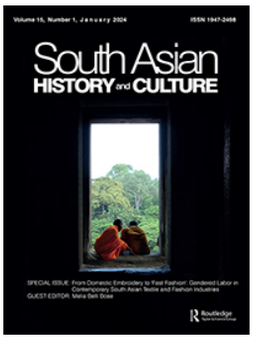

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Caste, gig-economy, and youth: the resurgence of a new age caste politics in urban Gujarat

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ABSTRACT

This article interrogates the connections between caste and gig economy, and how these connections play out in the political actions by youth in the erstwhile mill-neighbourhoods in the western Indian city of Ahmedabad, in the state of Gujarat. It asks, how do the gig-economy workers from the lower castes navigate in the highly caste segregated urban spaces of Ahmedabad? What drives them to join their own caste collectives while looking for gig work in the city? The article explains through ethnographic inquiries that while the recent emergence of the gig economy provides the young jobseekers from the lower castes an escape route from the caste-based occupations in the rural, their caste identities are strategically masked and highlighted in informing their choices, political aspirations and economic anxieties while navigating in the urban. The unpredictable and uncertain nature of the contractual work consolidates caste and kinship networks to get work and information about available work in the urban gig economy. This in turn facilitates a renewed political activism of the youth in the urban neighbourhoods that strengthens caste politics in the region.

KEYWORDS

Gig economy; youth; caste politics; urban; precarity

Introduction

Twenty-four-year-old Sunil Parmar ,[1] the first interlocutor of my study in 2017 mentioned to me multiple times that he does not have time for political activities; however, when it comes to voting, following leaders on social media, and supporting them, he would always support young leaders from his own caste. Sunil and I had long discussions about youth, precarity in the new economy, and youth politics in Gujarat. Sunil works part-time as a delivery personnel for one of the well-known food delivery companies, and at a shop in Ahmedabad after he moved to Ahmedabad from Majra village in Sabarkantha district. He moved to the city in 2016 looking for part-time work, so that he could pursue his studies. Then, he was staying with his uncle, and borrowed his two-wheeler to begin working for a well-known food delivery app in the city. My regular conversations with Sunil (since 2017), and my own search on the food delivery apps available in Gandhinagar for more than two years, showed me that the delivery agents were always from the lower castes listed as Scheduled Castes (SC) and Other Backward Classes (OBC) in Gujarat (Figure 1).

These interactions and observations eventually prompted me to interrogate how caste[2] features in the way youth workers navigate the gig economy that has unleashed many contractual, short-term and app-based work options in Indian cities. This paper, based on my ethnographic research in the western Indian city of Ahmedabad from July 2016 to February 2020, reveals that an overwhelming majority of the youth working in the app-based food delivery services (for examples,

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Swiggy and Zomato) and as cab drivers for Ola and Uber Ahmedabad, belong to the Dalit[3] communities mostly from the *Vankar* (Weaver), *Rohit* (Tanner) and *Darji* (Tailor) subcastes. There are some workers from Patidar and Thakore communities, as wel, both of which castes fall under Other Backward Classes (OBC). Youth from these caste groups often migrate to urban areas from small towns and nearby villages in and around Ahmedabad city looking for work to escape the caste based occupational patterns of their previous generations. These workers, as my study reveals, are increasingly turning to their own caste-based solidarity networks such as Gujarat Kshatriya Thakor Sena (GKTS) and Patidar Anamat Andolan Samiti (PAAS and anti-caste collectives led by Dalit youth such as Rashtriya Dalit Adhikar Manch (RDAM),) etc. in the urban and peri-urban areas to demand socio-economic justice for their communities. I specifically focus on the youth from the Dalit communities and their engagement with RDAM and small Dalit youth groups operating in the city.

The research questions that motivate the study are, how do the gig-economy workers from the lower castes navigate in the highly caste segregated urban spaces of Ahmedabad? How are their engagement, association, and participation in the caste collectives in the city are intertwined with their caste-based support network at work? The paper shows that the recent emergence of the gig economy provides the young jobseekers from the lower castes an escape route from the caste-based occupations in the rural, their caste identities are strategically hidden and highlighted in informing their choices, aspirations and anxieties while navigating in the urban. While many of them requested their employers to take their caste revealing surnames off their identity card or on app-based identification documents while serving the customers in the city, they are proudly embracing their caste identity on their social media accounts by sharing, resharing and liking content from the political group and leader of their choice, predominantly from their own caste groups. The unpredictable and uncertain nature of the contractual work consolidates caste and kinship networks to get work, and information about available work in the urban economy. Many youth respondents of my study suggested that they rarely have time to go for rallies and events organised by the Dalit Rights collective RDAM led by Jignesh Mevani, or the meetings of GKTS and PAAS, but they show support and connect to their own caste groups through social media platforms and neighbourhood networks when possible.

Note on methods and field site

The study partly draws on over my four years of on and off ethnographic research conducted as part of my doctoral project, one part of which focused on the Dalit youth politics in the city-spaces of Ahmedabad. The connection between the Dalit migrant youth taking up gig work and building local caste networks was not a part of my doctoral fieldwork, and I developed this theme of study later.[4] Most of the fieldwork was done between 2015 and 2020. I conducted twelve semi-structured interviews and collected data about the caste of the delivery workers since 2019 by observing the surnames of the delivery persons whenever I used the platform. I have basic fluency in Gujarati, officially the native language of Gujarat. Many of my interlocutors spoke fluent Hindi along with Gujarati in the fieldsites in Gomtipur, Dani Limda and Chandkheda in Ahmedabad.

Precarity, graded inequality and the civil society

Ambedkar[5] conceptualised caste as forms of 'graded inequality', where inequality in the access and assignment to work, is found in different castes according to their respective lower and higher statuses. Gig economy, which is founded mostly based on temporary and independent contractual workers' labour, and the lower castes' access to only the lowest paid jobs in the gig economy can be understood through this conceptual framework. Graded inequality has been referred in the works of Thorat as well – it is not a simple difference between the access to economic resources between the have and the have nots. Gaps on account of the unequal access to economic capital in the form

of wealth, and social capital in the form of connections, knowledge, and information to upskill and upgrade education, leaves Dalits and Bahujan youth very often at the margins of the economy.

Further, Thorat and Newman's study 'Blocked by Caste'[6]which was conducted after the liberalisation and privatisation and before the advent of gig economy in India, shows that in Dalit Bahujan communities, the main household income is often derived from caste occupation, and the rest from the relatively younger generation's casual or informal work that is not necessarily a regular source of income. Caste hindus with capital assets can invest these assets to upskill or upgrade their next generation's' job-seeking profiles. As a result, per-capita income and high paying jobs in the new economy decreases the lower one goes along the caste hierarchy. Deshpande[7]calls it the 'grammar' of caste wherein location on the caste hierarchy produces a systemic human capital gradation. High paying jobs are primarily a return of the investments that high castes can afford to invest into. These investments are done mainly through providing good higher education and upskilling resources to their next generations, investing money in their next generations' entrepreneurial ventures, letting them access family's land, infrastructure, and already owned capital.

Among the respondents of this study, I met Bharat Parmar and Pradeep Chavda, both of whom came to Behrampura in East Ahmedabad from nearby villages, after they passed high school in their respective village schools. Bharat did not want to join the caste occupation of his family, which is the work of a tailor. He was pursuing an undergraduate degree of Bachelor of Commerce, in a 'morning college'[8] and has also signed up for online coaching classes. I met Bharat at a rally in Dani Limda in 2017, led by Jignesh Mevani – a Dalit leader and convener of the Rashtriya Dalit Adhikar Manch (RDAM) who later became a Member of Legislative Assembly (MLA) of Vadgam constituency in Gujarat. The RDAM was formed in 2016 in response to flogging of Dalit men in Una town in Saurashtra in Gujarat. Bharat lived in a shared accommodation with nine other men in a rented apartment near Behrampura. All his housemates were young men belonging to the tanner, tailor, and cobbler castes – all of these are lower castes in the hierarchy. The neighbourhoods of Ahmedabad they live in, fall under the erstwhile textile mill areas, and are largely inhabited by Dalit and Muslim population. Their parents' generations worked in the mills that have shut down ever since the deindustrialisation of the urban Gujarat between the early 1980s and the mid-1990s. Behrampura, adjacent to Dani Limda, is one of the many neighbourhoods that had mills and housed thousands of workers in built and connected semi-common houses or chawls. These workers' houses or chawls have been undergone some renovations over the years and mostly families hailing from the same village stayed back in the same lanes.[9]

Bharat was initially doing various temporary jobs in the mill neighbourhoods. However, he could hardly manage to pay his rent, and send money back home. In 2019, his housemates and friends enrolled him on a food delivery app. Many of them were themselves working as food delivery boys with the support of these apps. After his morning shift working at a local factory, Bharat put on his uniform for the app- based food delivery company and rode from restaurants to homes of customers. This means at least ten rides every-day, for the rest of the day after his work in the factory. For him, meeting these targets was very important.'*Target meet nahi karne se koi faida nahi hai, pura din ka matlab nahi hai kuch..incentive milne se total income better rehta hai*' (Unless I meet the target, it feels like I have worked the whole day just like that, for nothing. If I get the incentives, that adds to my regular earnings. It is a good total income') says Bharat. He said that the complexity of the contracts and uncertainty during the COVID pandemic in 2020, made it doubly difficult for him and his team to meet targets and incentive ranges. Now that he has some experience on his resume, he has started applying for other delivery workers' jobs as well. He tried overcoming the precarious nature of his short-term work induced by COVID related uncertainties He expected that the delivery jobs for essential items from grocery stores to homes, would become more useful during the pandemic, than the food delivery job he was doing before the pandemic.

India's largely informal and 'socially constituted economy'[10] has been dubbed as the hallmark of its local quotidian economies. These social constitutions or the specific percolations of caste, class,

linguistic, regional and other historical relationships, play an active role in determining how migrant workers find entry-level work and then make their way to a form of work-based citizenship in Indian cities. Lalvani[11] discovered through their ethnographic studies of food delivery workers in Mumbai that traditional food production and delivery communities such as the *Dabbawalas f*ormed their networks based on the castes of their workers, and their customers are often from the same castes or villages preferring to get food deliveries from the *Dabbawalas* of their own caste groups. Similar observations were noted by Raval where she discussed that migrant women from rural parts of Karnataka, as well as from the north-eastern states of India preferred app-based platform work in Bangalore,[12] not because they could not get work easily but because the established channels through which migrants entered wellness work (through contacts with salon owners and their friends), were extremely exploitative. Since salon owners, who agreed to employ migrants, were already aware of workers' precarious positions in a new city, and they tended to be exploitative.

Working in the gig-economy is associated with economic vulnerabilities. There are affective and moral vulnerabilities too, as workers find their worth measured everyday by their performance at work, and in every interaction and movement. Bharat said that he and his housemates, all of whom are Dalit men in their early twenties, formed a team where they covered for each other in case one fell sick or had other commitments or examinations. They also recommended their friends' and relatives' names to their employers and sometime helped each other find vehicles to register for the job and get required documents for the same.

Acts of brotherly help informed by the role of kinship is central to workers' solidarity and support network in the gig economy. As mentioned earlier, historically the informal work of food delivery in Mumbai has been organised along the lines of caste, region[13] and familial networks. Within gig work, belonging to the city is a requirement as *bhais* recruit, advice and protect new joinees from their neighbourhood or communities as older brothers. Team leaders who occupy a position between the worker and the middle management at these companies are *bhais* that discipline, control and maintain the workforce for the company. Prior to joining, newbies would ask friends about their experience and even make deliveries with their friends to understand the work. Bhais offer support by riding pillion, arriving at 'unsafe' delivery locations at night or assisting a worker if the customer was drunk or unwilling to pay for their order.

Like other gig-communities that network to produce tacit knowledge about work,[14] the relationships of brotherhood in food delivery help workers gain knowledge about the rules of the company, while also helping them *find a way* around the rules. A *bhai* might offer to make an ID on behalf of those who were unable to do so due to lack of documents or offer an existing ID to those who may have been disabled or blocked by the company. *Bhais*, based on relatedness due to experience of gig work, understand the needs of other gig workers. This is not simply a reflexive *understanding* since they, much like sociologists, also understood the nature of the situation[15] that creates this relationship of relatedness and the importance of such a relationship in sustaining their future in this work as well as the future of this work. Structural realities such as caste plays a very important role in informing the anxieties and choices of the gig workers in urban Gujarat.

When asked about their delivery work in Ahmedabad, which is caste divided when it comes to neighbourhoods, Bharat and his friend Pradip shared stories of how they had experienced the pattern of getting low ratings from certain upper caste customers. Pradip, who recently requested his employer to hide his surname that is indicative of his caste identity, told me about occasions when the customer refused to take the delivery from him and pay for the same after he reached the venue or sometimes cancelled the order after he was assigned as a delivery person for the order on the app. He was ridiculed and refused by upper caste customers who refused to take food from him as he was also carrying other non-vegetarian deliveries in the same vehicle. There were multiple instances of him being asked to leave his shoes outside the main premises of the customer's house or the refusal to offer him water. Bharat and Pradip both said that the houseowner often asked them to get water from the security guard of the building. I have also heard the narratives of some of the

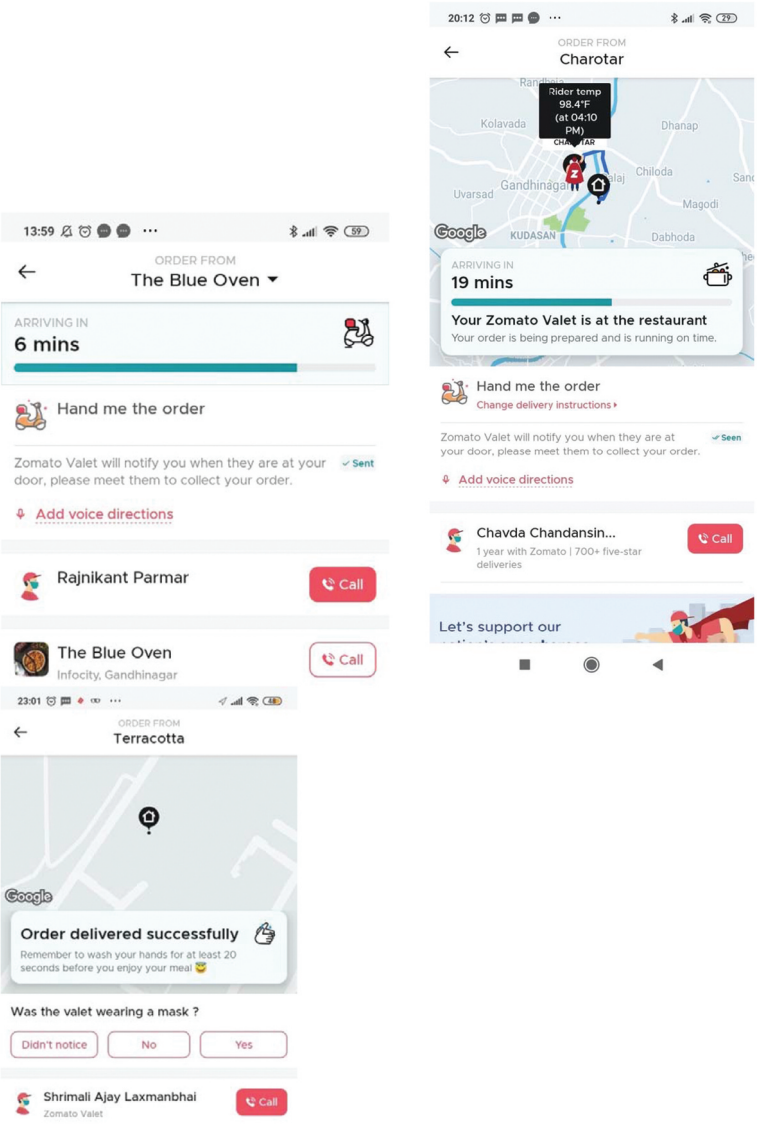

Figure 1. Screenshots taken on my phone from the Zomato app used in Gandhinagar area where delivery partners are predominantly from the dalit communities as evident from their surnames (Parmar, Chavda and Shrimali).

customers in *Savarna* residential places of Gandhinagar and Ahmedabad. One residential complex in Kudasan in Gandhinagar, where my friend used to stay on rent put up a notice on the building premises requesting the residents not to order app-based food during the month of *Navaratri*. After some of the residents, including my friend resisted these instructions, they were asked to pick the food up from outside the gate and delivery persons were not let in past the gate where the puja and *Navratri* celebrations take place. Information about how to navigate and follow the caste norms of the city is something the workers learn from their seniors, from the same castes, who they often refer to as *bhai*, or brother.

In social anthropological studies the role of kinship has been studied among employers and employees. [16].Scholarship on digital work and labour on the other hand questions of fair wages, working hours and conditions. There are plenty of academic works across cultures that show how economic relations are built on social relations and they are often transactional in nature[1718]The

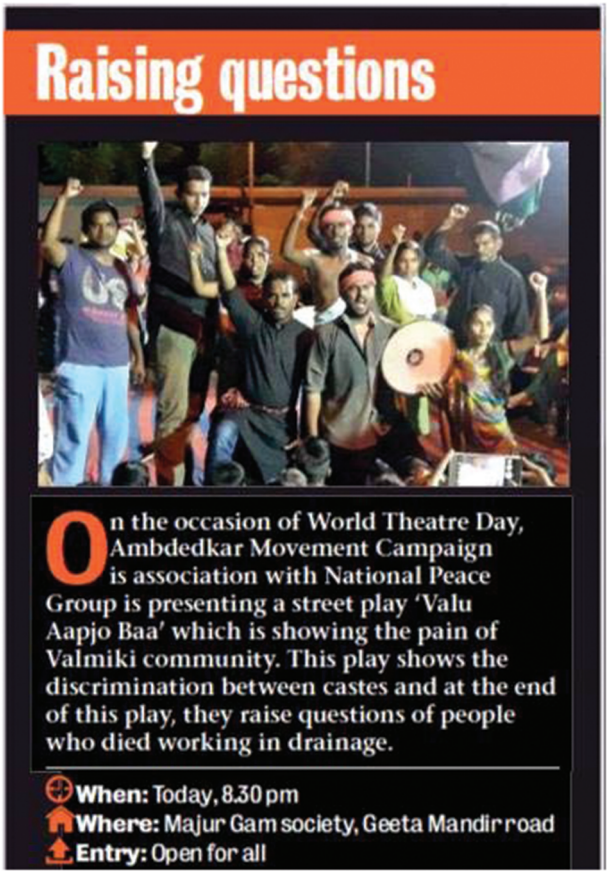

Figure 2. The advertisement of the play 'Vaadu Aapjo Baa' shared on Facebook.

findings from my study in Ahmedabad resonate with that of the other ethnographic works where delivery workers in Mumbai and Bangalore shared their experience of being able to relate to the challenges and discomfort faced by workers from their castes before them. Forming a safety net of brotherhood, an empathetic space where they can share their experiences with uncooperative or hostile customers is crucial. Being at the receiving end of exclusionary and casteist comments or gestures (which the interlocutors of my study often described as 'problems') while worrying about negative feedback from the customers on the app put the workers in an extremely vulnerable and precarious situation. Another interlocutor of my study, Yatinbhai Chavada, who had worked as a delivery boy for a long time before he moved to a temp job in real estate comments, 'these things (experiences) would remind you of the village life. I do not want to go visit my family in the village because even now I will be asked to step aside and stand separately in the que at the grocer's, I will be asked to take my chappals off in the tea shop. We come to work in cities to forget these things, to expect that caste would not matter here.' Yatin is an active member of RDAM and a regular at their rallies, meetings, and events now that he has a regular nine to five office job. Bharat and Pradip, on the other hand say '*time kahan hai iye sab karne ke liye*'. (Where is the time to do all this activism?) However, they are members of many WhatsApp and Facebook groups such as *Bhim Team, Jai Bhim Sena* etc. that help galvanise local Dalit youth and activists in social and political forums. Even if they themselves could not go for the events, they will share the images, videos of the event or rally shared by their friends. They also get to know about the new kinds of vocational training, subsidised tuitions for the youth of their castes and many other important things by getting in touch with their

Figure 3. A street play called 'vaadu aapjo baa' at Shankra Ganchi Chawl in Gomtipur organized by Lok Sewa Samajik Sanstha on 19th September 2015. Image source: facebook page of Mushtaque Ali, resident of Gomtipur.

caste groups. Surya Kant Bihola, who works at a shop in one of educational institutes of Gandhinagar, put me in touch with various small groups on WhatsApp where he constantly gets updated on the events and Dalit youth protests happening in and around Ahmedabad. Both Suryakant Bihola and Sunil Parmar, mentioned in the beginning of the paper, attended their first protest gathering outside Ahmedabad, at Bhadraniya village in Borsad taluka of Anand district led by Jignesh Mevani after the murder of the Dalit youth Jayesh Solanki by the dominant caste men in October 2017. They may not always be able to attend all the meetings and gatherings, but they made sure they share photos and posts of their friends who could attend the events.

Gig economy and the global south

Gig Economy platforms have become an intrinsic part of urban India in their consolidation of a middle class customer base and a newly emerging urban working class. Digital labour scholarship took keen interest in studying the platform economy, app-based gig work and the ways they have reshaped urban informal and semi-formal labour. Despite being celebrated as the 'Future of work', the exploitative nature of gig work, lack of job security and workers' safety concerns during the pandemic have been explored through various academic and journalistic reports. The conceptual direction of my study derives from the understanding that an exclusive focus on platforms as markets misses out the ways in which social networks, caste experiences, urban migration and local political arrangement shape the materialisation of platform or gig economy locally.

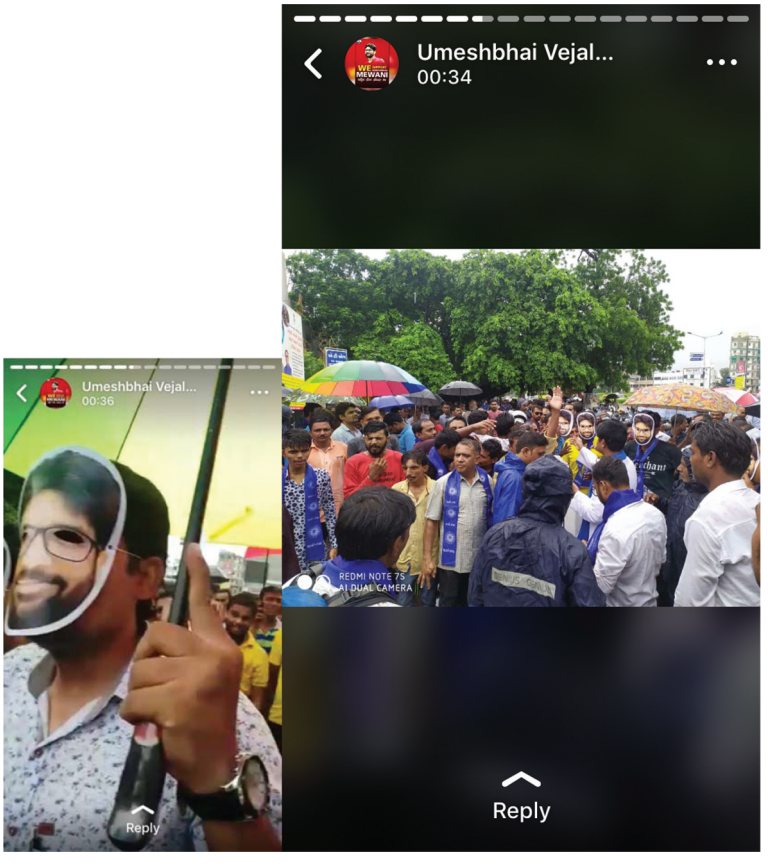

Figure 4. Screenshots taken on my phone from the WhatsApp stories shared by the interlocutors after a protest rally in Gandhinagar.

Scholarship on gig economy in Global South is varied. Ahmed et al.'s[19] ethnographic study in Bangalore engaged with the autorickshaw drivers and their everyday vulnerabilities, welfare schemes and competition from the app-based service providers. Surie[20] and Koduganti 's[21] work on cabs ride hailing focuses on the questions of rural to urban migration in search of the available app-based delivery jobs in the cities also show the connection between agrarian crisis in rural Karnataka and migration to the urban centres, especially to Bangalore, in search of app-based delivery work; the low skill jobs are comparatively easier to get and hold onto. Raval and Pal's[22] study analysed the gender aspect of the work, especially the wellness and beauty industry and the way they help women navigate patriarchal social relations more flexibly because of the relative invisibility of their app-based labour.

Raval[23] noted that the emergence and popularity of gig work, youth population explosion and the political juncture of shaping the 'Make in India' campaign by Narendra Modi led BJP worked in intertwined ways. Domestic manufacturing sector was undergoing easing of tariff and restrictions along with popularised campaigns for countering reliance of Chinese manufacturing. With the much-publicised vocational program 'Skill India' that promised supplying critical skilled labour to strengthen domestic manufacturing, work that requires 'low skill threshold' such as driving, delivery and wellness work were often marked as scalable easy work[24]). The author also questioned the analytical significance of the word 'precarity' when it comes to gig work in global south to make a point that gig work must be understood as a space where socio-cultural and political resources are mobilised even at the margins of the economy. Gig work is not a stopgap or meanwhile work, it is

a continuous engagement in which 'returning' to a waged and full-time work may or may not happen.

Digital labour in South Africa, South East Asia and sub-Saharan Africa and the changes in the 'loosening up' of the labour market were studied by a group of scholars who focussed on how app based work facilitated socio-economic transitions for youth.[25] Similar work done in and around Bangalore attest the findings of this group's work that point out how access and grasp over local languages, cultures, networks used to matter for job-hunt in the urban spaces before the proliferation of app-based work. My research findings in Ahmedabad and Gandhinagar are different from this group's findings where they argue that access to local networks, skills, language proficiency helped pre-gig economy local workers and that the 'outsiders' or the new migrants find it relatively easy to get jobs in platform economy now. My research findings show that local caste networks play a crucial role in facilitating and consolidating work.

New economy and the youth from the marginalised castes

Existing studies on the impact of liberalisation in India on Dalit communities have already discussed how the changes in the market worked for and against the Dalits.[26] As Babu (2004, 4) points out, 'for many Dalits the response to liberalization transcends the narrow confines of economic reforms and includes social and political concerns as well'. Jeffrey et al.[27] highlight in their study Dalit youth refashion aspirations and use the tag of formal education as tactics of socio-political and cultural navigation in the new economy in north India. Cultural production of an educated identity among Dalit youth is followed by increased literacy rate and education level in the first- and second-generation Reservation beneficiaries.[28] Their increased vulnerabilities in the free market economy without Reservation often manifest in distinctive socio-cultural patterns in urban Dalit youth politics. In their well-known study on the socio-political significance of 'timepass' by the youth in college campuses of Meerut Jeffrey et al. argued how cross caste solidarities among the youth is facilitated through their extended stay and spending 'time' at the college campuses to navigate the uncertainties around unemployment.

In my study of urban Gujarat, specifically on Ahmedabad, I try to flesh out the connections I see among political and social activism of the youth from the marginalised castes who try to survive in the urban spaces through their caste networks in the temporary gig work in the platform economy. Ethnographic works of some scholars on other cities revealed those youth's work to be marked by 'meanwhile-work' or 'work in-between' their studies and the aspired jobs in the formal economy; they typically identify gig work as 'something to do' before finding a better alternative, or something they are doing while pursuing education in the city. While the findings of my study show similar patterns, the interlocutors of my study, the Dalit migrant youth working for food delivery services in Ahmedabad also indicated their reluctance to associate with their agricultural work and caste-based work their fathers are engaged in in rural Gujarat.

Srivastava[29] ethnographic work showed that skill development programs sponsored by the government highlights possibilities of employment generation and expansion in the service industries for youth from the socio-economic margins. He gives the examples of the Gujjar youth and how they navigate and counter caste prejudices through their grooming in the service sector. There is a wide range of studies that focus on the tactics and the strategies followed by the youth in the neoliberal era that are reflected in their reconfigured lifestyles, aspirations, new class-based socialisation, gender roles, and in the embracing of the consumer cultures to shape newer subjectivities; all of this is deeply embedded in the reshaping of state–capital relations.[30] Other studies focusing on youth from the socio-economic margins refashioning their aspirations and lifestyles, such as Zabiliute's[31] works on youth wandering in the malls of the city or Lukose's[32] study on marginal youth embracing and participating in the new economy-induced consumer culture in the city, and Gooptu[33] identifying them as the enterprising neoliberal subjects put the question of individualised

agency of the youth as the fulcrum of the discourse around their agency and action in the new economy and the urban.

The economic and social transformations induced by neoliberal regimes and their reflections in the aspirations and the experiences of the youth across continents have been captured in some studies as 'mismic webs of multiple post-colonial crises'.[34] A substantial body of research focused on the strategies, *jugaad* and tactics of refashioning of educated unemployed identities of the youth[35] draws upon similar studies done in the other parts of the world about youth responding to economic uncertainties by adhering to social associations and political networks or renewing their engagement in youth politics .[36] The overarching analysis hints at the youth practices of engaging with localised symbolic resources ,[37] and attempts to reconfigure their roles within the 'traditional', 'indigenous' identities.[38]. It is often argued that youth show thin commitment to formal politics in the global North in their response to the socio-economic precarity they experience as compared to India where political activism is reinvented to deepening the more vernacularisation of democracy .[39]

Scholarship on youth focusing on individualised arrangements and flexibility in the new economy time and again argued that there has been an overall decline of party politics and class mobilised political activism, holding onto ideologies and interest in voting.[40] There has been a lot of attention from the youth studies scholar on what they identify as post-modern modes of protests that are beyond 'formal' political activities and are mostly reflected through the challenges mediated by cultural markers and symbols such as dance, theatre, style, music, other bodily engagements, and new media.[41] A counter to these analyses came from scholars focusing on the role of class mobilisation where they argue that youth in the neoliberal era are drawn to politics in terms of forming new collectives .[42] However, the major thrust of this line of research still lies in and revolves around the examples of significant waning of class and party politics and youth politics moving away from material and structural concerns.

Gig work, caste network and socio-political activism in Ahmedabad

Suryakant Waghmore[43] in his conceptualisation of Dalit civil society challenged the liberal and Marxist apprehension of civil society being elite and identity driven. Waghmore's thesis on democratic civility and possibilities of civil society intervention in the caste-ladden society stands in opposition to the Marxian scholarship that looked at civil society with suspicion. Waghmore draws on Eriksen's[44] ideas in connecting the unifying momentum of globalised economy and diversifying force of identity politics act as a complementing force in bringing about substantive foundation of Dalit polity in India. Instead of an inaccurately predicted impasse of Dalit politics in India by Shah,[45] and the liberal such as Chibber's[46]and the Marxist critique of civil society by Chandoke,[47] Waghmore's ethnography of Marathwada, like my findings from Behrampura and Dani Limda in Ahmedabad shows the political vitality of Dalit civil society. Gorringe[48] and Jaoul[49] used the centrality of Dalit politics in their analyses to understand how civil society must be studied. Waghmore incorporates the fractured, relational, and everyday functioning of the Dalit civil association in the political constellation of the region.

I met most of the interlocutors for this study while attending political events, functions, processions, and protests in the erstwhile textile belt of Ahmedabad in 2018. I was conducting ethnography in Dani Limda and Behrampura neighbourhoods that are mostly inhabited by the Dalits and the Muslims. I knew Ravi Vaghela from Behrampura since 2016 when Rashtriya Dalit Adhikar Manch (RDAM) was gradually becoming popular in the area and many small Dalit organisations in the neighbourhoods began to be more visible and assertive in their anti-caste campaigns after the Una atrocity in July 2016. Ravi used to let me know if there are events, plays and sessions scheduled in his neighbourhood (Figure 2). Ravi himself had never worked in the food delivery business, but he moved jobs multiple times right from his high school days when he started working in courier delivery, poster and advertisement pasting, mall-worker etc. Ravi and some of

his friends took voluntary responsibility as coordinators to organise ward level meetings and events around the city for RDAM.

After my first meeting with Ravi at the Una rally on 15 August 2016, and later, in September, at his small office in Dani Limda, he introduced me to some of his friends so that I could get in touch with them in case Ravi is busy working and could not take part in the events. I would laugh sometime and tell him that would never happen as every time there was an event in the neighbourhood, he would reach on time (Figure 4). I remember the day of one particular event when he was in Chandkheda, in the northwestern part of Ahmedabad from where I used to take the BRT buses from to reach Gita Mandir, the bus stop for Dani Limda. He was hurrying back on his two-wheeler, and he offered to take me along. He mentioned that day that the two-wheeler was jointly owned by him and his friend who works as a food delivery personnel. *'Zada se zada toh humare caste ka banda hi milega khana delivery ke liye'* (mostly men from our castes are found to be doing the food delivery work), Ravi said. *'Accha, aisa kyun?'* (Why so?), I asked. '*Yeh sab Zomato wagayra mein kaun nonveg khana deliver karega aap batao'* (Who will deliver the non-veg food items on Zomato etc, you tell me?); *'Khate to sab hai sab kuchh lekin woh kaam upper caste banda nahi karega, humara caste ka log or Muslim log hi karega'* (Everyone eats everything (non-vegetarian), but the delivery work for the non-vegetarian food to be done by the men from the lower castes and by the Muslims). Ravi and I speak in Hindi since my Gujarati is not fluent. Ravi's Hindi is not great either, sometimes he would joke that I am the only person he speaks in Hindi with, and that his Hindi is getting better this way.

Ravi is twenty-nine years old, and he lives in Parikshitnagar slum quarters in Behrampura-Dani Limda area in Ahmedabad. His father is an autorickshaw driver. Ravi has been working part time since high school. He has worked as a delivery boy, office boy, salesman, technical support assistant before landing his current desk- job in a real estate corporation, which he calls his 'office job with a computer'. He went to a municipality school and later moved to a private school where his high school education was free. He studied till the 12th and was pursuing Bachelor's degree as an external student in 2016. He admitted that he did not have much idea about B. R. Ambedkar and his contribution in the Dalit community when he was in school. He was aware of Dalit politics later by some of his family members who were educated and politically aware, 'like Jignesh Mevani', he said.

In my extended conversations with Ravi after the events in Dani Limda and Behrampura neighbourhoods, often questions around time and work would come up. Ravi would complain frequently about inconsistent participation from the Dalit youth from the adjacent neighbourhoods. He would post reminders on the Whataspp group whenever an event is organised. For example, he attended a reading session on Ambedkar's texts, and plays on untouchability and manual scavenging (Figure 3).

Ravi introduced me to some of his friends from Behrampura during these events and meetings. Many of them were part-time delivery personnel with Zomato and Swiggy. They would come for the neighbourhood events scheduled for late in the evening since during the day, and also during the first part of the evening, they used to be out with their two wheelers, working.

Conclusion

My study revealed that youth activism and attempts to mobilise larger groups employing social media in an urban neighbourhood, along with the registers of kinship bonds through informal Dalit networks are facilitated by and are deeply connected to the support system generated and sustained among caste groups in the precarious and rapidly changing gig economy. As Jaoul[50] states, in the context of his study of activism in a Dalit neighbourhood in Kanpur, The question remains whether the globalization of social movements could lead to the decline of the local repertoires of collective action that translate local mobilizations into local subjectivities. This does not seem to be the case in India, where people's movements continue to lay strong emphasis on localized imaginaries of popular rebellion. The findings of the study in the urban Dalit neighbourhoods of Ahmedabad also

resonates with the arguments around local associationism that Waghmore puts forward to foreground the importance of integrating Dalit politics with civil society networks to accommodate an inclusive caste lens in the postcolonial civil society scholarship.

Notes

1. All the interlocutors' first names have been changed in the paper, and their surnames (caste-names) have been kept intact.
2. Caste is defined as a social framework of differentiation where the constituting units are marked by endogamy and the ascribed differences are maintained by ritualised socio-cultural practices. Sub-castes are often associated with hereditary occupational specialisation that are difficult to escape by the members in a caste-based economy.
3. The term 'Dalit' means broken and oppressed people and refers to former untouchable castes in India.
4. My doctoral fieldwork was conducted between 2015 and 2018.
5. Ambedkar B.R. "The Hindu Social Order".
6. Thorat and Newman, *Blocked by Caste*
7. Deshpande, *The Grammer of Caste*
8. Classes in morning colleges usually start by six in the morning get over by noon. It is easier to attend morning college for Bharat so that he can start his delivery work from the afternoon.
9. Banerjee & Mehta, "Caste and Capital".
   Breman, *The Making and Unmaking*
   Shani, *Communalism, Caste and Hindu Nationalism*.
10. Harris-White, 'On understanding markets'
    'India's socially regulated economy.' 'Work and wellbeing in informal economies.'
11. Lalvani, "Workers fictive kinship".
12. Raval, "Platform-Living: Theorizing life".
13. Quien, A. "Mumbai's Dabbawalla".
14. Gray et. al., "The Crowd is a Collaborative Network".
15. Tucker, Max Weber's Verstehen.
16. De Neve, "We are all *sondukarar* ;(relatives)!".
    Parry,Ankalu. "Errant Wife: Sex, Marriage and Industry".
17. Hart, K. (2000). "Kinship, Contract and Trust".
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20. Surie, A., & Sharma, L. V. "Climate change, Agrarian distress".
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24. Surie, A., & Koduganti, J. "The emerging nature of work".
25. Anwar, M. A., & Graham, M. "Between a rock and a hard place".
    Graham, M., & Anwar, M. "The global gig economy".
    Graham, et al., "The risks and rewards".'
    Van Doorn et al., "Migration and Migrant Labour".
    Wood et al., "Good gig, bad gig".
26. Jodhka, S.S. and Newman, K. "In the name of globalisation".
    Thorat, Sukhadeo, and Negi Aryama. *Reservation and private sector*
    Babu, D.S. and House, C. *India's Liberalisation and the Dalits*.
27. Jeffrey et al., "A Useless Thing!".
28. Still, C. *Dalits in Neoliberal India*
29. Srivastava, S. 'Not Quite "Enterprising Subjects"'.
30. Fernandes, Leela. *India's New Middle Class*
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    Mankekar, Purnima, and Akhil Gupta. "Intimate encounters: Affective labour"
    Lukose, Ritty A. *Liberalization's children*
    Upadhya, Carol. *Reengineering India: Work, capital, and class*
31. Zabiliute, Emilija. "Wandering in a mall.
32. Lukose, Ritty A. *Liberalization's children*
33. Gooptu, Nandini, ed. *Enterprise culture*
34. Jeffrey, C., Jeffery, P. and Jeffery, R. "A Useless Thing!," 961.

35. Jeffrey, C., Jeffery. P.and Jeffery, R. "Degrees without freedom?".
36. Berry, Sara. "Fathers work for their sons".
    Altbach, P. G. "Student politics".
    Nasr, S. V. R. "Students, Islam, and politics".
    Humayun, S., and T. Khalid. "Student politics".
    Sykes, K. "After the '"Raskol"' feast."
    Obeng, S. G. "Doing politics on walls and doors".
    Matin-Asgari, A. "Iranian student opposition".
    Rhoads, R. A. *Freedom's web: Student activism.*
37. Massey, Doreen. *The spatial construction of youth cultures*
38. Oni, Bankole. "Education and alternative avenues"
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39. Michelutti, Lucia. "'We are Kshatriyas but we behave like Vaishyas'".
40. Cloonan, M.and Street, J. "Rock the vote".
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47. Chandhoke, Neera. *State and civil society*
48. Gorringe, Hugo. *Untouchable Citizens*
49. Jaoul, N. "The making of a political stronghold".
50. Jaoul, N. "The making of a political stronghold" 114.

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