(De)polarizing ICT Debates of Reservations and Affirmative Action Policy: A Plea for Reparations in India and the U.S.

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Abstract This paper explores the role of information and communication technologies (ICT) in exacerbating social polarization in India and the United States. The paper aims to examine the role of ICT in shaping public opinion and group convictions about the reservation policy in India and the policy of affirmative action in the U.S. The proliferation of ICT platforms has meant the widening of spaces of social articulation across gender, race, religion, and castes whereby supporters and critics of these policies represent their claims and contestations. This widening creates concomitant insulation in "echo chambers" where exposure to content consistent with individual and group opinions reinforces existing beliefs, attitudes, and the resulting behavior. In both India and the U.S., the ideological systems and social values of dominant races and castes tend to dominate the multiple ICT platforms sowing further (mis)trust in the state-sponsored development policies aimed at educating and empowering subjugated groups such as Blacks in the U.S. and Dalits (ex-untouchables) in India. The paper argues that ICT mediated ideas of equality and justice fail to recognize centuries of racial and caste oppression and based on the content analysis of the data, a reparations policy in both nations that works towards the democratization of virtual spaces to represent the voices of the voiceless is one of the best remedies.

Keywords Reservation policy · Affirmative action · Oppression · Information and communication technology · Discrimination

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1   U.S. Racial Policy from Affirmative Action to Reparations: An Introduction

It was never more evident than on January 6, 2021, Trump insurrection at the U.S. Capitol, how dangerous false/(mis)information could be once circulated millions of times online in "echo chambers" using multiple ICT platforms. From 24-hour cable news channels FOX News, OAN (One American News Network), social media Twitter and Facebook, far-right websites Breitbart.com, messaging apps Telegram and message boards Parler, white supremacist lies can now be amplified in ways previously inconceivable. The mob of white supremacist insurrectionists, who laid siege to the U.S. capital, killing five people and injuring many more, had been fed a high-tech soup of lies and inaccurate information regarding a host of subjects. Most notably the domestic terrorists that stormed the Capital cited following @realDonaldTrump's baseless Tweets of fraud during the 2020 U.S. presidential election. These followers for years had been whipped into a frenzy with disproved and discredited conspiracy theories from Obama's citizenship, a violent invasion of Central American asylum seekers and Qanon, to name a few.

The lie of white supremacy and the ensuing cults following white supremacist ideologies is not new in the United States. In fact, like India, the United States has had a tortured relationship with a segment of its non-White citizenry for the past three centuries. But unlike the hierarchical system in India based on *caste* (Bhardwaj et al. 2021; Bhatt et al. 2022; Sutter et al. 2022), the European settler colonialists in the United States invented a hierarchical system based on *race* that Menakem (2017) refers to as *white body supremacy*. In order to implement *white body supremacy* fact denial and a white-washing of the history of the attempted genocide and theft of Native American land and simultaneous kidnapping, enslavement and torture of Africans in America, what Winbush (2018) refers to as the *Maafa na Maangamizi* has been the *modus operandi* in the United States. Therefore, the resulting U.S. culture of a racialized hierarchy with white bodies firmly planted on top remains largely intact. Omi and Winant (1994) pointed out decades ago that although the series of racial categories in the U.S. are socially created, transformed and destroyed through time, the experience of racial minorities such as African Americans, Latinx Americans, Native Americans, and Asian Americans (blacks, browns, reds, and yellows) with race-based slavery and segregation, have tended them to favor a racial identity which demanded group rights.

In her groundbreaking book Caste, Wilkerson (2020) writes about caste systems as artificial rankings of human value based on ancestry designed by the dominant caste and notes,

> Throughout human history, three caste systems have stood out. The tragically accelerated, chilling, and officially vanquished caste system of Nazi Germany. The lingering, millennia-long caste system of India. And the shape-shifting, unspoken, race-based caste pyramid in the United States. (p.17).

While Wilkerson, leaves out the horrific system of apartheid in South Africa, Nelson Mandela helped to dismantle in the early 1990s, the two surviving systems

of caste in India and the United States she does mention are taken up in this chapter in relationship to each other and how ICTs continue to perpetuate them through echo-chambers online.

2 Affirmative Action

Facing the facts, on and offline, is a starting point to producing a more equitable society. Acknowledging that local, state and federal legislation in the U.S. have been instrumental in anti-Black discrimination and has produced race-based inequality is the first step toward ending it. Affirmative Action is a policy first introduced in the United States to do just that. Introduced as a response to the social uprisings in the early 1960s against Jim Crow laws in the Southern states and the second class citizenship status afforded to African American descendants of enslaved Africans nationwide, Affirmative action attempted to prohibit discrimination in employment based on race, color, religion, sex or national origin. Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 was signed into law by President Lyndon Johnson and included a provision that stated if employers were found guilty of this type of discrimination "affirmative action...or any other equitable relief as the court deems appropriate"[1] could be instituted.

While Kurtulus (2012) found the share of minorities and women in high-paying skilled occupations grew during the 1970s and early 1980's unfortunately these advances due to affirmative action disproportionately benefited white women. In fact,

> Women are now more likely to graduate with bachelor's degrees and attend graduate school than men are and outnumber men on many college campuses [but] those benefits are more likely to accrue to white women than they are to women of color, and that imbalance has very real effects on employment and earnings later in life. In other words: affirmative action works, and it works way better for white women than it does for all the other women in America. [2]

So while originally intended to address historical discrimination against Blacks and other racialized minorities in the U.S. the main beneficiaries were white women.

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[1] U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, accessed November 17, 2020 https://www.eeoc.gov/statutes/title-vii-civil-rights-act-1964

[2] IM Diversity, "Affirmative Action is Great for White Women. So Why Do They Hate It?," accessed November 17, 2020 https://imdiversity.com/diversity-news/affirmative-action-is-great-for-white-women-so-why-do-they-hate-it/

3 Affirmative Action in the Media

During the 1980s under the Reagan administration promoted in the media the concepts of "welfare queens" (undeserving Black women receiving welfare) as well as a "war on drugs" (a war on Black people) primarily aimed at denigrating Black people. This media campaign led to a white backlash against not only Black people but the small gains Black Americans and other racialized minorities made under Affirmative Action. White women lead this backlash serving as the primary plaintiffs in the major Supreme Court affirmative action cases even though they had been the main beneficiaries (for example *Hopwood v. Texas* in 1996. Cheryl Hopwood, *Grutter v. Bollinger*, Barbara Grutter, *Gratz v. Bollinger*, Jennifer Gratz, 2003 *Fisher v. the University of Texas* in 2016, Abigail Noel Fisher and Rachel Multer Michalewicz.

Collectively these cases weakened public support for Affirmative Action to the point that even Justice Lewis Powell ruled in the 1978 case *Regents of the University of California v. Bakke* that attaining a diverse student body was the only real interest that survived legal scrutiny. Powell emphasized that the.

> nation's future depends upon leaders trained through wide exposure' to the ideas and mores of students as diverse as this Nation of many peoples, [suggesting] that the point of affirmative action was to foster a more varied classroom environment for "leaders," thus shifting the intended beneficiary of the program from the historically discriminated against to the nation that had discriminated against them. (Reyes 2018).

The point here is that the mass media including liberals and conservatives is controlled by the dominant race in the U.S.—whites.

4 Introducing Reparations

Reparations is not a new concept in the history of the United States or the world for that matter. Jewish survivors of the Holocaust, the state of Israel and their descendants in the U.S. benefited from reparations paid by Germany and its corporations in 1952 of more than 3.5 billion marks (more than 2 billion dollars). In 1988, President Reagan apologized for the internment of Japanese Americans and authorized a payment of $20,000 (equivalent to $43,000 today) to each former internee eventually disbursing more than the equivalent today of 3.4 billion dollars. Regarding Black Reparations for Slavery, the formerly enslaved Africans began demanding reparations from the U.S. government with the Freedmen's Bureau immediately upon their release from bondage, and special field order No.15 proclaimed by General Sherman during the American Civil war ordered plots of land no larger than 40 acres (16 ha) and mules to the newly freed African families.

Perhaps the best-known activist, organizer and proponent in favor of Black Reparations was Queen Mother Moore who was a member of Marcus Garvey's organization the UNIA and a founder of the Republic of New Afrika which all

demanded self-determination, land and reparations. In 1989 Rep. John Conyers, Jr. of Michigan introduced the Congressional Bill H.R. 40 and joined the movement for Black Reparations by calling for the creation of a commission to study and submit a formal report to Congress with its findings and remedies for reparations.

Radical and progressive Black people took up this call for Black Reparations and began national campaigns and formed organizations like N'COBRA (National Coalition of Blacks for Reparations in America) as the policy of Affirmative Action was further weakened by Proposition 209 passed in 1996 in California. The bill dropped enrollments of Blacks at the University of California Berkeley and UCLA by more than 60 percent and renewed nationwide calls for Black reparations.[3] These effects were so staggering that in that year after Prop 209, Berkeley Law School had only one new black student. The U.S. experiment with Affirmative Action had failed and the justification for keeping it now resided in the compelling interest of universities for a diverse student body. Reyes (2018) argues for an epistemological shift in our collective understanding of affirmative action saying "Affirmative action should be about reparations and leveling a playing field that was legally imbalanced for hundreds of years and not about the re-centering of whiteness while, yet again, demanding free (intellectual) labor from the historically disenfranchised."

Ladson-Billings (2006) in the American Education Research Association presidential address, building on her earlier work in culturally relevant pedagogy and critical race theory (Ladson-Billings 1995), is largely credited for attempting to disrupt the pattern of conquest and marginalization in education and reframes the so-called "achievement gap" as an education debt. The address lays out clearly how four debts—historical, economic, sociopolitical, and moral—is owed to historically marginalized communities and students in school because of hundreds of years of prohibition on teaching and learning an indigenous language, literacy, and cultural practices. Ladson-Billings (2006) creates a space in the educational research community for a long-overdue conversation about reparations in education for all historically marginalized communities and the need to "develop schools and curricula that met the unique needs of [African Americans] a population only a few generations out of chattel slavery" (p. 6). Perhaps in one of the most clearly defined treatise articulating a plan for reparations in education, Nzingha (2003) calls for a $155 billion budget (as adjusted for inflation) as a part of a program of reparations for slavery in the field of education.

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[3] Zachary Bleeme, "The impact of Proposition209 and access-oriented UC admissions policies on underrepresented UC applications, enrollment, and long-run student outcomes" accessed November 17, 2020 https://www.ucop.edu/institutional-research-academic-planning/_files/uc-affirmative-action.pdf

5   The Case of Caste and Reservations in India

Caste is a South Asian phenomenon. Though caste is popularly associated with Hinduism, the impact of caste ideologies could be observed among the non-Hindu religious groups such as Christians, Muslims and Sikhs. Dalits (the ex-untouchables) are the victims of the caste system. They are subjected to multiple forms of discrimination and deprivation because of their social rank in the caste hierarchy (Bhardwaj et al. 2021; Bhatt et al. 2022; Sutter et al. 2022). Dalits are reduced to a second-class citizens in India. The caste system in Indian society needs to be approached from the orthodox and heterodox traditions both in the pre-modern era and the modern era. Diverse Indological discourses highlight the sub-human position of Dalits throughout the ages even in the twenty-first century. The everyday forms of humiliation, discrimination and atrocities against Dalits across the states in Indian society demonstrates caste as the ruler in India (Ghurye 2016; Gundemeda 2020; Ratnamala 2012; Khumbhar 2018).

6   Reservation Policy as Social Engineering Strategy

The progress of the nation is measured by the human development indicators and inclusive policies and practices of the state and civil society. Though most of the Western nations transformed into modern democracies and advocate for the right to equality, still most of these so-called modern nations including the UK and USA fail to institutionalize the spirit of egalitarian values and morals of social justice in dealing with diverse racial minorities and ethnic communities. Reservation policy in India was introduced by the colonial state based on the social categories such as caste, tribe and religion. Shah (1996) argues that reservation policies were designed to serve the colonial interests as part of the divide and rule policy. However, the reservation policy in post-independent India was a brainchild of Dr. B.R Ambedkar, the champion of social justice theory and chief architect of the Indian constitution. The scope of reservations varies from one social group to the other. The Indian constitution extends reservations for Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs) in education, employment and political spheres whereas the other backward classes (OBCs) are entitled to reservations only in education and employment (Jaffrelot 2006).

The debates around reservation policies in India can be classified into four types; first, caste-based group reservation, second, class-based group reservation, third, class in the caste-based reservation, and fourth, no reservation. Those who support caste-based group reservations believe that the caste system is responsible for the exclusion of marginal castes in general and Dalits in particular for thousands of years so they should be compensated by fixing quotas as per their population in education, employment and political spheres. They argue that it should be continued as long as the caste system exists. However, the class-based group reservation

Table 1 Analyzed literature against affirmative action

Against Affirmative Action (AAA)	Title	Publication	Year
Stanley Fish	The Nifty Nine Arguments against Affirmative Action in Higher Education	*The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education*	2000
Frisancho, V., Krishna, K.	Affirmative action in higher education in India: targeting, catch up, and mismatch.	*Higher Education*	2016
Bagde, S., Epple, D., & Taylor, L.	Does affirmative action work? Caste, gender, college quality, and academic success in India.	*American Economic Review*, *106*(6), 1495–1521.	2016
Bertrand, M., Hanna, R., & Mullainathan, S	Affirmative action in education: Evidence from engineering college admissions in India.	*Journal of Public Economics*, *94*(1–2), 16–29.	2010
Krishna, K., & Tarasov, A.	Affirmative action: One size does not fit all.	*American Economic Journal: Microeconomics*, *8*(2), 215–52.	2016
MN Srinivas	Caste and 21st Avatar	Orient black swan	2000

believes in the decline of the caste system and its ideological foundations of discrimination. They argue for the use of an economic class as the main criterion for the classification of beneficiaries of reservation. They highlight the poor among the upper castes and ignore the social roots of discrimination. To cater to the aspirations of the poor, the government of India invented a new reservation policy for Economically Weaker Sections (EWS) of the society.

Class in the caste-based reservation believes in the selective application of reservation policy. According to it, the upper and middle class among the reserved categories should be eliminated from the reservation. They argue that because of their inclusion, the needy among the reserved categories are not able to benefit from the reservation policy. No reservation group strongly advocates for the merit argument. They highlight the right to equality and underscore the right to equality of opportunities and conditions (Tables 1 and 2).

An attempt has been made to review some of the social science debates on the social conditions of Dalits in India the critical significance of reservations for social upliftment of the marginal sections of Indian society. The Indian state since the independence times visualized group reservation as a means of economic mobility and social development. That's why; it is common to find reservations for women, Muslims and the disabled in some of the states in India. Though the state policy of reservations for SC and ST was met with social disgust, it is the Mandal

Table 2 Analyzed literature in defense of affirmative action policy

In defense of Affirmative action policy			
Gupta, Asha	Affirmative Action in Higher Education in India and the US: A Study in Contrasts	UC Berkeley Research and Occasional Papers Series	2006
Sujit m. Raman	Caste in Stone: Consequences of India's Affirmative Action Policies	Harvard International Review Vol. 21, No. 4	1999
Sukhadeo Thorat and Katherine S. Newman	Caste and Economic Discrimination: Causes, Consequences and Remedies	Economic and Political Weekly Vol. 42, No.	2007
Peter H. Schuck	Affirmative Action: Past, Present, and Future	Yale Law & Policy Review Vol. 20.	2002
Vivek Prahladan	Emergence of the Indian Constitution: Affirmative Action and Cultural Fault Lines	Economic and Political Weekly Vol. 47, No. 7	2012
Prakash Louis	Affirmative Action in Private Sector	Economic and Political Weekly Vol. 39, No. 33	2004
Rochana Bajpai	Rhetoric as Argument: Social Justice and Affirmative Action in India, 1990	Modern Asian Studies Vol. 44, No. 4	2010
C. Basavaraju	Reservation Under The Constitution Of India: Issues And Perspectives	journal of the Indian Law Institute Vol. 51, No. 2	2009
Pradeep Kumar	Reservations within Reservations: Real Dalit-Bahujans	Economic and Political Weekly Vol. 36, No. 37	2001
Sonalde Desai and Veena Kulkarni	Changing Educational Inequalities in India in the Context of Affirmative Action	Demography Vol. 45, No.	2008
Orhan Aygün and Bertan Turhan	Large-Scale Affirmative Action in School Choice: Admissions to IITs in India	The American Economic Review	2017
Aswini Deshpande Rajesh Ramachandram	10% Quota- Is Caste Still an Indicator of Backwardness?	EPW	2019
Wankhede, G. G.	Accessing higher education: Affirmative action and structured inequality – The Indian experience.	*Social Change*, *38*(1), 31–51.	2008
Chalam, K. S	Caste-based reservations and human development in India.	SAGE Publications India.	2007

Commission[4] recommendation of 27 percent reservation for OBCs that led to public outrage and the anti-reservation movement across the states in India in general and in the north India in particular. It was led by anti-reservation groups hailing from the upper castes. Public spaces and the higher education institutions across India became the spaces of anti-reservation protests.

The classical debates around the reservation policy and its practices engage on universal principles such as equality of opportunity, social justice, secularism, individual liberty, equality, merit, competence, efficiency, nation-building, and national integration (Galanter 1984; Anthonyraj and Gundemeda 2015). The pro-reservation groups justify the reservation as a means for a compensatory mechanism for age-old discrimination, deprivation, exclusion and social stigma.

Reservation sponsored development cultivated a sense of *dignity for Dalits across the states in India.* BB Malik (2019) claims that access to land enabled Dalits to overcome the roots of economic discrimination embodied in the caste system. He examines the relationship between caste and land ownership in Indian society. Modern occupations helped Dalits live with a sense of achievement, not merely a source of livelihood, but also a means of achieving a sense of dignity. There are several studies that deal with the implementation of *Reservation Policy in India. Scholars from diverse branches of the social sciences* question the impact of reservation policies in education, employment and political representation. They argued that though reservation policy cultivates a sense of hope among the marginalized categories, empirical data reveals that the state and its agencies never fully implemented the policy in educational institutions or the public sector at all levels since its inception. They argue that the reservation policy is being implemented only in class-IV jobs, not class-I jobs. Thus the marginal representation of SC/ST in the positions of power reveals the covert forms of discriminatory policies followed by the state agencies. (Thorat and Senapati 2006).

Some of the leading scholars on reservations claim that the Impact *of Reservation on Admissions to Education in India* enabled millions of students from SC and ST to complete their schooling and university education. They argue that these categories of students would not have been able to reach the universities without the reservation policy because of poverty and a persistent lack of access to cultural and social capital. However, it is also important to understand the post-university life of these students regarding their eventual career pathways (Weisskopf 2004). Jaffrelot (2006) one of the leading scholars in the field of the political economy of the reservation policy in India argues that the impact of reservations for SC/ST is limited. His view is that the reservation policy hasn't changed the lives of Dalits and Adivasi substantially. A series of socio-political movements, along with the implementation of the Mandal[4] commission report has led to the rise of OBCs in North India. It has been the autonomous OBCs politics that has been one of the

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[4] B.P. Mandal, the chairmanship of backward class commission recommended for 27% reservations for OBC in education and employment in India. OBC comes under the shudra varna who have deprived of economic, educational and employment opportunities for ages.

lasting outcomes of the OBC reservation policy in education and employment in the Northern states of India.

The foregoing studies present the empirical facts related to the meanings of reservations for the marginalized and their continued political deprivation while implementing reservations. The life of Dalits (Channa and Mencher 2013) in Indian society is manifested in diverse forms of exclusion in access to the economic capital and discrimination in cultural and social spheres. At this juncture, it is pertinent to explore how ICTs mediate public opinion on reservation debates in social media in India.

7   Re-presentation of Reservation Policy in India

At this juncture, it is important to examine how the media and its means of ideological state apparatuses such as ICTs shape public opinion on reservation policy in education, employment and political spheres (Althusser 1971). Several media platforms such as movies, multimedia, Facebook, Whatsapp and others are complicit in shaping public opinion on reservation policy. It is also important to explore the nature of public response on the champions of reservations such as B.R. Ambedkar. The supporters of reservations strive hard to protect reservation policy by floating diverse associations on online and offline modes. Though the offline battles in favor or against were very common in the pre-liberalization, privatization and globalization (LPG) era, the emergence of ICTs changed the nature and direction of public engagement on the state policies and reservation debates in India. The scope and scale of ICTs enabled the advocates of diverse ideologies to articulate their agenda. Hence, the role of ICTs in shaping public opinion on any public issue has far-reaching implications. Social media is considered a source of information collection and dissemination of critical information for shaping public debates and opinions. Social media forums act as democratic and un-democratic spaces to change public opinion on social and cultural values associated with castes and reservation policies. However, the question is how far-reaching ICTs as mediating technologies act in democratic spaces whether or not they promote the voices of the historically marginalized communities across the country remains a big question. It is also important to acknowledge ICTs role in responding to the ideas and images of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, the champion of democracy and social justice in India.

Social media is a powerful tool that has gained critical significance and so it is important to analyze how the reservation policy and its advocates are covered and judged on social media. It is assumed that private beliefs and values determine public opinions. The opinions towards the historically excluded and marginalized tend to be determined by the political ideologies, socio-cultural background, exposure to diverse ideologies, and access to media technologies. People's perceptions irrespective of if they defend or oppose reservations demonstrate the nuances and intricacies in dealing with reservation policy in the Indian public sphere.

8 Caste and Media: Re-presentation of Reservation Policy in India

What is the role of media in shaping the debate on the reservation policy in India? This is an important sociological question. Most of the critical scholars argued that the media presents biased views against the Dalits and other historically marginalized groups in India who have been deprived of the material, cultural and spiritual resources they are entitled to as human beings. B. R. Ambedkar realizing the significant role of media in presenting the voice of the oppressed Dalits started a newspaper titled Mooknayak during the colonial era. Despite the growing participation of Dalits in higher education since the 1970s, it is extremely difficult to find Dalits as media heads and in charge of editorials and reportage. As Dalits feel the sense of discrimination in the mainstream media both print and electronic, they always explore alternative media channels to present their views and voices (Balasubramaniam 2011). The most heinous crimes and atrocities against the Dalits have never been given due coverage in the mainstream media. Thus the current generation of Dalits believes strongly in the potential role of ICTs to articulate voices once unheard in digital media.

8.1 Dalit Media and Counter Public Space

Dilip Mandal (2020) articulates the significance of Dalit Media for the Dalits. He reminds us of the vision of Dr. B.R Ambedkar regarding the power of media for Dalit upliftment and to represent the counter voices of the oppressed order. Mandal in his paper titled, "What Mooknayak was for Ambedkar, YouTube is for Dalits Today" argues the power of Dalit YouTube. Millions of subscribers to these Dalit YouTube channels demonstrate the Dalit sense of owning the word and redefining the world. He celebrates it as a great move towards diversity in media ownership in the era of media social segregation in India. Thakur (2019) in *New Media and the Dalit Counter-public Sphere* discusses the new trends in Dalit articulations in diverse technology-mediated media forums. What is the meaning of new media for Dalit activism? What are the lessons Dalits learned from the #BlackLivesMatter movement? Thakur shows the positive relationship between the rise of online media platforms and the surge in Dalit mobilization on the diverse issues of regional and national significance. He claims that most of the digital Dalits use internet-mediated media as means of countering the public sphere. It enables them to represent their issues and set the agenda on their own terms. Dalit narratives, to a certain extent, counter the dominant narratives on the issues of public policy sponsored by the state.

9 Discussion

When the Japanese made their case for reparations, the U.S. general population was largely unaware of the concentration camps that had been established for Japanese Americans (Tateishi 2020). Today the Indian and U.S. general populations remain largely unaware of the centuries-long length and sheer brutality of caste and race-based chattel slavery on its respective citizenry. Like Tateishi (2020) who knew that concessions from Congress would only come with a mass media education campaign about the government's civil rights violations an even greater scale social media and ICT campaign will be required to shift public opinion in favor of Reparations for Dalit, SCs, STs, OBCs and African Americans.

To transform the Reservations and Affirmative Action Policy in India and the U.S. into a consciousness shift in favor of Reparations, educational campaigns must include explicit critical media literacy instruction along with multimodal media production (MMP) in the curriculum in these countries (Turner 2011). (Re)organizing instruction around this type of critical media literacy has two-fold implications. First, these instructions address important social issues that are needed for public consciousness. Second, students need to develop critical media literacies for making an effective MMP with successful semiotic presentations. Hence, an MMP is an effective tool to address social justice issues as well as a hands-on pedagogy. Students can reflect on their oppression, communicate biases, and claim what they deserve. Finally, these literacies would help students to become active agents of social transformation in the U.S. and India.

As the idea of multimodal texts emerges, accessing information in today's world goes beyond the traditional idea of only accessing and making meaning of printed texts. Multimodal texts including audio-visuals have a broader impact than what only one mode of language can achieve (Gee 2003). Based on the idea of multimodal texts, the traditional idea of literacy thus advances into media literacy. Critical media literacy further discusses the ability to read and produce multimodal texts that address social justice issues (Turner 2005). According to Goodman (2003), critical literacy is.

> the ability to analyze, evaluate, and produce print, aural, and visual forms of communication. Critical literacy empowers low-income, urban teenagers to understand how media is made to convey particular messages and how they can use electronic and print technologies themselves to document and publicly voice their ideas and concerns regarding the most important issues in their lives. (p. 3)

Gee (2003) views critical media literacy as empowering people to identify and produce meaning in a *semiotic domain* (pp. 18–19). Critical media literacy is the skill to identify, analyze, and produce multimodal texts intended for addressing social inequality. For instance, while creating her media, Sultana got an opportunity to build her critical media literacy that enabled her to look beyond language and to understand the complex combination of multimodal communication. It also trained her to critically deconstruct this combination in a way that revealed the power and patriarchal structures responsible for women's oppression in her society. Once

she was able to do that, she could raise her critical voice and position herself as an active agent of social transformation (Sultana and Turner 2019). The role of literacy has shifted from consuming information to creating information (Beers 2007). Apart from becoming an integral part of our lives, media and technology are significant for being "the major contemporary means of cultural expression and communication" (Buckingham 2003, p. 5). Even though social networking, watching a video on YouTube or playing video games might seem like mere entertainment, such activities have been proven to construct social illusion, develop biases, preserve stereotypes, and communicate identities.

As information creates people's perception about a system or policy and disseminates blind biases over time, people can hardly erase that perception. Therefore, our political discourse is shaped by the information we get and the media we encounter. Social stereotypes regarding Policies of Reservations and Affirmative Action are created by the information people immerse themselves in. According to Pager and Shepherd (2008), "Although great progress has been made since the early 1960s, the problem of racial discrimination remains an important factor in shaping contemporary patterns of social and economic inequality." For instance, caste or racial discrimination exists in employment, wages, housing, credit, and the consumer market. Ito (2009) in his empirical paper shows caste-based discrimination in rural North India's labor market by analyzing the household data. His analysis provides evidence of discrimination against backward classes regarding their access to regular employment (cf. Qureshi et al. 2018). His results suggest that up to now the achievements of India's reservation policy have been inadequate. However, the question is whether policies and actions can change the social mindset. Coate and Loury (1993) in their study regarding the joint determination of employer beliefs and worker productivity show that affirmative action can make employers believe that the identified groups are not equally productive even though they are.

As we all become technologically savvy in our daily communication, it is obvious that our social actions and policies also need to integrate the effective use of technology, media production, and multiliteracies to ensure the masses' active participation in social reforms. "The Multiliteracies approach suggests a pedagogy for active citizenship, centered on learners as agents in their own knowledge processes, capable of contributing their own as well as negotiating the differences between one community and the next" (Cope and Kalantzis 2009, p. 72). Along with becoming efficient high-tech users, this active agency can help people become critical thinkers to be engaged in issues of social justice worldwide.

There are signs that a campaign for reparations is breaking through to mainstream media as evidenced by the 2020 Democratic Party presidential primary where reparations were discussed and affirmed alongside the racial reckoning occurring in the United States after the years #BlackLivesMatter protests against police/white vigilante murders of Trayvon Martin, Eric Gardner, Walter Scott, Tamir Rice, Sandra Bland, Ahmaud Arbury, Breonna Taylor, George Floyd, and the COVID-19 pandemic which all disproportionately killed Black Americans. We hope that a consciousness shift, of the Reservations and Affirmative Action Policy in India and the U.S., to a program of Reparations is an idea whose time has come. We encourage

educators, activists, community members and governments to use the tools of ICTs and social media to promote nationwide conversations of healing that a Reparations policy will bring everyone.

10 Conclusion

Caste and Race are two important social institutions that guide the everyday life of Indians and Americans. The public sphere and diverse political, economic and educational institutions are guided by the overt and covert forms of discrimination against the socially stigmatized categories such as Dalits and African Americans. The core agenda of discrimination in the sense of superiority is shared by the upper castes of Indian society and the whites of American society. Despite the reservation policy in India and affirmative action policy in America, it is unfortunate to witness the need for Black lives Matter and Dalit lives Matter struggles even now two decades in the twenty-first century in the U.S. and India. The sociological writings of W.E.B. Du Bois on critical race theory and B.R Ambedkar's study on the origin of untouchability set the political sociological agenda for Blacks and Dalits to represent their voices and demand full human dignity.

It is unfortunate to note that despite a hundred years of democracy, Dalits and Blacks continue to struggle for social democracy in the public sphere and institutions. Their selves are humiliated on an everyday basis. This sense of deprivation leaves them vulnerable and suffering in multiple ways. Based on the empirical studies on the politics of representation in the reservation and affirmative policies the paper argues that there is a need to go beyond the affirmation of reservation policy. The demand for reparations as an alternative policy is advanced to correct the historical injustice and legitimization of the sub-humanization. A reparation policy should include not only the economic and political positions but the right to dignity and self-respect in the truest form.

Thus the paper submits that the debates on the reservation and affirmative policies primarily inform the sense of loss by the socially privileged races and castes and sense of deprivation by the marginal races and castes in the US and India. Though the implementation of affirmative action policy and reservation policy for these marginal sections led to their limited inclusion in informal institutions and seats of power and authority, a critical review of the studies on the representation of affirmative policy debates shows that only a class of minorities from the historically underprivileged groups got into modern institutions whereas the majority still struggle to secure meaningful livelihoods and dignified lives. However, most of the privileged races and caste shares antagonistic views on the ICT platforms and social media on the laws of positive discrimination and principle and philosophy of social justice.

Thus the paper argues that the ICT mediated social media platforms instead of bridging the social walls rather contributing towards the polarization of social groups on the racial and caste issues in India and the USA.

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