Bulletin of Nexus
Multidisciplinary International Research Journal, Double-Blind Peer Reviewed, Open Access Journal
ISSN : 3065-7865 / Volume-3, Issue-2 , February 2026

Original Article

Empowering the Margins: Theatre in Education and Participatory Pedagogy as Tools for Cultural Adaptation and Agency among Dom Children in Patna

Dr. Anupam Priyadarshi
School of Journalism and Mass Communication (SJMC),
Aryabhatta Knowledge University (AKU), Mithapur, Patna

Manuscript ID:
BN-2026-030236

ISSN: 3065-7865

Volume 3

Issue 2

February 2026

Pp 189-197

Submitted: 15 Jan. 2026

Revised: 27 Jan. 2026

Accepted: 15 Feb. 2026

Published: 28 Feb. 2026

DOI:
10.5281/zenodo.22916486

DOI link:
https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.22916486

Abstract

This paper investigates the potential of Theatre in Education (TIE) and participatory pedagogies to foster cultural adaptation, self-expression, and educational engagement among children of the Dom community, a Mahadalit group in Bihar, India. Historically relegated to stigmatized occupations such as cremation work and drum playing, the Doms face systemic caste-based discrimination that perpetuates severe socio-economic marginalization and devalues formal education. Drawing on a mixed-methods study conducted in three Patna slums (Kankarbagh Tempo Stand, Ambedkar Colony Yarpur, and Adalatganj) between August and October 2025, this research utilizes semi-structured interviews with 120 participants to document community perceptions of their socio-historical status and contemporary livelihood struggles. Critically, the paper evaluates the impact of SAMAR Charitable Trust's TIE program in Ambedkar Colony Yarpur and Adalatganj as a participatory intervention. Our findings indicate that while systemic barriers—including job scarcity and social exclusion, persist, the application of TIE serves as a powerful counter-narrative. It enables children to reclaim their cultural heritage (notably music and performance), challenge ingrained stigma, and develop critical skills often sidelined in traditional schooling. By repositioning performance not as a marker of caste but as a tool for agency, this paper argues that participatory pedagogy offers a viable pathway for equitable development and psychosocial empowerment within deeply stratified contexts. These insights contribute to scholarly and policy debates on caste, education, and community-driven change in contemporary India.

Keywords: *Theatre in Education (TIE), Participatory Pedagogy, Caste-Based Discrimination, Dom Community, Cultural Adaptation, Educational Marginalization, Child Agency, Empowerment.*

Introduction

The Dom Mahadalits of Patna, particularly the Dom community, represent the "poorest of the poor" among Dalits, as designated by the Bihar Mahadalit Vikas Mission in 2007, due to marginalization rooted in historical associations with drum playing, music, cremation work, and scavenging. The Dom community in *Ambedkar Colony Yarpur* and *Adalatganj* resides in the vicinity of Bihar's legislative assembly, occupying a paradoxical space physically adjacent to the power center of policymaking yet remaining socially and economically impoverished. Despite this proximity to political power, the community remains trapped in hereditary caste-based occupations like manual scavenging and cremation work, which reinforce untouchability, while skills in bamboo work, sewing, and similar crafts remain untapped and unmonetized.

1. Study Scope

This paper examines three Dom settlements, Adalatganj, Ambedkar Colony Yarpur, and Kankarbagh Tempo Stand, in Patna to analyze how caste-based labor, educational barriers, and internal stratification sustain their marginalization. As Ankur Bisen argues in *Wasted: The Plight of India's Scavengers* (2023), India's sanitation economy relies on caste-oppressed labor, where communities like the Doms are "spatially integrated but economically ghettoized." Systemic caste-based discrimination perpetuates a cycle of severe poverty, social exclusion, and limited opportunities, a cycle that education alone struggles to overcome amid enduring prejudices and occupational segregation.

***Creative Commons** (CC BY-NC-SA 4.0)*

This is an open access journal, and articles are distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International Public License, which allows others to remix, tweak, and build upon the work noncommercially, as long as appropriate credit is given and the new creations ae licensed under the identical terms.

Address for correspondence:

Dr. Anupam Priyadarshi, School of Journalism and Mass Communication (SJMC), Aryabhatta Knowledge University (AKU), Mithapur, Patna
Email:

How to cite this article:

Priyadarshi, A. (2026). Empowering the Margins: Theatre in Education and Participatory Pedagogy as Tools for Cultural Adaptation and Agency among Dom Children in Patna. Bulletin of Nexus Journal, 3(2), 189–197. https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.22916486

Quick Response Code:

Website: https://bnir.us

Critically, this study goes beyond documenting marginalization to evaluate an intervention: SAMAR Charitable Trust's Theatre in Education (TIE) program. By embedding participatory pedagogy within the lived realities of Dom children, the program seeks to disrupt the cycle of exclusion by fostering critical consciousness, cultural pride, and communicative agency. This paper assesses whether and how TIE functions as a tool for cultural adaptation and educational empowerment among children in Ambedkar Colony Yarpur and Adalatganj, contributing to broader debates on caste, pedagogy, and social change.

2. Enduring Challenges

Caste discrimination confines Doms to menial labor, women to cleaning roles barred from kitchens and prayer rooms, and children to skipping school for family support, as recent IIM Bengaluru reports (*The Hindu*, Nov 19, 2025) highlight ongoing public-school bias despite constitutional safeguards. These challenges are not merely economic but deeply pedagogical: the education system itself reproduces caste hierarchies through teacher bias, curricular erasure, and infrastructural neglect. It is within this context that participatory, culturally responsive pedagogies like TIE become urgently relevant.

Historical Context

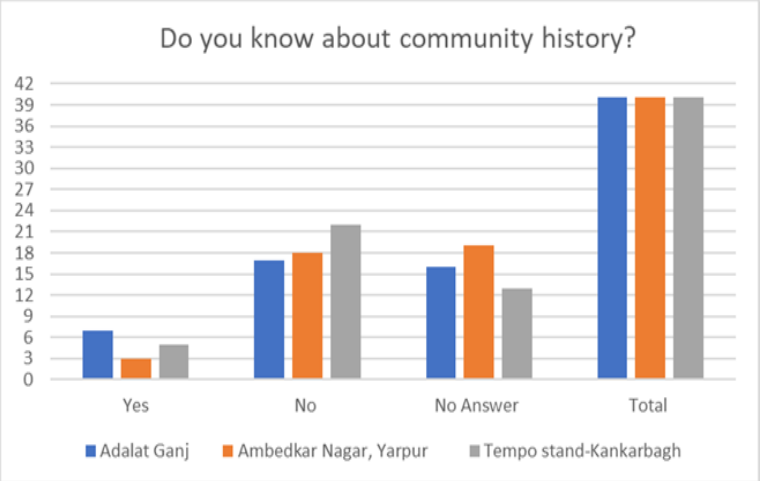


Fig: 1 Familiarity with community's history

Drawing on colonial records, anthropological studies, and modern scholarship, this study traces Dom history through community narratives. This section examines their origins and socio-religious roles to understand the historical roots of their persistent marginalization and exclusion in Indian society. Only 15 respondents were familiar with their community's history. They described how their ancestors were criminalized—a stigma that continues in two forms: first, in the presumption by police that their slums harbor fugitives, leading to searches after any nearby incident; and second, in the stigmatization of their traditional cremation work, which includes Hindu funeral rites such as skull-breaking.

2. Origins and Migration

The study first notes that the Dom community, primarily found in North India, Nepal, and Bihar, has historically been associated with drumming, scavenging, and cremation work—'Dom' itself linked to 'drum' in Bhojpuri, highlighting their traditional musical roles.

Of 120 respondents, 95 from Patna reported no knowledge of their ancestral place and traditional roles, describing families as wanderers without a fixed abode in search of survival. Linguistic and genetic studies suggest Europe's Roma (Gypsies) migrated from northwest India around the 11th century; scholars like A.L. Basham in *The Wonder That Was India* (1954) argue they descended from Domba-like groups, sharing nomadic lifestyles, musical occupations, and social marginalization. Despite this historical significance, the Dom faced severe caste-based oppression, classified as a 'criminal tribe' under British colonial rule and relegated to 'untouchable' status even among Dalits

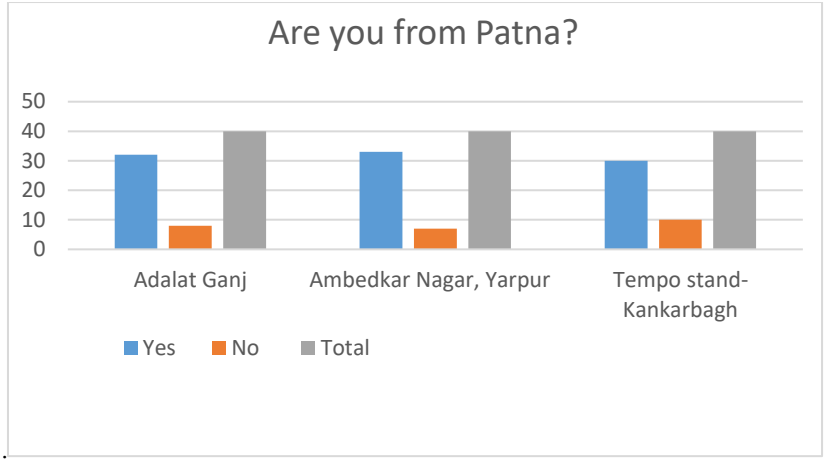


Fig: 2 Knowledge of Dom's ancestral place/role

2. Colonial Stigmatization

Under British rule, the Dom were classified as a 'criminal tribe' under the Criminal Tribes Act of 1871, which labelled certain communities as hereditary criminals. The 1931 Census of India reinforced this stigma, documenting the Dom as 'habitual offenders', a classification later critiqued by scholars like G.S. Ghurye (1959) as exploitative and baseless. Colonial ethnographers such as Herbert Hope Risley (1891) recorded the Dom's role in cremation work, noting: "The Doms of Bengal and Bihar are employed as burners of corpses, and in some regions, they break the skulls of the dead to ensure complete cremation, a practice rooted in Hindu funeral rites" (Vol. 1, p. 243). This ritualistic duty reinforced their 'untouchable' status, placing them at the lowest rung of the caste hierarchy. The Dom's most stigmatized occupation has been their work at cremation grounds, particularly in Varanasi (Banaras) and Bihar. Their tasks include: breaking the skull of the deceased to 'release the soul' (as per Hindu belief) and handling funeral pyres, collecting remains, and disposing of ashes.

3. Socio-Religious Roles

D.N. Majumdar (1958) explains: "The Dom's role in skull-breaking stems from Hindu beliefs that the skull must be fractured to release the soul. This task, deemed polluting, fell exclusively to them." This ritual obligation made them 'untouchable' even among Dalits. Colonial narratives often described Dom practices as "barbaric," ignoring their religious and cultural significance. However, modern scholars like Jonathan Parry in *Death in Banaras* (1994) analyze the Dom's work as ritualized oppression rather than mere tradition, while Amita Baviskar in *Uncivil City: Ecology, Equity and the Commons in Delhi* (2020) links their marginalization to caste-based economic exploitation. Not all Dom were solely engaged in cremation work. Yogendra Nath Bhattacharya in *Hindu Castes and Sects* (1896) documents: "The Doms are chiefly engaged in making baskets, mats, and other articles from bamboo and reeds. Their skill in weaving is indispensable to rural economies" (p. 312). Despite this, their artisanal contributions were overshadowed by the stigma of their funeral work.

4. Theoretical Framework

This study draws on two interconnected theoretical traditions. First, Kancha Ilaiah Shepherd, in *Why I Am Not a Hindu* (1996), argues that Brahminical Hinduism systematically oppresses Dalit-Bahujan communities, including the Dom, by deeming their essential labor "polluting" and barring them from social equality. Second, Dr. B.R. Ambedkar in *Annihilation of Caste* (1936) writes: "The Dom's relationship with Hinduism is one of forced labour, not spiritual belonging," highlighting how the caste system forced them into hereditary degrading jobs with no upward mobility. Building on these critiques, this paper introduces a third theoretical lens: participatory pedagogy, as articulated by Paulo Freire (1970) and Augusto Boal (1979). Freire's concept of *conscientização*, critical consciousness, and Boal's *Theatre of the Oppressed* provide the framework for understanding how TIE can enable Dom children to name their oppression, reclaim their cultural narratives, and envision alternative futures. This synthesis, caste critique plus participatory pedagogy, forms the analytical core of this study.

Social and Education condition of Doms in the Slum of Patna

The Dom community in Patna occupies a paradoxical space: their slums sit in the heart of the capital, adjacent to legislative assembly residences and urban centres, yet they remain trapped in social and economic exclusion through caste-based labour, educational barriers, and internal stratification.

1. Study Settlements

This analysis covers three Dom settlements: Adalatganj, Ambedkar Colony Yarpur, and Kankarbagh Tempo Stand, where hereditary occupations like scavenging, bamboo work, and cremation persist despite proximity to political power. As Ankur Bisen (2023) argues India's sanitation economy. Relies on caste-oppressed labour, where communities like the Doms are "spatially integrated but economically ghettoized."

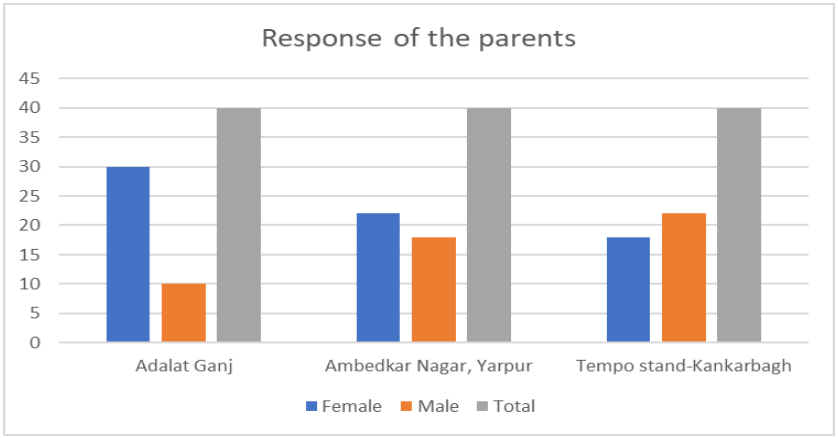


Fig: 3 Responses of the parents

This study has taken 120 samples (40 per settlement; 70 females, 50 males), all with children in SAMAR Charitable Trust's Theatre in Education (TIE) program, where kids learn about community issues and present family and external problems through performance (most highlighted surroundings). Initial parental resistance to evening sessions was overcome after persistent outreach; children's responses revealed work involvement in scavenging, garbage picking, vending, and bamboo work, exposing dire family economics driving child labour. This analysis covers three Dom settlements: *Adalatganj, Ambedkar Colony Yarpur*, and *Kankar Bagh Tempo Stand*, where hereditary occupations like scavenging, bamboo work, and cremation persist despite proximity to political power. As **Ankur Bisen (2023)** argues in *Wasted: The Plight of India's Scavengers*, India's sanitation economy relies on caste-oppressed labour, where communities like the Doms are 'spatially integrated but economically ghettoized.' Despite living near Patna's political elite, the Doms remain trapped in hereditary scavenging, bamboo work, and cremation labour, reinforcing their untouchability. This study has taken 120 samples (40 per settlement; 70 females, 50 males), all with children in SAMAR Charitable Trust's Theatre in Education (TIE) program, where kids learn about community issues and present family/external problems (most highlighted surroundings). Initial parental resistance to evening sessions overcame after persistent outreach (knocking); children's responses revealed work involvement in scavenging, garbage picking, vending and bamboo exposing dire family economics driving child labour.

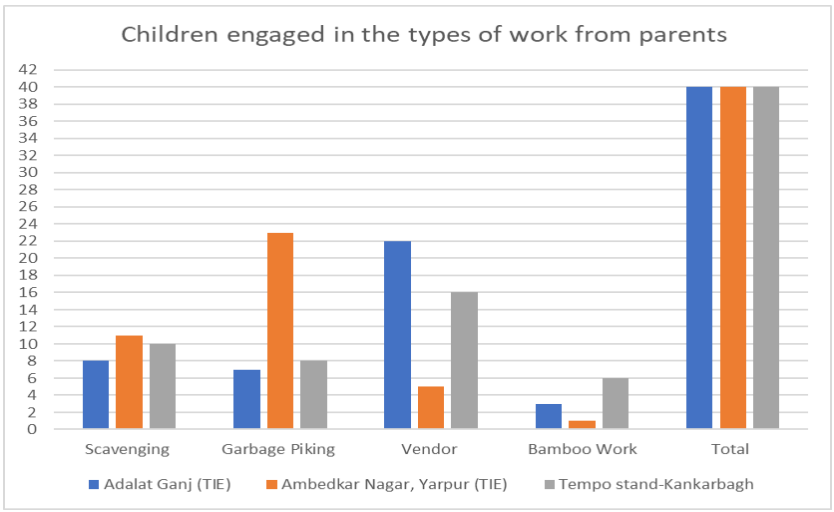


Fig: 4 Engagement of Children to help parents

Table: 1 Education Level Among Dom in Caste-Survey, 2022

Sr. no.	Education Level	Percentage
1.	Primary (Class 1-5)	23.16
2.	Middle (Class 6-8)	10.05
3.	Secondary (Class 9-10)	5.20
4	Higher Secondary (11-12)	2.9
5.	Graduation	1.02
	Professional Education	**Number of Students**
1.	Engineering	59
2.	Medical	13
3.	PhD/CA	25

The table states the number of students in the professional education is 59 in Engineering, 13 in Medical, and 25 in PhD/CA. despite high primary enrolment (92%), only 11% reach Class X, reflecting dropout due to economic pressures and discrimination.

Despite high primary enrolment (92%), only 11% reach Class X, reflecting dropout due to economic pressures and discrimination.

2. Internal Stratification

The study observes the field's occupational hierarchy and surname-based stratification. The Dom community in the slums of Patna is fragmented along occupational lines, reflected in their adopted surnames. Field research reveals a rigid internal caste system within the Dom community:

Table: 2 Internal Stratification and Occupations

Sub-Groups	Primary Occupation	Social Status	Marital Boundaries
Dom/Raut	Manual Scavenging, Corpse Handling	Most Polluted	Endogamous
Mestar	Municipal Sanitation Work	Medium Status	Avoids Dom/Raut
Bansfore	Bamboo Craft Productions	Higher Status	Intermarries with Malik
Malik	Petty Trade	Highest Status	Avoids Dom/Raut

Within the Dom community itself, a rigid occupational hierarchy exists, reflected in their adopted surnames and dictating social interactions. The most stigmatized are the Dom/Raut families, engaged in manual scavenging, sewage cleaning, and handling dead bodies. Slightly higher in status are the Mestars, working as municipal sweepers and hospital cleaners. The Bansfore community members work as bamboo artisans crafting baskets and ladders, while the Maliks, occupying the highest rung among Doms, work as fish and vegetable vendors. These divisions create a microcosm of caste oppression within the community itself, where Bansfore families will intermarry with Maliks but not with Doms or Mestars. The Kandu Doms, who perform cremation rituals, face the worst discrimination, even other Dom subgroups refuse to marry them. This internal stratification mirrors what Jonathan Parry (1994) observed in Banaras: a "graded hierarchy of pollution" that fractures collective consciousness.

3. Persistent Barriers

Education, often touted as the great equalizer, has failed to provide an escape route for Dom children. While many families enrol their children in government schools, the systemic barriers prove insurmountable. Parents trapped in daily wage labour cannot supervise their children's education, leading to high dropout rates. Many children skip school to contribute to family income through rag-picking or assisting in bamboo work. When questioned about their children's future, Dom parents in the slums of Patna express profound disillusionment: "*Will our child get any job beyond menial work? If not, we must train them in our traditional work*." This sentiment echoes Kancha Ilaiah Shepherd's (1996) argument in "*Why I Am Not a Hindu*" that the caste system deliberately blocks Dalit upward mobility to maintain a pool of cheap, exploitable labour. Though Bihar's **Mahadalit Commission (2007)** categorizes Doms as a "*most backward*" Dalit group, welfare schemes rarely reach them. The Bihar Caste Survey (2023) reveals abysmal education levels among the Dom:

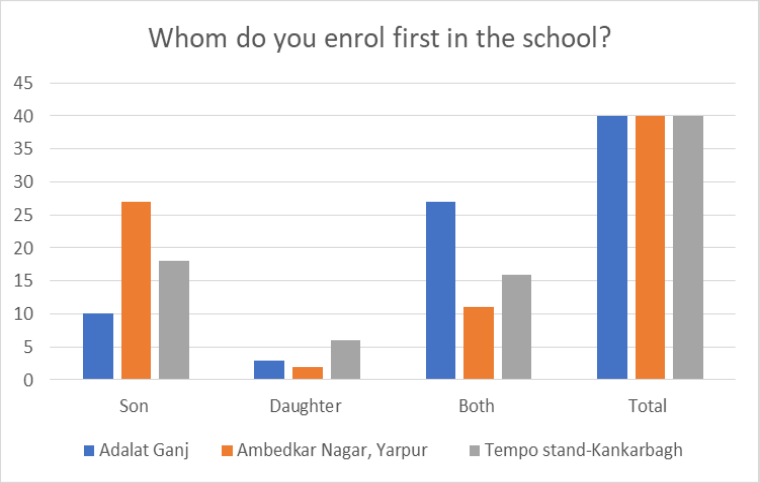


Fig: 5 First enrolment of son/daughter

The persistence of manual scavenging among Doms highlights the catastrophic failure of policy implementation. Despite being banned since 1993, manual scavenging continues to employ thousands of Doms, with minimal enforcement of rehabilitation schemes. Ankur Bisen's research reveals how India's sanitation economy remains deliberately structured around caste oppression. In Patna's Dom settlements, families live in squalid conditions near open sewage lines, with no access to proper housing or sanitation facilities. Even those with bamboo craftsmanship skills find no alternative employment opportunities. The Prohibition of Employment as Manual Scavengers Act (2013) exists on paper but has done little to change ground realities. Welfare schemes meant for Mahadalits rarely reach their intended beneficiaries due to corruption and bureaucratic apathy. The Dom community's internal divisions further weaken their ability to collectively demand rights and rehabilitation.

4. Systemic Failures

The alarming dropout rates among Dom children reveal a systemic pattern of caste-based educational neglect that goes far beyond individual circumstances. Government data showing that 92% of Dom children enroll in primary school but only 11% complete Class X points to structural failures in the education system that disproportionately affect marginalized communities. This dramatic attrition reflects what scholars like Geetha Nambissan, *Exclusion and Discrimination in Schools: Experiences of Dalit Children* (2010) have termed the '*hidden curriculum of exclusion*' in Indian schools, where Dalit children face both overt discrimination and subtle forms of erasure.

5. Systemic Failures

Teachers frequently perpetuate caste stereotypes by assuming Dom children will inevitably drop out, creating a self-fulfilling prophecy through their neglect. As noted in the National Commission for Scheduled Castes 2018 report, many government school teachers in Bihar openly express caste biases, with some admitting they '*don't expect much*' from Dom students. This institutionalized low expectation manifests in concrete ways: Dom children are often seated separately, called upon less frequently, and receive less academic support. The NCERT's 2021 study on inclusive education found that 68% of Dalit children reported facing discriminatory treatment from teachers, with Dom children experiencing particularly severe exclusion due to the additional stigma attached to their traditional occupations. The curriculum itself compounds this marginalization by systematically erasing Dom history and contributions. While textbooks extensively cover caste reform movements, they completely ignore the Dom community's cultural legacy as musicians, artisans, and keepers of funeral traditions. As Paik *Dalit Women's Education in Modern India* (2014) documents curricular invisibility reinforces caste hierarchies by denying marginalized communities their historical agency. The Dom's significant role in folk traditions and their connection to the Roma diaspora, a fact noted by scholars like A.L. Basham, finds no mention in school syllabi, further alienating Dom children from the educational process.

Economic pressures intersect with these educational barriers in devastating ways. The 2022 NSSO survey on education expenditure found that 78% of Dom families reported pulling children from school to contribute to household income, compared to just 32% among upper-caste families in the same economic bracket. This disparity highlights how caste compounds class disadvantages - Dom children aren't just poor but poor within a system designed to keep their community in menial occupations. The Bihar Education Project's 2021 internal report revealed

that Dom students face particular pressure during agricultural seasons and festival periods, when their labour becomes crucial for family survival. The infrastructure of schools near Dom settlements often reflects this institutional neglect. A 2023 survey by the Patna-based Samta Foundation found that 82% of schools serving Dom communities lacked functional toilets, 67% had no drinking water facilities, and 54% operated without proper classrooms. These material conditions create what Nambissan terms an "*architecture of exclusion*", physical environments that silently but effectively push Dom children out of the education system. The same study found that Dom girls face additional barriers, with 61% of families citing a lack of female teachers and sanitary facilities as reasons for withdrawing daughters from school after puberty. Policy responses have failed to address these intersecting forms of exclusion. While the Right to Education Act mandates 25% reservation for disadvantaged groups, Dom communities report widespread non-implementation of this provision. The Bihar Mahadalit Vikas Mission's 2022 annual report admitted that only 12% of targeted Dom children had received the promised free uniforms and textbooks, and scholarship disbursement rates stood at a dismal 9%. This bureaucratic failure mirrors what Subramanian (2019) identifies as the *"ritual of policy without practice*" in Dalit education schemes.

Breaking this cycle requires more than just enrolment drives. It demands a fundamental reimagining of the education system to address both the material and symbolic violence Dom children face. This includes curriculum reforms that recognize Dom history and culture, intensive teacher training to combat caste biases, and community-school partnerships that address the economic pressures forcing Dom children out of classrooms. Until these structural issues are confronted, the gap between Dom enrollment and completion rates will remain a stark indictment of India's unequal education system. The spatial dynamics of Dom settlements in the slums of Patna present a powerful metaphor for India's unresolved caste crisis. Their physical proximity to power centers - some slums are literally in the shadow of legislative buildings - contrasts starkly with their complete exclusion from social and economic opportunities. This visible invisibility underscores how caste operates as both a spatial and social ordering principle in urban India. B.R. Ambedkar's warning in "*Annihilation of Caste*" (1936) rings true decades later - without dismantling the link between caste and occupation, no meaningful progress is possible. The Dom community's plight exemplifies how caste oppression adapts to urban settings, maintaining hierarchies through economic ghettoization rather than rural segregation.

Breaking this cycle requires urgent, multi-pronged interventions. Secure land and housing rights must form the foundation for any rehabilitation effort. Occupational training programs need to provide genuine alternatives to caste-based work. Most crucially, strict enforcement of anti-discrimination laws in education and employment is essential to break the self-perpetuating cycle of despair. Perhaps the most challenging is the need for grassroots mobilization to overcome internal community divisions and build collective bargaining power. As Ambedkar emphasized, political democracy remains incomplete without social democracy. The Dom community's continued marginalization in the heart of Patna stands as a powerful indictment of India's failure to achieve this vision. Until caste-based occupational hierarchies are fundamentally challenged, communities like the Doms will remain spatially integrated but permanently excluded, their presence in the city's landscape a constant reminder of unfinished social justice.

Field Narratives: Voices from Dom Parents

1. This points to a lack of supportive educational infrastructure such as after-school programs, parental guidance workshops, or engaging pedagogical tools, that are crucial for first-generation learners in challenging environments.
2. "The main question remains... who will offer a job? We cannot go to work at any home... restricted to cleaning and menial jobs." There is a critical failure in translating education into dignified employment. Prejudice in the labour market confines the community to their traditional, stigmatized roles, nullifying the perceived economic benefit of schooling.
3. "We have skills in sewing and bamboo work, but could not get much [income] to send our children to private school." Existing vocational skills remain untapped and unmonetized due to a lack of market access, formal certification, and entrepreneurial support. This represents a wasted opportunity for economic self-sufficiency.
4. "Caste discrimination is not like earlier, but their behaviour is the same, as we are still untouchable." While overt discrimination may have lessened, pervasive informal bias and social exclusion continue to limit opportunities and reinforce a sense of untouchability, which policies alone cannot easily erase.

Conclusion

The persistent marginalization of the Dom community in Patna underscores the urgent need for pedagogical interventions that not only address structural barriers but also empower children to reimagine their social realities. This paper has argued that while formal education systems in India largely reproduce caste hierarchies through teacher bias, curricular erasure, and institutional neglect, Theatre in Education (TIE) offers a transformative alternative, one that merges critical pedagogy with artistic expression to challenge caste-based stigma and foster collective consciousness. The SAMAR Charitable Trust's TIE program around the slums of Patna exemplifies this model. By engaging children in role-playing exercises that dramatize their lived experiences, from police harassment to educational exclusion to the dignity of traditional occupations, TIE creates a safe space for critical reflection and dialogue. Confidence-building activities, such as public storytelling and collaborative scriptwriting, equip students with tools to articulate their struggles while challenging internalized oppression. The program's culmination in stage performances serves a dual purpose: it validates the children's narratives as worthy of public attention while compelling audiences to confront the systemic violence of caste. Such participatory theatre aligns with Paulo Freire's notion of *praxis,* the cycle of reflection and action, by transforming students from passive recipients of exclusion into active agents of change. When Dom children perform their realities on stage, they not only reclaim agency over their stories but also expose the contradictions of a society that relegates them to the margins despite their spatial proximity to power. As one child participant reflected: "When I perform, I feel people listen to me. At school, they don't even call my name." This testimonial captures the essence of TIE's intervention, restoring the fundamental human right to be seen, heard, and valued. Crucially, the program also reconnects Dom children with their cultural heritage. The community's historical association with drumming, music, and performance, which caste hierarchy transformed into markers of pollution, is repurposed through TIE as a source of pride and collective strength. Parents who had hidden their family's musical traditions now witness their children performing with confidence, reclaiming an identity that oppression had taught them to suppress. This cultural reclamation is not merely sentimental; it is a political act that challenges the Brahminical logic that equates certain forms of labour and artistry with degradation.

The theoretical synthesis offered in this paper, combining Ambedkar and Ilaiah's critiques of caste with Freire and Boal's participatory pedagogy, provides a robust framework for understanding how TIE operates. It addresses both the material and symbolic dimensions of oppression: while caste structures economic exclusion, it also inflicts psychological violence through stigma, erasure, and internalized inferiority. TIE intervenes at the symbolic level, enabling children to develop critical consciousness, build solidarity, and imagine alternative futures. However, the paper acknowledges that TIE alone cannot dismantle the structural barriers that keep Dom families in poverty. Secure land and housing rights, genuine occupational alternatives, and strict enforcement of anti-discrimination laws remain essential. Yet TIE provides a crucial complement to these structural reforms: it cultivates the agency, confidence, and collective voice necessary for communities to demand their rights. The spatial metaphor is worth reiterating. Dom settlements in Patna sit in the shadow of legislative buildings—physically proximate to power yet socially excluded from it. TIE, in this context, becomes a form of political theatre that ruptures the silence around oppression, offering the slum community not just a stage to speak but an audience compelled to listen. In the shadows of Patna's legislative buildings, where slum children grow up invisible yet hyper-visible as targets of stigma, such creative resistance may yet light the path to liberation. As Ambedkar asserted, social democracy requires the annihilation of caste, not just in law but in consciousness. The SAMAR Trust's work demonstrates how theatre can contribute to this project, transforming children from objects of pity into subjects of history. Future research should conduct longitudinal impact evaluations of TIE programs, tracking not only educational outcomes but also psychosocial indicators such as self-esteem, collective identity, and community mobilization. Comparative studies across different marginalized communities would further illuminate the specific conditions under which participatory pedagogies succeed or falter. Ultimately, this paper argues that participatory pedagogy, particularly when grounded in the lived realities of marginalized communities, offers a viable pathway for empowerment within deeply stratified contexts. "First they ignore you, then they laugh at you, then they fight you, then you win", adapted from Gandhi, but in this context, a rallying cry for Dom children claiming their right to be seen, heard, and finally, free.

Acknowledgement
The author expresses sincere gratitude to all the participants and families from the Dom community in Adalatganj, Ambedkar Colony Yarpur, and Kankarbagh Tempo Stand, Patna, whose valuable insights and experiences contributed to this study.

Financial support and sponsorship
Nil

Conflicts of interest
The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

References

1. Basham, A. L. (1954). *The Wonder That Was India*. London: Sidgwick & Jackson.
2. Risley, H. H. (1891). *The Tribes and Castes of Bengal* (Vol. 1). Calcutta: Bengal Secretariat Press.
3. Majumdar, D. N. (1958). *Races and Cultures of India*. Bombay: Asia Publishing House.
4. Parry, J. (1994). *Death in Banaras*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
5. Ilaiah, K. (1996). *Why I Am Not a Hindu: A Sudra Critique of Hindutva Philosophy, Culture, and Political Economy*. Kolkata: Samya.
6. Ambedkar, B. R. (1936). *Annihilation of Caste*. Bombay: Bharat Bhushan Press.
7. Freire, P. (1970). *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. New York: Continuum.
8. Boal, A. (1979). *Theatre of the Oppressed*. London: Theatre Communications Group.
9. Bihar Caste Survey (2023). *Education Indicators for Scheduled Castes and Mahadalits*. Government of Bihar.
10. Nambissan, G. (2010). *Exclusion and Discrimination in Schools: Experiences of Dalit Children*. New Delhi: Indian Institute of Dalit Studies.
11. Paik, S. (2014). *Dalit Women's Education in Modern India: Double Discrimination*. London: Routledge.
12. Bihar Education Project (2021). *Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) - Caste Disaggregated Data*. Government of Bihar.
13. Subramanian, A. (2019). *The Caste of Merit: Engineering Education in India*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
14. National Sample Survey Office (NSSO) (2022). *Education Expenditure and Dalit Households in India*. Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation.
15. National Commission for Scheduled Castes (NCSC) (2018). *Report on Caste Discrimination in Bihar Schools*. New Delhi: Government of India.
16. Bisen, A. (2023). *Wasted: The Plight of India's Scavengers*. [Publisher details].
17. Baviskar, A. (2020). *Uncivil City: Ecology, Equity and the Commons in Delhi*. New Delhi: Sage.
18. Bhattacharya, Y. N. (1896). *Hindu Castes and Sects*. Calcutta: Thacker, Spink & Co.
19. Ghurye, G. S. (1959). *Caste and Race in India*. Bombay: Popular Prakashan.
20. Bihar Mahadalit Vikas Mission. (2007; 2022 Annual Report). Government of Bihar. https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/bihar/caste-identity-influences-how-teachers-judge-students-in-bihar-public-schools-iimb-study/article70298670.ece