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Review: The Delek Archives

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Project

The Delek Archives

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<https://thedelekarchives.wordpress.com/>

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Project Overview**Titas Bose**

The Delek Archives, a research initiative of the [Delek Education Foundation](#), intends to archive instances of identity- and religion-based discrimination in India's schools. Currently, the project features narratives sharing educational experiences. Our long-term goal is to map policies, surveys, curriculum evaluation, and self-reflections to provide a vision for justice, equity, and inclusivity in school education.

Most of the stories currently featured on the blog are written by people who are associated with school education in India. Some of these stories developed through conversations, some through self-reflection, and some through critical empathetic reading. The blog is multimodal in nature, with some stories reimaged in the form of graphic narratives, some taking the form of audio-visual interviews, and others including infographics, lesson plans, or reading lists for people interested in school education.

When the COVID-related lockdowns began, the idea of digital multimedia documentation seemed all the more urgent. One of the implied objectives of our continued work on the project is to reach out to potential contributors and explore their ideas and practices within classrooms. Through the Delek Archives, our hope is to reimagine the act of archiving as an open collaboration. In doing so, we aim to demonstrate that discrimination is as much a personal narrative of harm as it is a systemic pattern that repeats itself in policy decisions, administrative prescriptions, and social attitudes.

Project Review

Arjun Ghosh

Education is a means for reshaping social relations and is therefore strongly contested in the affairs of the state. This is particularly true of societies like India where education is an avenue for traditionally subjugated communities to contest existing hegemonies. Under the colonial administration, limited avenues for education for Indians were dominated by upper castes. After Independence, the Indian state adopted a policy of affirmative action to respond to historical injustices against Dalits (formerly known as “untouchables”) and Adivasi (Indigenous) communities.

However, implementation of such policies have been limited and uneven across various regions. In the last three decades, there have been renewed efforts to expand the scope of affirmative action by including more communities and identities within its fold. However, this has had mixed effects on the social relations and balance of power. While on one hand it has empowered large sections of historically subjugated communities, on the other hand it has given rise to a reactionary upsurge that has sought to undermine the impact of affirmative action. The Delek Archives seek to document these efforts to frustrate progressive education policies by reading into the nuances of pedagogical practices.

In its currently form, the Delek Archives is a blog where various writers are invited to critically explore multiple challenges to democratization and experiences of discrimination in the Indian schooling system. The website notes that the project is part of the activities of the Delek Education Foundation, an organization that undertakes initiatives to encourage reading habits by creating community libraries and conducting workshops. Although the subtitle of the blog is “Mapping Islamophobia and Casteism in Schools,” individual blogposts go beyond the issues of caste-based or religion-based discrimination in schools, touching upon other aspects of school curricula, pedagogy, and administration, such as the role of environmental education in schools, the importance (or lack) of sports within the schooling system, and questions about child nutrition.

Initiated in July 2020, the blog presents approximately 30 carefully curated posts, each written by contributors invited by the editorial team. Most of the writers compose from the deeply personal and autobiographical perspectives of experiencing or witnessing discrimination. In certain cases where contributors experienced traumatic experiences

as children—from teachers, school administrators, parents of other children, or children of their own age—they had been previously unable to fully unpack the trauma. Therefore, the posts reflect upon their memories through the lens of discriminatory structures that they later came to understand. This anecdotal recounting of experience, alongside references to and readings of statistical surveys and studies of education undertaken by state and non-state agencies, enhances the readers' experiences.

The blog takes a different approach than conventional ways of understanding the nature and extent of discrimination in the schooling system by using personal experiences as entry points rather than larger surveys. While many of the blog posts are powerful, the impact of the blog results from the sum effect of its content. It is particularly successful at articulating how discrimination is routinized through everyday practices, such as the normalization of Hindutva (Hindu nationalism) and Brahminical prejudice (privilege of the upper caste). The tone is set by the very first post, which begins with a reference to the experience of a teacher whose upper caste Hindu student is worried about the "polluting" touch of his Muslim friend upon his tiffin (lunchbox). The anonymous contributor then situates purity, pollution, and the marginalization of the Muslim body with a study of the history of deprivation of Muslims in India after Independence through a reading of documents such as the Sachar Committee Report (2005). Another piece that deserves mention is Hiba Ahmed's "Tracing the Trajectory of Growing up as the Other," in which she takes readers through her experience growing up as a Muslim who faced scorn from Hindu children—children who were themselves being educated by the world around them to differentiate between Hindus and Muslims. Particularly poignant is the mention of the contributor's sister, who is repeatedly unfriended and re-friended by schoolmates confused about whether they should listen to their parents who despise Muslims or believe what they find before them—a child who is just like them.

Technically, the site could do with better navigation. It is difficult to navigate through the content when the only options are chronological or using tags. The titles of each of the posts rarely offer any indication of their content. The blog carries a broken link to a "Database," which is perhaps the same "Database" mentioned on the website of the Delek Foundation, a set of resourceful links to documents and articles on the primary concerns of the blog.

The blog presents a deep set of insights into experiences that are relatable and would further benefit from tracing the diversity of pedagogic practices in various parts of

India and across time. Currently, most of the blog posts deal with educational conditions in Delhi or the general curriculum climate in the country. However, education in India is primarily the responsibility of state governments, and there are multiple policies in place across the country. Additionally, there are multiple non-governmental actors who are involved in experimental pedagogy in various parts of India. An effort to record the insights from alternative pedagogical practices would shed light on approaches to educational reform, which would be a useful addition to the successful use of personal narrative to highlight the shortcomings of educational systems.