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INDIAN DESIGN PEDAGOGY:

AN ANTI-CASTE PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT

To be an Indian designer is synonymous with being Oppressor Caste, Upper class, urban elite i.e. not representative of India's majority. Instead of acknowledging this reality, Indian design pedagogy trains and encourages designers to apply their skills and imaginations to sell inessential goods and services, promote casteist/racist narratives rooted in hegemonic traditions of Brahminism, and to appropriate or romanticize traditional arts and crafts practiced by marginalized castes and indigenous/Adivasi/tribal communities. Indian visual design has so far successfully escaped accountability whenever it has misrepresented people from marginalized castes by permitting the Oppressor Caste illustrator/visual designer to ignore the lived experiences of the former not only as visual themes but also their credible contribution to the plethora of visual design works. This research aims to highlight the casteist roots of design education in India. Through illustrations and visual design the research focuses on the impact that casteism has on India's visual design language and the mechanical means of reproduction that designers employ in their practice.

The fact that most of what is included in Indian graphic design history is yet to be acknowledged as casteist imagery, coupled with the disregard for the graphic work that is produced by artists, laborers, and craftspeople from marginalized castes has helped to consistently ignore caste and casteism in almost all discussions of visual design. This research intends to offer a historical context from a critical and anti-caste perspective for the casteist modes of creating and thinking in visual design. The absence of an anti-caste perspective to critically look at Indian visual design opens up space for a conversation on how history of Indian design is written, who gets to write it, and about the creative production methods by keeping caste at the centre. It is crucial that a dialogue materialize on this topic of visual design education given how influential the visual designs are in both print and digital domains, especially since casteism persists and perpetuates through them. This study is an invitation to look critically into Indian design keeping caste as the central aspect of Indian visual design specifically as a modern visual culture with its peculiar economy of reproduction that persists within contemporary practices of design production.

Dr. Ambedkar's work forms the foundation of this research to discuss the impact of caste complexities on how we learn, teach, and understand visual design, especially through its unique position as an ontological instrument that has created the distinct visual manifestations of caste. It enables the reader to see the differences through mechanically reproduced images and texts. This research is anti-caste and not a guide that describes how to make design education more diverse and inclusive or how to use visual design for design justice. For visual designers and illustrators, it is a method to acknowledge their own positionality and caste privileges as much as it is a means to understand how visual culture was built in India through a casteist perspective. This research is directed primarily at producers of visual design, visual art, illustrators, and design practitioners who seek to understand their design processes and the methods of production that are entrenched in casteism and freighted with casteist histories. If Indian designers are to produce ethically and politically appropriate work, the casteist meanings of the elements in their designs and the methods of creative reproduction they use must be critically examined for their casteist roots.