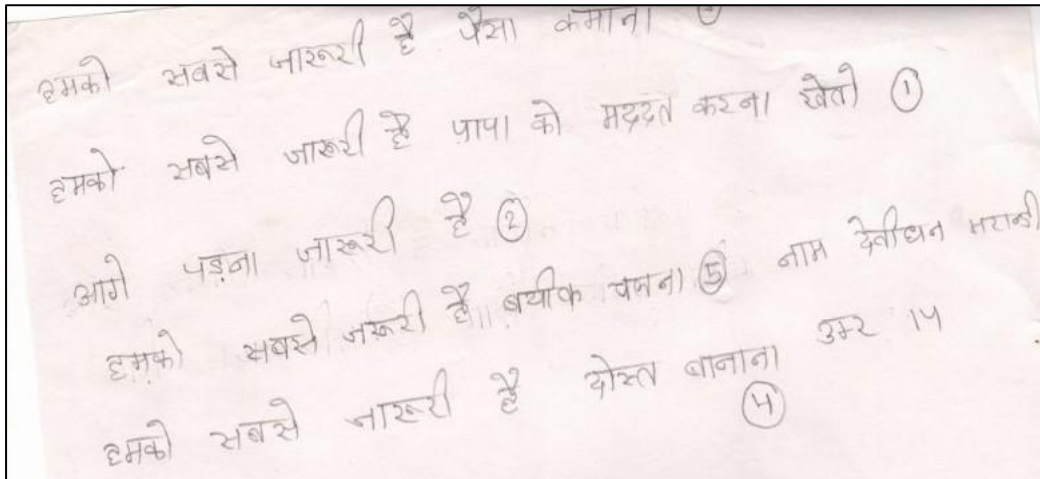


Image 1.3: Another Santhali Student marking Priorities. The Numbers on the Right indicate that Education comes Second (source: author).

The math teacher in one of the schools said: “these kids (pointing to Adivasi students) need to work hard and open their minds; only then will they be able to reap the benefits of education.” While Santhali students harbour aspirations to become army officers, nurses, doctors, teachers, these aspirations do not find their way back to their parents. Sunita says: “I have not told my parents that I want to become a teacher, otherwise they will feel burdened.” The same opinion is repeated by Jonathan who wants to go into the army: “I have not told my father yet; I have to earn money for them; they will feel pressured if I tell them I want to go in the army.” But students unanimously declared that *aage badhna* was very important. Rueben wants to buy a bike in future, a drawing of which he has stuck on the classroom notice board. *Aage badhna* for students is expressed in the same way, as was defined by Dost and Froerer (2021), linking the concept to a gain in social status, spatial mobility, the acquisition of material things, and the enjoyment of freedoms. These aspirations are formed through symbols and through information that the students are exposed to in the classroom.

In one workshop activity, students were asked to chart-out two career paths for a fictitious *Santhali* student who was their own age. The first was to chart out a pathway towards becoming a teacher or a doctor, and the other was a pathway towards becoming a mine worker, or a daily wage labourer. These career options were picked through discussions with the students. The options of a teacher and doctor were listed by students, according to what they see in their books or aspire towards, whereas mine working or the work of a daily wage labourer were careers they saw in their everyday surroundings. There are many stone quarries in Dumka (Rao 2005), and it is not uncommon for students or their family members to work in one. Their lived realities influenced their career choices in the activity that was carried out in groups of three. I elaborate here on the outcomes of 2 groups. The first group had Rueben along with Pooja and Duryodhan; and the second group had Sunita along with Preeti and

Neetu. The students were also asked to describe the roles played by their parents, the school, the community, and the self, in decisions leading to deciding on a particular career option. The groups were first asked to draw a character and give them a name. This character was supposed to be a bearer of backgrounds similar to theirs, and hence s/he was a Santhali student of the 8th grade. The students were then asked to chart-out aspirational career paths for their character, like teacher and doctor. They were disconcerted while doing so, because apart from saying *mehnat karni padegi* (we must work hard), they did not have any clear idea about how the path ahead would materialize. They charted-out the path in a disjointed way that argued that their character would first have to gain financial assistance, and then gain good education: schooling, enrolment in tuition classes, and prepare and appear for exams. The same was the case with group 2, where the girls could not imagine how their character would become a doctor. Even as they tried to chart-out different paths, the realities of their lives made them stop and think. For example, questions like how the character would secure adequate financial support to carry out their chosen career, or whether school education would be adequate to become a doctor later, confused them.

Leaving this exercise where it stood, they next moved on to imagining how their character would start working in a mine. They had elaborate explanations on what role the school, the teachers, the community, and their parents had to play in pushing their character into mine work. The reasons to go into mine work included medical emergency in the family, the family's need for money that would push their character into working part-time along with school, and / or the accidental death of the character's parents. On the school front, their character was imagined to have left education and gone into mining work because of the very demanding nature of schoolwork. Their character was unable to keep up with the curriculum and her studies. She was perhaps heavily beaten and punished in the classroom by teachers, and she had perhaps also failed the exams. Their character may not have been able to attend regular classes, and unable to understand the textbooks. Not being able to do homework, would only have compelled teachers to increase their punishment of the character, resulting in the latter first falling behind in her studies, and eventually dropping out of school. The community's role was seen in terms of parents pushing the character to earn money instead of wasting time in school. All these reasons, Rueben said, lay just one misfortune away for him and for his peers; it was something he witnessed many people in the village go through. Returning to the prompt of the character becoming a teacher or doctor, Rueben, after deliberation declared that the character would have to work on a farm to earn money first, to financially support the family,³ in order to fund her higher education plans of becoming a teacher. For Rueben, higher education in this case meant that the character would have to continue with school beyond the 10th grade. Rueben drew up an elaborate plan for himself, if he were to pursue a career in teaching. After pondering on the financial requirements that becoming a teacher would entail, he declared that he would have to work every morning from 4am to 12noon to earn money, after which he could go to school to study, and then return home to help his parents with farming. Notwithstanding the unsustainability of this routine, Rueben said that undertaking higher education would at least require this amount of hard work from him, so that he would have enough capital to fund himself. This capital would aid him to buy better books for studies after the 8th grade, that in turn would help him to get into tuition classes and thereafter get admitted to college. He would have to attend school regularly, and pay attention in the classroom. He tried to plan about how he would build a better relationship with his teachers,

³ Rueben is aware of the Pre-matric government scholarship that Scheduled Tribe students receive. He receives 1500 rupees every year, which his parents save, to be used in an event of an emergency. Along with this, Rueben received 600 rupees for his uniform and 4500 rupees for a cycle. Rueben believes the scholarship amount is not enough to make a tangible difference to his education.

and the solution, he thought, lay in him finishing all his homework on time, and pushing his teachers to teach more.

Pursuing a career would, however, also be very isolating for him. Rueben imagined, he would not get much support from his parents or teachers, and would have to embark on his journey alone. The thought scared him, but he felt content thinking that if he actually managed to become a teacher, everyone, including his parents, teachers and the community would finally respect him and acknowledge his capabilities and not brand him 'unable'. Rueben, without knowing how the education system was ideally supposed to be providing for him, found himself grasping at straws, without many options in the face of harsh reality. The onus of moving forward in his life, to climb the ladder of social mobility, lay squarely on his shoulders. In case he was unable to achieve the mobility promised to him by the education system, he would accept defeat and acknowledge that the fault lay with him. As Kumar (1983: 1568) writes "the failure to remain in advanced institutions is attributed to the marginalized students' own inadequacies, and not to the inadequacies of the school curriculum and the school system to which they were exposed throughout childhood and adolescence." Similarly, Sunita in her group declared that their character would first have to ply a rickshaw to sustain her education that was necessary to become a doctor. She would have to get better books, enrol herself in tuition classes and attend school daily. Even thereafter, the possibility of becoming a doctor seemed slim: *patanahi, kaise hoga. lagta nahi hai ho paega, doctor banna toh bohot mushkil hai, hum jaise log kaha bante hain* (I do not how it will happen; it will be too difficult to become a doctor; how can people like us become doctors), she rhetorically says. In either scenario, the student characters seemed to be fighting an already lost battle, in the face of their current realities. These obstacles did not enable them to make meaningful career choices. As another student Duryodhan said:

I don't know if I will be able to write the exam for the post of police, for that I will have to at least finish 10th. I am not sure if that would be possible. I have to work at the farm, and might have to go out to earn money after 10th. Will have to carry rocks (*pathar wagera uthana padega*). I have not worked in a mine yet; but maybe when I am a little older I would have to go there. If I do not find any work here, then I will have to go to work in the mine.

Duryodhan's feelings are reflected in Jakimow's (2016: 26) analysis of why students stick to education even when it seems to be failing in its promises. The reason is the absence of alternative routes to create a good life. This attachment with an "almost impossible" hope of ever reaching their aspirations, lowers their expectations from life, and gives rise to negative consequences that reinforce their structural position of marginality. While education opens the doors for Adivasi students to dream of careers like that of an army officer, teacher, police, and the likes; the reality is still overwhelming. To achieve these goals in the future, they would have to inevitably engage in manual labour. The best they hoped, was to perhaps start a small business, like a shop in the village. Jonathan, from the 7th grade expressed it in this way: "At least I will be able to study till 8th, so I will try to open a shop. I will do something or the other (*kuchh toh kar lenge*)." Dost and Froerer (2021: 125) show how schooling leads to the narrowing of young people's aspirations by progressively channelling the "forward movement" towards a limited set of possibilities that are unattainable. Even after they realize that their aspirations are unattainable, young people reframe their aspirations into locally viable outcomes. In the lives of Adivasi students from Dumka, it is clear that locally viable outcomes remain the ones that they see their parents, or their elder siblings and relatives take recourse to. For them, even though they are more educated than their parents, and have reached a higher grade, their career and work options remain the same. Rueben, for instance, talks of a brother-in-law, who after finishing 10th grade, still remains a *chaddmistri* (stone mason). By

citing such examples, he tries to convey what the future realistically holds for him, and many other students like him, who are currently enrolled in government schools.

The Othering of Adivasis

Rueben and Sunita's school, a primary and upper primary government school in a village in Dumka has 6 teachers per 210 students, sporadic electricity, and no playground or boundary wall. 3 of the teachers look after standards 1st to 5th, and the other 3 are entrusted with standards 6th to 8th. Even though teachers are allotted classrooms, they teach subjects interchangeably depending on where the need arises. The classrooms of the 6th, 7th, and 8th standards are situated on the first floor, whereas the rest are on the ground floor. With one teacher perpetually absent, the other two teachers of the middle school seldom climb to the first floor to address or teach students. "The teachers do not climb up for days; each teacher comes only once in a week" Sunita says, when asked about the teachers' classroom interactions. With a skewed teacher-student ratio, teachers have to extend themselves to be present in all classes at the same time. They enter a classroom for a few minutes where they assign classwork and move to the next class. This translates into students jotting down the contents of their books into their notebooks or mugging up the answers written on the board. "Sir comes once a week and gives us maths classwork but does not explain how to do the problems. He just comes and gives classwork and then leaves; if we are unable to write the correct answer then he just asks us to repeat it next week," Rueben disappointedly explains as he elaborates on the gap between his curiosity to learn more and the way teachers teach in school. Teachers tend to take help from older students or monitors, who make sure that the students are finishing their classwork in the absence of teachers. A blueprint of rote learning, this process affects student learning. As many students recount, they just practise writing, try to read stories, or mug up questions and answers, as directed by teachers. Hence, students often find themselves without a teaching presence or reliable guidance about the subjects they are prescribed in classrooms.

The teachers' explanation of poor learning is the behemoth of the various administrative tasks assigned to them, which gives them lesser time to spend in the classroom. Administrative duties and a skewed student-teacher ratio is however, peeling away just one layer of the problem. The many layers underneath need to be understood in further depth. Even when teachers are present in the classroom, they do not strive for excellence. They expect only a 'minimum level' of performance from students from marginalised backgrounds (Velaskar 1990). Teachers are satisfied with imparting bare minimum knowledge, which they justify by pinning it on to the alleged incapacities of 'these Adivasi students'. Teachers claim that Adivasi students are cognitively less capable of grasping concepts that are designated for the learning level of their standard. As one science teacher put it: "They don't have enough brains to work hard and reach beyond labouring (careers). All the smart kids are in private schools; we get students who are less capable; so, it is unfair to expect them to reach the same height as students from private schools." This suggests that the inability faced by students to encash the social mobility offered by schools is seen as being a natural product of their talents or lack thereof. The label 'ineducable', detailed by Balagopalan (2003) fits here, as teachers deem Adivasi students as not smart enough to assimilate whatever is taught in the classrooms, a notion that reinforces the idea of community 'backwardness'. Their sense of responsibility and duty towards students becomes skewed, when teachers feel students lack the capacity to compete with their privileged private-school-going counterparts. This is also confirmed by the practices employed by teachers in Sunita's school. Coming once a week to allot classwork, not entering classrooms for days, and spending time on the phone in the hallway, are some ways in which teachers fail students. During examinations, teachers help the students in writing answers, so that they achieve passing grades, and are not held back at the previous level in

school. Rueben recounts various ways in which teachers in his school helped him with writing answers during exams. Teachers are known to write answers on the boards, google the questions, and individually convey answers to students, or help them arrive at the answer by engaging them in conversation. Rueben says, even though he does not understand math properly, he continues to get good grades. Carried out as a systemic strategy to increase enrolment, retain students, and bolster promotion rates, these strategies show an increase in the education level of the state and the country, while learning outcomes remain abysmal. Actual knowledge, growth, and cognitive development does not seem to be the real goal of the education system, especially when it comes to catering to marginalized students. Velaskar (2010) confirms this by saying that while the state's educational innovations enable the economically and socially subordinate to get a foothold inside the system, it continues to exclude them from attaining the educational level that really counts.

As knowledge transmission and growth takes a backseat, discipline in the form of corporal punishment comes to the forefront. In this apparatus, as defined by Balagopalan (2003) when describing formal schooling in the modern state, teachers are predisposed to carrying out the functions of the state. The schools have non-Adivasi teachers for the upper and primary levels. Even though the principal of Rueben and Sunita's school is from the *Santhal* community, non-Adivasi, upper caste teachers seemed to be in a decision making role. The principal agrees to everything the teachers say about Adivasi students. Deeming Adivasi students ineducable, allows for limited education, with the primary aim becoming discipline imparting, which is the prime objective of creating 'citizen-subjects' out of Adivasi students. Classrooms act as a space for instilling discipline in the minds of the young, and Adivasi students become its primary-most recipients. Teachers take immense pride in their Adivasi students reciting the national anthem standing in the correct posture, or taking the pledge for India. If students falter, joining the assembly late, or not wearing correct uniforms, they are corporally punished or verbally abused for not following orders. "Corona really affected the discipline we had taught these students. The school was shut for 2 years and whatever discipline we had maintained in the school premises; the students forgot everything. This has been the biggest drawback. They do not even remember that they have to stand for the national anthem," one teacher said, when expressing exasperation with the 'undisciplined' nature of Adivasi students.

Discipline, for teachers, takes precedence over didactic education because it is more important for teachers that Adivasi students follow instructions and remain amenable. "They beat us more than they teach us," mumbled Rueben hesitantly, fearful of this information reaching his teacher. Jonathan said, "they just try to find an excuse to hit us." Adivasi students are aware that the corporal punishment they receive is not commensurate with the mistakes or disrespect that they may have caused teachers. A girl from the OBC caste who studies in the same class as Adivasi students happily tells me that she does not get beaten by the teacher, as she is a good girl. But she is still scared because she has seen how teachers beat Adivasi students. Students are known to stop coming to school if they cannot bear the punishment. To be physically violent is the only way by which teachers try to discipline and mould students into good citizens. Morrow et al. (2015) demonstrates that students from marginalized backgrounds are more likely to be punished in school, and this punishment has adverse and negative impacts on their cognitive skills. The Othering that students confront, as Ramachandaran (2023) shows, is perhaps most pronounced in the Schedule V Areas of the country (see fn. 1), which schools like the ones in Dumka fall under. Corporal punishment is just one of the ways of 'civilizing' Adivasi students, and assimilating them into the mainstream. Teachers are quick to point out that Adivasi students are not interested in studying. Many researchers have pointed to how teachers place blame about Adivasi student disinterest in education on their parents' illiteracy, as factors that contribute to the falling back of Adivasi students—that is, apart from their allegedly innate ineducability (Desai 2015). A teacher said

along similar lines: “Their parents do daily wage labour; they don't understand the importance of education; nor do they want their kids to be educated. They just want them to earn money as it will bring more money into the house.” This is why teachers think Adivasi students are disinterested in education, believing that they just come to the classroom to idle away time. This is far from the truth, as many Adivasi children categorically said that they wanted to learn more. They specially wanted to learn languages, because they knew it would help them to communicate better. They expressed the need to learn English, as it might help them to progress. Rueben mentioned that he found a YouTube channel that teaches maths, and he tries to follow it because he really wants to learn maths. Teachers' perceptions about Adivasi student disinterest and ineducability informs their teaching and their disinterest in teaching Adivasi students. While many scholars have said that the solution to this is to have more Adivasi teachers, Desai (2015: 154) notes that, while schools may have an increased number of Adivasi teachers, at times, the internalized biases of society and its oppression, results in duplicating an older dynamic between teachers and students.

Ramachandaran et al. (2013) illuminates the disjuncture between teacher perceptions and reality, when describing how students from marginalized backgrounds perform in school. Santhali students said, they loved studying Hindi or English, but laughed when asked if they were ever taught in their own language. “They would never teach in our language; that is not official; we learn in Hindi here,” Preeti said. According to Carrin (2015) Santhali students feel stigmatized for their mother tongue and develop inferiority, when failing to get good marks, due to the problems of learning in a second or third language. Santhali students feel Othered and excluded by all their experiences in the classroom, where their language, culture, and their families are looked down on. In 2008, textbooks in the Santhali language were distributed in schools in Jharkhand, but the state had not appointed Santhali teachers, and the project has since been halted (Shekhar 2008). The classroom, hence, becomes a space where Adivasiness is disrespected, ignored, rejected, and punished, within interactions with teachers, the curriculum, and the overall education system. Desai (2013) corroborates this: although the last two decades have witnessed an increase in elementary school provision for Adivasis, student experiences are jeopardized by discrimination, prejudice, and low expectation, that occurs in the micro-practices of teaching and learning. Hierarchies of caste and tribe and resulting discrimination, is expressed and becomes fixed in social interactions between the teacher and student, and among students (Desai 2013). Adivasi students realize quite early in their schooling that there is a separation in the knowledge being imparted in schools, and the knowledge being imparted by their ancestors in the community (Carrin 2015: 348).

The Realities that Students Bring into the Classroom

Santhali children do not leave their identity outside the classroom. They bring their knowledge, realities, perceptions and context to the classrooms where they study. Rueben, when asked to define himself by naming the qualities he possesses, writes matter-of-factly: *hum gareeb hain* (we are poor) and *hum santhali hain* (we are Santhali). These phrases define the character of Rueben's family life and are the most important aspects that dictate every decision made by him and his family. One day's work ensures enough money for the sustenance of a family for that day, with families always at a risk of being unable to subsist on meagre wages. Rueben's father has studied till the 5th grade and now works as a *mistri* (mason), while his brother-in-law who has completed 10th grade now working as a *chaddmistri* (also mason). It was inevitable that Rueben would become the third earning member of his family, responsible for putting food on the table. As the economic policies of the neoliberal state have contributed to the increasing poverty of Adivasi communities, this continues to produce manual labour as integral to the subsistence of these children and their families (Balagopalan 2003: 60). The parents, apart from daily wage labour, also work on their own lands of 2 acres, to grow their

food. Work responsibilities are divided among family members, and the women of the family share in this. Rueben's sisters and grandmother are responsible for goat herding and fetching water from the handpump. Men are responsible for earning wages. The women of the family are also in charge of household chores: cooking, washing, and cleaning. At their farm, responsibilities are again divided based on gender. Boys are entrusted with ploughing and weeding, while girls do paddy transplantation, cutting and collecting. Rueben wakes up every day at 4am to work on the farm. After farm work for the day is over, Rueben gets ready for school. Farm labour is an important aspect of family life, a task that the family undertakes together without exception. Among Santhals, reciprocity among kin and children are incorporated into a system of production (Carrin 2015: 352) subject to gender-defined roles. Even though Rueben does not like working on the farm, and complains of the strenuous work and insect bites, he feels he has no say in the matter. His father dictates Rueben's responsibility to the family, and if he rebels against farm work, his father threatens him by denying him food if the work does not get completed. The tension Rueben feels is corroborated by Morrow (2013) when describing individualistic values that are mirrored in the acquiring of formal education in contrast to the values embedded in collective cultures, where children are supposed to contribute their labour to a shared enterprise. Rueben's father pushes him to undertake more work, leaving him no time for studies, and sometimes the work ends up eating up into his school time. "My father asks me to work even when he sees that I am studying. He says if I am not able to earn through any other means, at least I will have the farm to fall back on," Rueben says, almost believing what his father instils in him. Implicit in this statement are his parents' reservations about the actual utility of education. Ruben tells me.

I do not think I will be able to study much. My father would not let me go to school, if I do not finish my work on the farm in the morning. He says education has its own place in life, but why put in so much effort if I have to farm and do manual labour for the rest of my life? He lets me go to school but asks why I need to go everyday?

In Rueben's village, people who have finished school have not been able to secure permanent jobs and are seen as doing either manual labour or odd jobs, with some out-migrating for the short-term. This holds the parents back from letting their children give up on household realities. Parents weigh their options and sometimes decide to avoid the direct cost entailed in availing opportunities, like getting secondary school certificates that will ultimately be useless (Froerer 2011). This phenomenon is explained by Balagopalan (2003: 60) as: oftentimes parents feel that even if they spend money on their children's education, they do not get jobs and do not want to work in the fields either. Hence, it becomes important for parents to instil the abilities of doing manual labour in their children from an early age, even if they keep attending school. Bourdieu (2002) explains that parental behaviour towards children's education is based on an empirical evaluation of their real hopes, common to other individuals in their social group; children are constantly reminded of their impending fate through the experience of failure or the partial success of children from the same background. This is why Rueben's father insists on Rueben prioritizing farm work. Even with parental support, the material realities of the family propel parents to impede their children's education. Shyam, an 8th grade Santhali student, passionately works on technical projects at home and wants to pursue a career in engineering. Since his father's accident, which has resulted in no income for the family, it has pushed the family into taking a loan, in order to provide for themselves. Even though Shyam's parents are supportive of his dreams and would not want him to drop out, he feels that it is almost inevitable that he finds an odd job somewhere to support his family. Sunita, describing herself, writes: *hum bohut mehnat karte hain* (we work very hard) and declares that she loves doing farm work. If given a choice between school and farm, she would gladly give up school and work full time on the farm, because that is what her parents prefer. Moreover, she feels that she truly belongs there, because of the feeling of togetherness

while working with her kin and friends on the farm. In addition to farm work, domestic duties for girls begins by the time they are 7. Teaching girls domestic work and farm labour is non-negotiable, because of the community's belief that the foremost responsibility of girls is to take care of their households, especially after they are married. Many parents, because of this, urge their daughters to discontinue school as they do not see the merit in education: "My parents urge me to learn house work and farm work properly as they say I have to do only this, later in life. After I get married, I will be doing domestic chores and working on the farm," Sunita says. Many girls in remote government schools of Dumka get married well before the age of 18.

During the harvest season, everyone has to work together on the fields and children are no exception. The classroom sees very low attendance during that time because all the students work in the fields at the time. But the school calendar is not designed to take this into account. Nor do teachers design their classes around it. Students, when they return to classroom after the harvest, have to catch up with their lessons on their own without help from teachers. Instead of extending a helping hand or an understanding nod, teachers are known to dangle the fear of issuing 'Transfer Certificates' for students with absenteeism.⁴ Jonathan tells me: "sir just gets angry and says he will issue a TC if I am absent for a month; when we say the harvest time is an important time to us, he gets angrier and blames our parents." The dichotomy between manual and intellectual labour that the education system propagates is not lost on students. There is a discursive shame attached to manual labour when looked at from the schooling lens. This discursive production of manual labour as inferior, which fits well with existing caste hierarchies in Indian society is only accentuated by the schooling system (Balagopalan 2003).

Students who see other Adivasis like themselves doing only manual labour, this dichotomy between manual and intellectual that is furthered by teachers only separates students further from school, as corroborated by Morrow (2013), when describing the tension students feel. The parents on the other hand try to bridge this gap by making sure that their children do not separate themselves from manual labour entirely. To take an example of this, making rice beer is considered integral to Santhali culture, something that many parents take part in, for their subsistence as well. Making rice beer has in fact been seen as a marker of Santhali identity (Carrin 2015: 352). Canney (1928), documents that the principal cultivation crop of Santhals is rice and the beer made from it is a prominent feature of their celebrations and festivals. In the Santhal creation story, The Great Spirit after creating the first human pair, gave them yeast to make rice beer (Canney 1928: 331). But this is not understood by the teachers, and students are shamed for their culture of beer consumption. Teachers, instead of acknowledging and understanding the realities that define student lives, often label their parents *unpadh* (unlettered), as those who do not understand or appreciate the value of education. Adivasi parents are thus visualised only as 'drunk' and 'disinterested' in the education of their children (Balagopalan 2003). When an Adivasi student enters the classroom, the education system actively propels him to leave their realities outside school.

The Unmaking of Indigeneity and the Diminishing of Aspirations

The classroom urges Adivasi students to keep their Adivasi-ness outside when they enter the room but simultaneously punishes them inside the classroom for this very identity. Adopting the framework extended by Balagopalan (2005) to understand the experiences of Adivasi students, it becomes clear that the postcolonial education system functions to "integrate Adivasis into the nation-state through forms of submissive assimilation, which retains them in subordinate positions" (Desai 2015: 154). Adivasi students feel inherently Othered by the

⁴ Transfer Certificate is an official document that students receive when they leave school.

education system; they are discriminated against by their teachers, their peers, the curriculum, and the pedagogy. This demeaning educational experience pushes them, in turn, to internalize the symbols of 'backward' behaviour (Kumar 1983). The ethnographic accounts above that outline the interaction of Adivasi students with the education system in classrooms make clear that Adivasi culture, language, everyday practices, and epistemologies are delegitimized by the education system. Carrin (2015) further confirms this experiences of Othering for Santhali students, when saying that because they do not find their language, their people, or their knowledge represented in the classroom, all of which is moreover, effectively devalued, the knowledge that is imparted through the curriculum of government schools is only socially valuable to dominant groups. This makes the differential values education holds for different groups invisible (Kumar 1983: 1569). Without context-based curriculum, schools in Adivasi areas offer the kind of knowledge that is designed only for the middle classes living in metropolitan areas. As Carrin (2015: 354) puts it, for Santhali students,

The textbooks overwhelmingly represent the values and perspectives of middle-class families who live in villas in residential areas where children play in a protected environment and visit relatives by car. Parents in these textbooks have stable and interesting jobs, while issues of unemployment and poverty are absent from the textbooks' landscape. Santal children cannot recognize themselves in these books.

The importance of teachers and the relationships they build with students in a classroom affects a child's learning (Hamre and Pianta 2001), along with affecting their engagement with school and successful education (Roorda et al. 2011). The teacher as a figure of authority facilitates the construction and regulation of knowledge in a classroom (Carrin 2015). Kumar (1989: 21) elucidates the importance of teacher-pupil interaction through a case study where a teacher asserts her knowledge and authority to prove to an Adivasi boy and to the rest of the class, that he is ignorant. The relationship teachers have with Adivasi students is laden with biases and an increased control, seen also in Rueben's and Sunita's experiences. Adivasi students are forced to identify with the symbols of dominant groups through curriculum, and they internalize the biases that teachers hold against them, thereby believing in their own 'backwardness' (Balagopalan 2003: 56). This feeling of lack is also echoed by the stakeholders of the education system. The feeling of Othering experienced by Adivasi students is described by Bourdieu (2002: 23) as neglect:

To penalise the underprivileged and favour the most privileged, the school only has to neglect, in its teaching methods and techniques and its criteria when making academic judgements, to take into account the cultural inequalities, between children of different classes. In other words by treating its pupils, how unequal they may be in reality, as equal in rights and duties, the education system is led to give its de facto sanction to initial cultural inequalities. The formal equality which governs pedagogical practices is in fact a cloak for and a justification of indifference to the real inequalities with regard to the body of knowledge taught or rather demanded.

State education system neglects Adivasi students and Others them by refusing to take their differences, realities, and forms of indigenous knowledge into account. In the above accounts it becomes clear that this neglect is geared to communicate their inferior place, and reduced their opportunities in the state education system. This acute awareness shapes and reshapes Adivasi student aspirations, continually narrowing the idea of *aage badhna* that keeps getting diminished. Carrin (2015), illuminates the pressures of dominant culture that Adivasi students face in a classroom, and in extension in the education system, which makes the school a space

where indigeneity is unmade. The pressures from the dominant culture, to assimilate Adivasis into the mainstream simultaneously excludes Adivasi identity and culture in the classroom by punishing Adivasis, and contributing to producing the classroom as a space where indigeneity is unmade. The idea of *aage badhna* that is entwined within the education system is not the same for Adivasi students as it is for other students. For Adivasi students, the education system does not work to provide them any social mobility, but reforms them to create subordinate and rational, citizen-subjects—a project in civility. Balagopalan (2003) uses a Foucauldian framework to explain classroom culture. The dominant culture of modern schooling is interested in students incrementally acquiring civil-social skills, discipline, self-regulation, and rationality, and most importantly, work ethic that prepares them for a future career. This is privileged as the modern natural order, in which teachers are ultimate authority figures. It is they who decide who can and who cannot be placed in this natural order, in the classroom. Adivasi students in terms of this natural order, are viewed as non-modern subjects and hence in need of reform, but not as people who can be prepared for a future career till such reform takes place. Schools have historically functioned to create citizens out of their populations. Foucault gives us an insight into the role of the hidden school curriculum (Skelton 1997) in how it promotes education as social control that creates the marginalized as docile. The marginalization students face in the classroom when they interact with the curriculum, with teachers, peers, pedagogy, and the school calendar, works to reinforce their ‘non-modern’, ‘inferior’ status.

The conceptualisation of aspirations for Santhali students falls under the habituated logic and even when they create emergent aspirations for themselves, the relationality with the classroom pushes them towards the habituated logic. Students are aware of their positionality in the classroom and in the education system; they know that *aage badhna* is not for them. This is why Rueben says *lagta nahi hai zada padh paenge* (I do not think I will be able to study much), as he fights the system to keep himself in the classroom. This is why Sunita wants to choose farm work over schooling, if the choice ever presents itself, since the classroom does not provide her either the inclusion or the social mobility that education promises. The forward movement that education promises is in fact unattainable from the moment they enter the classroom, where they internalize the notion of their own alleged lack and ‘inferiority’. They repeat the anthem, *nahi sakenge* (will not be able to do). *Hume pata hai zada nahi padh paenge, karni toh majdoori hi hai* (we know we will not be able to study much; we have to work as daily wage labourers), as a way of describing their realities, despite the promises offered by education. Without acknowledging their lived realities, the education system only pushes Adivasi students out of the classroom. Adivasi students treat education and classroom access as a privilege, and not as something they deserve. For the Adivasi young people in the villages of Dumka Jharkhand, education does not seem to open new alternatives, or locally viable options, other than working on the fields, in mines, or migrating as manual labour to other states. The internalized inferior status that the classroom instils, places the blame for not being able to get ahead in life through education, squarely on them. Thus, aspirations are relationally produced, but for Adivasi students the most important aspect informing their aspirations, is their Adivasi identity.

Conclusion

Santhali students experience great tension between their aspirations and their identity, something that gets reinforced in their relationality to the classroom. The paper shows four ways in which students relate to the classroom: one, where their aspirations are formed; second, where *aage badhna* is hindered; third, where Adivasi identity is denied; and fourth, where Adivasi identity is simultaneously punished in the education system’s agenda to ‘civilize’ Adivasis and create rational citizen-subjects out of them. The idea of *aage badhna* is intricately

linked with Adivasi identity, and it is this identity that shapes and reshapes their aspirations in the classroom. It ultimately also reshapes their aspirations about current realities, even though their education levels might be higher than their previous generation. The classroom becomes inherently important as a space where these aspirations get conceptualized, and where their current realities also get reinforced. This serves to push Adivasi students out of the classroom and out of the education system. The idea put forward by Dost and Froerer (2021) about the reconceptualization of aspirations as an act of agency discounts the way in which the education system in its interaction with students' Adivasi identity actively plays a role in diminishing these reconceptualized aspirations. The paper shows that the Othering of Adivasi students inside a classroom plays a crucial role in reshaping their aspirations as inferior. Appadurai (2013, 2004) speaks of the capacity to aspire which needs to be developed, and Finnan et al. (2017) speak of the school, and in extension the classroom's role, in developing aspirations. This research has attempted to uncover how the classroom as a relational space, instead ends up doing exactly the opposite for Adivasi students.

References

- Ansell N., Froerer P., Huijsmans R., Dungey C.E., Dost A.C., Piti, (2020). "Educating 'surplus population': uses and abuses of aspiration in the rural peripheries of a globalising world." *Fennia* 198(1–2): 17–38.
- Appadurai A., (2004). "The Capacity to Aspire: Culture and the Terms of Recognition," in Rao V., Walton M., (eds.) *Culture and Public Action*, pp. 59–84. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Appadurai A., (2013). "The Future as Cultural Fact: Essays on the Global Condition." *Rassegna Italiana di Sociologia* 14(4): 649–650
- Balagopalan S., (2003). "'Neither Suited for Home nor for the Fields': Inclusion, Formal Schooling and the Adivasi Child." *Institute of Development Studies Bulletin* 34(1): 55–62.
- Balagopalan S., (2005). "An Ideal School and the Schooled Ideal: Some Reflections On Educational Experiences at the Margins," in Chopra R., Jeffery P., (eds.) *Educational Regimes in Contemporary India*, pp. 83–98. New Delhi: Sage.
- Biswas P.C., (1956). *Santals of the Santal Parganas*. New Delhi: Bharatiya Adimjati Sevak Sangh.
- Bourdieu P., (2002). *The School as a Conservative Force: Scholastic and Cultural Inequalities*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- Canney M.A., (1928). "The Santals and Their Folklore." *Folklore* 39(4): 329–343.
- Carrin M., (2015). "Adivasi Children and the Making of Indigeneity in Jharkhand." *South Asian History and Culture* 6(3): 348–364.
- Desai K., (2015). "Adharshila Shikshan Kendra: An Experiment to Reconstitute Possibilities for Adivasi children," in Huaman E.S., Sriraman B., (eds.) *Indigenous Innovation: Universalities and Peculiarities*, pp. 149–168. Rotterdam: Sense Publishers.

- Dost A.C., Froerer P., (2021). "Education, Aspiration and 'aage badhna': The Role of Schooling in Facilitating 'Forward Movement' in Rural Chhattisgarh, India." *European Journal of Development Research* 33(1): 109–129.
- Finnan C., Sahoo S., Pramanik R., (2017). "Living in the Present while Imagining the Future: How School and its Promises Shape Conceptions of Childhood for Indigenous Tribal Students in India." *Global Studies of Childhood* 7(3): 255-265.
- Froerer P., (2011). "Education, Inequality and Social Mobility in Central India." *Eur J Dev Res* 23: 695–711.
- Froerer P., (2012). "Learning, Livelihoods and Social Mobility: The Utility of Girls' Education in Chhattisgarh, Central India." *Anthropology and Education Quarterly* 43(4): 344–357.
- Gurdatta M., Narang P., (2022). *National Education Policy Compliance Profile: Jharkhand*. New Delhi: Centre for Civil Society.
- Hamre B.K., Pianta R.C., (2001). "Early Teacher–Child Relationships and the Trajectory of Children's School Outcomes through Eighth Grade." *Child Development* 72(2): 625–638.
- Hujismans R., Ansell N., Froerer P., (2021). "Editorial Introduction: Development, Young People, and the Social Production of Aspirations." *European Journal of Development Research* 33: 1-15.
- Jakimow T., (2016). "Clinging to Hope Through Education: The Consequences of Hope for Rural Labourers in Telangana, India." *Ethos* 44(1): 11–31.
- Jeffrey C., (2010). *Timepass: Youth, Class and the Politics of Waiting in India*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Jeffrey C., Jeffrey P., Jeffrey R., (2004). "'A Useless Thing!' or 'Nectar of the Gods?'" The Cultural Production of Education and Young Men's Struggles for Respect in Liberalizing North India." *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 94(4): 961–981.
- Kumar K., (1983). "Educational Experience of Scheduled Castes and Tribes." *Economic and Political Weekly* 18(36/37): 1566-1572.
- Kumar K., (1989). *Social Character of Learning*. New Delhi: SAGE Publications.
- Kuper A., (1988). *The Invention of Primitive Society: Transformations of an Illusion*. London & New York: Routledge.
- Maithreyi R., Prabha K., Viknesh A., (2022). "Decontextualized Schooling and (Child) Development: Adivasi Communities' Negotiations of Early Childhood Care and Education and Schooling Provisions in India." *Children's Geographies* 20(6): 774-787.
- Morrow V., (2013). "Whose Values? Young People's Aspirations and Experiences of Schooling in Andhra Pradesh, India." *Children & Society* 27(4): 258-269.

- Morrow V., Singh R., (2015). "Children's and Parents' Perceptions of Corporal Punishment in Schools in Andhra Pradesh, India," in Parkes J., (ed.) *Gender Violence in Poverty Contexts: The Educational Challenge*, pp. 67–83. Abingdon: Routledge
- Ramachandaran V., (2023). "Educational Situation of Scheduled Tribes in India: With a Focus on Schedule V Areas and West Bengal," in Shah M., Vijayshankar P.S., (eds.) *Tribal Development Report: Human Development and Governance*, pp. 193-231. Abingdon: Routledge.
- Ramachandaran V., Naorem T., (2013). "What it Means To Be a Dalit or Tribal Child in Our Schools: A Synthesis of a Six-State Qualitative Study." *Economic and Political Weekly* 48(44): 43–52.
- Rao N., (2005). "Displacement from land: case of Santhal Parganas". *Economic and Political Weekly* 40(41): 4439-4442.
- Roorda D.L., Koomen H.M.Y., Spilt J.L., Oort F.J., (2011). "The Influence of Affective Teacher–Student Relationships on Students' School Engagement and Achievement: A Meta-Analytic Approach." *Review of Educational Research* 81(4): 493–529.
- Sen A., (1999). *Development as Freedom*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Skaria A., (1998). "Being *Jangli*: The Politics of wildness". *Studies in History* 14(2): 193-215.
- Skelton A., (1997). "Studying hidden curricula: developing a perspective in the light of postmodern insights." *Curriculum Studies* 5(2): 177-193.
- Veerbhandranaika P., Kumaran R. S., Tukedo S., Vasavi A.R., (2012). *The 'Education Question' from the Perspective of Adivasi: Conditions, Policies, and Structures*. Bangalore: National Institute for the Advanced Studies.
- Velaskar P., (1990). "Unequal Schooling as a Factor in the Reproduction of Social Inequality in India." *Sociological Bulletin* 39(1-2): 131-145.
- Velaskar P., (2010). "Quality and Inequality in Indian Education: Some Critical Policy Concerns." *Contemporary Education Dialogue* 7(1): 58–93.
- Zipin L., Sellar S., Brennan M., Gale T., (2015). "Educating for Futures in Marginalized Regions: A Sociological Framework for Rethinking and Researching Aspirations." *Educational Philosophy and Theory* 47(3): 227–246.

Online Resources

- A Treatise on Indian Censuses Since 1981: A Recount of Journey of Counting People in India and Much More* (2009). Office of the Registrar General & Census Commissioner, India. Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India (<https://censusindia.gov.in/census.website/>), accessed on 15.08.2023.
- National Education Policy 2020* (2020). Ministry of Human Resource Development Government of India. (www.education.gov.in/sites/upload_files/mhrd/files/NEP_Final_English_0.pdf) accessed on 18.08.2023.

Report on Jharkhand, Poverty, Growth and Inequality (2016). World Bank Group. (<https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/767291467992476557/pdf/105854-BRI-P157572-PUBLIC-Jharkhand-Proverty.pdf>) accessed on 16.08.2023.

Report on Unified District Information System Education Plus UDISE+ (2021-2022). Ministry of Education, Department of School Education and Literacy, Government of India (https://www.education.gov.in/sites/upload_files/mhrd/files/statistics-new/udise_21_22.pdf), accessed on 12.08.2023.

Shekhar S., (2008). "Only Santhali books, no teachers: Mission to promote language in schools takes back seat." *The Telegraph Online*. (<https://www.telegraphindia.com/jharkhand/only-santhali-books-no-teachers-mission-to-promote-language-in-schools-takes-back-seat/cid/526060>) accessed on 15.12.2023.

Statistical Profile Of Scheduled Tribes In India (2013). Ministry of Tribal Affairs, Government of India. (<https://tribal.nic.in/ST/StatisticalProfileofSTs2013.pdf>). accessed on 15.08.2023.