"Studying Up" through Digital Ethnography: The Case of Conservative Caste Enclaves

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Abstract

Although the call to "study up" — directing the scholarly gaze towards elites — was made over half a century ago, HCI scholarship in this area remains underdeveloped. This paper demonstrates digital ethnography as a critical entry point, particularly for researchers from marginalised positionality facing refusals and deterrents when accessing elite social worlds. Drawing on 20 months of digital ethnography on Brahmin women food vloggers in Kerala, India, we show how caste-privileged cultural producers caste-code socio-technical practices of nichification, leverage platform affordances and constitute conservative caste enclaves in response to anxieties about threats to the prestige associated with Brahmin ways of life. These enclaves archive and circulate Brahmin food pedagogies, preserve caste customs and norms, guide younger Brahmin generations to remain connected to their roots, and seek recognition from wider publics. By foregrounding these dynamics, we expand methodological and political possibilities for "studying up" and critical caste and technology studies in HCI.

CCS Concepts

• **Human-centered computing → Collaborative and social computing**.

Keywords

Studying Up, Elites, Caste, Digital Ethnography, Conservative Caste Enclaves, Critical Caste and Technology Studies

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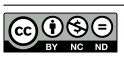
1 Introduction

HCI and CSCW scholarship has become increasingly invested in questions of equity, justice, and marginality [43, 87]. Researchers have shown how technologies intersect with the everyday lives of marginalised communities, surfacing how they are appropriated, resisted, or repurposed in ways that make visible both the exclusions and possibilities of design [35, 41, 42]. This body of work has significantly advanced justice-oriented agendas in the field [4, 15, 155]. Yet, with a few notable exceptions, the research gaze of HCI and CSCW [17, 55, 77, 96] has remained largely fixed on those at the margins. Far less attention has been paid to those who inhabit positions of privilege and power — donors, funders, designers, policymakers, and, relevant to this study, cultural producers, the social actors who are engaged in "the creation of symbolic goods that contribute to a shared sense of culture"[1] [119, 120] — who seek to reproduce hierarchical logics within digital publics. For all of these actors, the material and cultural practices that configure social hierarchies are circulated, reinforced, and deployed through digital platforms, shaping technosocial relations and technopolitical futures.

Studying privilege is challenging precisely because it is diffuse, normalised, and elusive — threaded through the everyday practices that structure social life and techno-political arrangements. The social power of such arrangements, such as in the case of caste, works to naturalise norms and claim legitimacy, to hide in plain sight the histories of extraction and oppression that constitute them, and simultaneously to preserve the stratified social order from which they benefit. "Studying up" opens the door to making visible, and open to scrutiny, what is otherwise actively attenuated and designed to remain hidden. Understanding how power and privilege are produced, maintained, and circulated is as crucial as studying marginality, yet it often poses barriers to access, legitimacy, and safety for researchers — particularly when the researchers themselves come from positions of marginality. In South Asia and throughout South Asian diasporic communities worldwide, caste remains a critical axis of power and privilege, yet its digital circulations are only beginning to be examined within computing fields [80, 147, 170, 171].

This paper examines the cultural production of Kerala's Brahmin[2] women vegetarian food vloggers on YouTube, with attention to their staged caste lifeworlds. We argue that food, long central to caste-based social ordering, has become a medium through which caste power and privilege are signified and circulated on platforms such as YouTube. We illustrate how Kerala's Brahmin food vloggers leverage the socio-technical practices of nichification — the organisation of cultural production and consumption around narrowly defined interest communities via datafication and algorithmic



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[1] Cultural producers range from individual creators to game developers, musicians and news organisations. For further discussion of their relationship to platformisation, see [120].
[2] A privileged group at the top of the graded caste hierarchy.

personalisation [120] — and associated platform affordances to facilitate the creation of what we term "conservative caste enclaves," digital clusters in which caste-privileged groups articulate, archive, preserve, and circulate caste-coded visuals and texts, while partially insulating themselves from broader publics. Within these enclaves, Brahmin women vloggers convert historically guarded food pedagogies — i.e., the discursive, institutional, and embodied practices through which (caste-coded) dietary norms are taught, learned and circulated by privileged actors and allied apparatuses — into platform-mediated branding and visibility, with Brahmin identity itself becoming a claim to authenticity. These formations emerge in response to anxieties that the radically egalitarian project of the Indian Constitution put in motion roughly eight decades ago and neoliberal transformations of the last half a century are destabilizing historical caste codes and the once-uncontested prestige associated with Brahmin ways of life. As these anxieties are worked through in digital spaces, vloggers actively promote Brahmin food pedagogies as mechanisms for preserving caste customs and norms, guiding younger Brahmin generations to remain connected to their "roots," and seeking recognition from wider publics to legitimise their ways of life.

Methodologically, we emphasise digital ethnography as a critical entry point for "studying up" elites in computing [57, 71]. Public-by-default platforms make visible the paratext and staging through which privilege is enacted (e.g. titles, tags, descriptions, thumbnails, comment threads, and visual framings), enabling analysis without relying on elite self-disclosure and minimising direct interaction with powerful actors. At the same time, we caution against possible harm, especially when marginalised communities and scholars are involved [160]. We weigh the potential benefits against harms and attend to the specific challenges that "studying up" poses.

Our contribution is threefold. First, we extend "studying up" in HCI and CSCW by foregrounding critical caste and technology studies, highlighting caste as a pivotal axis of power and privilege in studies of platforms and computing. Second, we demonstrate how seemingly benign practices — such as food vlogging and nichification around it — become socio-technical mechanisms for sustaining and circulating power and privilege, illustrating the entanglement of digital platforms with entrenched social hierarchies. Third, we demonstrate the methodological potential of digital ethnography for accessing socially privileged and exclusionary lifeworlds, highlighting both its affordances and reflexive challenges. In doing so, we call for a shift in HCI's justice-oriented scholarship to look beyond the archives of oppression and marginality toward the infrastructural reproduction of privilege.

2 Related Work

2.1 "Studying Up" in HCI and CSCW

Despite the best attempts by scholars in their individual capacity, academia worldwide has largely remained a bourgeoisie dispensation. This ensures that generation after generation, in discipline after discipline, the elite gaze is directed towards scrutinising the marginalised, famously theorized by Michel Rolph-Trouillot as reproducing the "savage slot" [166]. As a result, while we know a lot about the "marginalised" through the gaze of elites, we know relatively less about elites themselves, particularly from the vantage points of marginalised communities. HCI and CSCW are relatively newly established fields of academic praxis, but they are not radically different from the wider academic community. HCI and CSCW communities share a similar excess of scholarship on communities at the margins with other traditional social sciences, that once contributed to the joke that "every indigenous family has a mom, a dad, and an anthropologist" [65]. Over the last five decades, in anthropology and related disciplines, there have been significant debates on how to address this lacuna [57, 63, 100, 122, 139, 145]. However, in the fields of HCI and CSCW, scholarship on this topic remains nascent [55, 77, 96]. In the scholarly drive to explore 'users' and later 'people' and their communities [137], HCI and CSCW communities have paid an overbearing attention to historically marginalised communities, enhancing our understanding of, and the need for, designing context-appropriate technologies and uncovering the social structures of inequalities and injustices [127].

In HCI and CSCW, an interest and commitment to studying elites is slowly on the rise. These include, but are not limited to, inquiries into questions on algorithmic fairness, understandings of machine learning data and ethical sensitivity in design [11, 17, 77, 96] and the assumptions underlying decisions made by technology designers and developers [137], or by public sector agencies regarding whether to develop or adopt new AI tools [77]. However, we still know comparatively little about the normative assumptions, values, interests and practices of designers, developers, scholars, brokers, consultants, lobbyists, bureaucrats, policymakers, donors, advertisers, businesses, corporations, military and state in the making of technology worlds and empires.

As with other disciplines and fields, even in HCI and CSCW, researchers grapple with accessing field sites and interlocutors, facing refusals [106], and navigating conflicts with powerful, privileged participants. The difficulty of cultivating or maintaining long-term relationships — especially when the research takes an oppositional stance — and the challenges of negotiating ethics and methodology are just a few hurdles researchers encounter [63, 71, 100, 122] in studying elite communities [72, 151]. The challenges are all the more severe when a researcher from a marginalised position attempts to "study up." Elite pedigree, proximity to wealth and political power, institutional affiliation, access to grants, and legitimacy easily available to researchers with pre-existing social capital are often unavailable to the marginalised [107, 172]. The inability to blend into elite social settings, asymmetrical power relations with the participants and the need to contend with hegemonic epistemologies and norms are a few of the obstacles they face [18, 32].

Through this article, we are building on these conversations to further reorient research toward power, while acknowledging the reflexive and methodological challenges of doing so in computing contexts. We do so by examining the imbrications of caste, food, and social media platforms in South Asia.

2.2 Caste and South Asia in HCI and CSCW

Past research has highlighted the prominence of South Asia, particularly India, in HCI and related research, a factor attributed to the high number of English speakers and India's hospitable political and institutional atmosphere [29]. However, the dominance

of English-speaking, caste-privileged communities in higher education institutions — both in the West and beyond — remains overlooked in these discussions. Even a cursory look at the authors' caste surnames in HCI and CSCW scholarship reveals that only specific groups of South Asians are involved in, and guiding, the production and politics of knowledge. The "bundles of silences" [167] surrounding the caste question even within South Asian HCI research merely reflect the existing configuration of caste power in academic research.

In recent times, HCI and CSCW communities have been appropriately reprimanded by Black women HCI scholars, who have highlighted how power operates within the field, leading to the oppression, marginalisation, and erasure of Black voices [43, 128]. In a striking parallel, we find that scholarship on caste primarily resides on the fringes of the computing community because caste-oppressed researchers find themselves in the waiting rooms of academia. Even some of the most "progressive" academic institutions in India and in the West are often dominated by caste-privileged 'people of colour,' who otherwise often directly benefit from diversity, equity, and inclusion policies of Western universities. Furthermore, caste-privileged researchers enjoy an enabling environment such that, on the one hand, they can invoke the "person of colour" card, and on the other, they regularly study caste-oppressed groups.

As we stated earlier, a lot of these are structural features of the nature of academia. As such, we are not arguing to restrict their access to field sites, their authority to discuss the lives of the oppressed, or to dismiss all such academic analyses, as it would amount to reducing their work merely to their identities. These broad predicament are a function of existing global power relations and unequal resource distribution. Instead, we advocate opening up deliberations and institutional efforts to democratise our knowledge production, distribution, and circulation. Efforts to improve diversity, equity, and inclusion in HCI and CSCW, as in any other field, should lead to justice through both substantive and symbolic representation, while also driving structural changes in the logic and governance of neoliberal institutions and academic capitalism.[3]

Much of South Asian scholarship, unearthed through the lens of caste-privileged scholars, has not only "legitimised their self-privileging views" [8] but has also misrecognised the work of caste-oppressed researchers, reducing their communities' articulations of lived experiences to mere "emotional, descriptive-empirical, or polemical narrations" [53]. In recent years, there have been attempts at "studying up" in critical caste studies [71, 153], including the exploration of mobilisation among caste-privileged groups around the politics of victimhood in the context of India's anti-reservation movements [75]. Caste-oppressed researchers have also noted how navigating their positionality amid fieldwork often requires tactics of self-concealment [75]. Even when caste-privileged women study their own community, backlash from powerful actors renders the fieldwork experience daunting and difficult [160].

Although "studying up" in the context of caste poses significant challenges [71, 160], avoiding it has incurred a cost. The paucity of research on caste-privileged communities has contributed to an inadequate understanding of how caste power functions among the privileged and why they must commit to, work toward, the annihilation of caste [123]. Such a politics of knowledge has largely resulted in producing an archive of suffering, and inadvertently but unjustly positioned caste oppression as a challenge largely to be overcome by the caste oppressed [123]. Furthermore, just as scholarship from the majority world in interpretive CSCW and HCI research is burdened with questions on 'generalisability' [150], in South Asia's academic labyrinth, the caste-oppressed scholars are forcefully relegated to the margins of 'particularity,' while the caste-privileged researchers are effortlessly able to wrap their scholarship in the mantle of 'universality'. Therefore, we assert that caste-oppressed communities and other oppressed minorities[4] have not only the right to voice their 'lived experiences' but also the right to claim and engage with the civilisation's history, polity, economy, and culture. The realm of technology cannot be a zone of exception.

While the myth of castelessness [31], the over-representation of privileged castes, and their deeply ingrained caste-informed ideas of "meritocracy" in computing are well-documented [9, 44, 142, 169, 171], and there is emerging evidence of the reproduction of caste hierarchies on social media [80] and of tensions arising amid community-based design around the institutionalised practice of caste [49], a critical caste and computing agenda [144] has yet to evolve in HCI and CSCW. In this context, we go beyond the "archives of the oppressed" [7] and inquiries surrounding marginality, and develop methodological tools and approaches that support "studying up." In South Asian context, this would mean attempting to decipher the "caste hieroglyphics" — the subtle, encoded signs and proxies of caste concealed within the language of meritocracy — in caste-privileged worlds [170] and striving for the de-brahmanisation [124] of technology and society.

In this light, by exploring caste-privileged YouTube vloggers, we enquire how caste is produced, sustained and reproduced through cultural codes and communicative practices [144] in digital spaces, as well as the potential of digital ethnography as a methodological entry point for studying caste-privileged worlds, which are otherwise deprived and deterred to caste-oppressed scholars.

2.3 HCI, Digital Ethnography, and Social Media Platforms

2.3.1 Digital Ethnography. Digital platforms enable the formation of social and cultural patterns or practices [85, 164] by cultural producers and audiences, making them critical sites for ethnographic, and specifically digital ethnographic, enquiry. Past HCI studies indicate [16, 165] that studying these platforms requires close attention to the everyday activities of both producers and audiences, approaching digital culture as a lived, shared experience rather

[3] Academic capitalism denotes the structural reorientation of higher education and research, marking a transition from "public goods" to "private goods" driven by market logic, where students are treated as customers and education is reconfigured to serve specific labour market needs and corporate capital accumulation. For a more detailed discussion, see [69, 149].

[4] We want to emphasise that we mean majorities and minorities in the terms clarified by Ambedkar, who first showed how numerical minorities can act as oppressive majorities in a political sense, and numerical majorities can often be relegated to political minority status, as part of his contributions to the Indian freedom struggle and his later authoring of the Indian Constitution. For North American audiences, this entails imagining India as more akin to South Africa during apartheid, given that caste-oppressed people form almost 80-85 per cent of the Indian population, with Brahmins and other caste-oppressor groups being a mere 10–15 per cent.

than merely an audio-visual or textual medium, with the researcher immersing themselves in, and carefully documenting the meanings that emerge within these spaces [85]. Following this approach, researchers have used targeted keyword combinations to identify potential videos for observation, applied clear inclusion and exclusion criteria, and analysed selected material in detail to document patterns and meanings [82, 110]. Studies also look beyond the content to comments and metadata, which can uncover implicit knowledge about users and the interests of specific communities [66].

Ethical challenges in digital ethnography also include the possibility of surveillance of researchers by the state, private businesses, or other actors, as well as risks associated with data breaches [168]. Digital ethnography that relies on public data introduces additional challenges. Past HCI research cautions that there are potential harms in treating such data without acknowledging the people behind it [45], with analysing publicly available data from marginalised online communities, such as Black Twitter, carrying the risk of causing long-term harm [81]. Researchers are advised to pay close attention to the norms that shape these communities, practise reflexivity (including on the positionality of researchers), and avoid assumptions or reliance on stereotypes when conducting such analyses [81]. However, we are not advocating for "studying up" through digital ethnography merely because public data is accessible, but to weigh the potential benefits of such an approach against possible harms given the limited scholarship on "studying up" in computing. Furthermore, in digital ethnography—particularly on social media platforms such as YouTube—it must be noted that platform algorithms determine visibility and mediate relationships between cultural producers and researchers [25, 138]. Consequently, what researchers observe is culturally enacted through the practices used to engage with these algorithms, which are themselves unstable objects [25, 138].

2.3.2 Social Media Platforms and Identities. These algorithmic mechanics do more than just shape research observations; they fundamentally structure the socio-technical environment in which users exist. HCI scholarship has long established that social media platforms are critical spaces for finding community through shared interests, engaging in identity formation, and fostering cultural production, while also functioning as "marginalisation machine[s], perpetuating and enforcing hegemonial power, discourse, and culture-making," that generate myriad forms of harm and harassment for marginalised/oppressed identities [78, 89, 99]. There is a growing consensus that the affordances of these platforms exacerbate harmful legacies against oppressed identities — such as indigeneity, sexuality, ability, race, gender, and caste — through users' appropriation of platform features, platform design, algorithmic curation, and policy enforcement [27, 80, 95, 99, 104]. Platforms like YouTube, for instance, have faced criticism for invoking libertarian 'free speech' rhetoric to justify moderation policies that tolerate toxic behaviours, often failing to curb social violence against marginalised identities [21, 22, 93].

Consequently, HCI and CSCW research has engaged with the challenges of addressing this toxicity, debating the efficacy of community versus platform-led moderation and the role of counterspeech [59, 174]. Scholars have examined human and computational tools in supporting these efforts, but increasingly highlight the limitations of one-size-fits-all technological solutions that fail to account for varied cultural contexts [52, 64, 98, 118, 136, 140, 141].

However, to address harms and oppression, we must examine the motivations, tactics, and strategies underpinning cultural production on social media platforms, including covert practices [174] that normalise and sustain oppressive cultures in everyday life. This includes cultural production situated in the grey areas, which neither content moderation nor counterspeech finds easy to address. For example, cultural producers who promote cultural knowledge and competence [46], bringing interior perspectives on identity into public conversation [19], can normalise oppressive cultures in ways that do not explicitly mandate hate, yet circulate social privilege, assert superiority, or produce harms, including through individuals practising racial [and caste] innocence [20]. Moreover, cultural producers are shaped by the awareness that outsiders to the community will inevitably visit, interject their own perspectives, or interpret these discourses (decode) in ways that differ from their original intent (encode) [19].

To ground this argument empirically, we next situate our study within the histories of food and caste in India, and the specific socio-political context of Kerala's Brahmin food cultures.

3 Background

3.1 Food and Caste in India

In India, nationwide sample surveys indicate that only 20% to 37% of the population identify as vegetarian, mainly among caste-privileged groups [14, 101]. Most Indians, especially those from caste-oppressed groups, have a history of meat consumption [133]. Yet, the myth of India as a vegetarian nation prevails in popular discourse both within India and internationally. Ambedkar argued that historically even Brahmins were significant meat-eaters, including beef, but they transitioned to vegetarianism to assert spiritual superiority over Buddhism and gain prestige and power [2].[5] Given Brahminical hegemony over culture in the subcontinent, over time various non-Brahmin communities have attempted to imitate Brahmin vegetarian practices. The cost of this has been steep for oppressed castes. For instance, for Dalits, dead cows often served as their primary sustenance and a cheap source of protein [2]. Given the imposition of vegetarianism in India's public policies which are dominated by politician and bureaucrats which are overwhelmingly from the caste-privileged groups, many historically oppressed communities such as indigenous groups and Dalits suffer from extreme forms of malnutrition, a form of structural violence which is at once biomedical in nature, as well as cognitive and socio-cultural, through the denial of opportunities to partake in one's own culinary traditions and pasts.

Nonetheless, caste-privileged communities, both in India and among Indian diasporas, maintain their cultural hegemony through a politics of vegetarianism [33, 133], reflecting what Pandian describes as "talk of caste by other means, rather than addressing caste on its own terms" [113]. Caste purity is inextricably linked to food among South Asians worldwide, and given this context,

[5]The primary conflict in the subcontinent is not Hindus versus Muslims, but Hindus versus Buddhists: Hindu law emphasised caste purity, while Buddhism upheld moral law and opposed caste [158].

often vegetarianism, is less about individual choice. This raises ethical issues that extend beyond those highlighted by contemporary environmental and animal rights movements [33, 133].

> "The links between traditional notions of caste, purity and pollution and the preparation and eating of food are intimate and strong. Social conventions may ban the use of certain ingredients and place restrictions on the ways in which food is prepared, served and consumed. The separation of vessels used for cooking vegetarian and non-vegetarian dishes, preoccupation with the caste of those preparing and serving, and concerns over potential contamination from plates used by others are a few examples" [67].

Many Brahmin communities abstain from garlic and onions, believing that these root vegetables provoke passions like anger and lust [36], which they regard as obstacles to spiritual progress. Although regional variations exist—such as fish consumption among Brahmins in coastal Odisha and West Bengal or goat meat in the Himalayan regions of Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand—most Brahmins identify as vegetarian [84].

Moreover, since vegetarianism is considered spiritually superior by caste-privileged groups, conversely, meat-eaters are often labelled as violent and bloodthirsty [36]. The Hindu right-wing in India has murdered, lynched and attacked beef-eating and meat-eating communities [148], and forcibly closed meat shops during Hindu religious festivals [70]. Several provincial governments have banned eggs from preschool and school meal plans, severely impacting the nutritional needs of oppressed castes [101] despite medical and public health research opposing such measures. Chronic malnourishment in India is inextricably linked to caste, with child stunting highest among caste-oppressed communities: Adivasis (43.6%), followed by Dalits (42.5%) and Other Backward Classes (38.6%) [125].[6] Even India's premier public education institutions, such as the Indian Institutes of Technology (IITs), exhibit exclusionary practices, such as segregating dining based on vegetarian or meat-eater classifications and using separate utensils to uphold the purity concerns of caste-privileged students [154]. Meat-eating dietary choices also lead to discrimination in housing markets [162]. Hence, slogans and codes like "I do not eat meat" are crucial to constructing Hindu and caste-privileged identities [134]. Therefore, vegetarianism in India, and among Indians globally, constitutes a form of structural violence against caste-oppressed communities [133].

3.2 From Feudal Hierarchies to Social Change: Caste in Kerala

Kerala's feudal history was marked by severe caste oppression, with Brahmins wielding power over land and labour through a violent caste system. Practices such as caste slavery, untouchability, and the inhuman rules of unseeability denied caste-oppressed communities basic human rights, such as entering streets, wearing clean clothes, or accessing drinking water [13, 97]. Brahmins considered themselves polluted even by merely seeing an caste-oppressed person from a distance and could punish them with death.

Against this backdrop, post-colonial Kerala's transformation into a social democracy — celebrated in development literature as a Global South society that successfully navigated the transition to modernity and democracy [30, 40, 47, 60, 62, 68, 91] — is credited to political action from below, where militant anti-caste and working-class movements forced the state to implement radical reforms, including redistributive land reforms and expansive welfare policies under parliamentary communists [13, 30, 62]. These changes eroded feudal caste power and challenged social conservatism and caste obscurantism, envisioning a society based on equality and social justice [13, 61]. Although Kerala remains far from annihilating caste in the ways envisioned by Ambedkar [1], it has been reimagined and reorganised within the framework of secular modernity [88, 159], with practices such as dropping caste surnames [112]. However, vestiges of caste-based social power persist, manifested in the social and resource deprivation of caste-oppressed groups and the dominance of caste-privileged groups in politics, education, and the state [115, 121]— though the feudal and moral authority once claimed by Brahmins has faced socio-political challenges and gradual erosion.

3.3 Caste and Food Culture in Contemporary Kerala

Compared to other Indian states, Kerala's dietary patterns are unique due to their high food diversity across all income groups [76], including substantial meat-eating among caste-privileged groups. At least fish or meat features in the culinary practices of most non-Brahmin communities. Among the Namboodiri Brahmins, vegetarian (or more precisely, *sattvik*[7]) food is identified closely with claims of superiority of caste status and superior *gunam* (or attribute of mind- body-spirit) [108]. Osella and Osella [108] explains:

> "Among Malayali Hindus, caste separation and distinctiveness is clear in the nuanced gradations practiced and counted as significant between the most severe forms of Brahminical vegetarianism, which shun all 'bodily heating' foods (such as garlic) and even certain items thought to resemble meat or used ritually to symbolise flesh (e.g. pasta); through those middle-ranking communities (e.g. the Nairs) which partake of 'non-veg' in the everyday, but are strictly vegetarian on ceremonial and sacred occasions."

Notably, as past studies have shown, gender ideology positions women as bearers of tradition and honour, legitimising the organisation of caste [105, 129, 130], with food serving as a key site of this regulation. Among Brahmin women, eating practices also follow gendered distinctions and rules, as both the kitchen, considered the social womb, and the biological womb were considered sacred.

Nonetheless, during agrarian struggles and social renaissance movements in colonial era, inter-dining — especially involving cooked food — became a form of political protest [103], reflecting the tempo of a coastal state like Kerala. Moreover, a dense ecology of bottom-up social reform organisations and class organisations has privileged a social imaginary of a modern egalitarian society:

[6] According to the National Family Health Survey Round 5 (2021–22), 35% of Indian children under the age of five are stunted, and nearly half of all women are anaemic.

[7] Sattvik denotes purity and balance and is associated with a vegetarian diet that Brahmins consider conducive to ascetic discipline.

overt caste discrimination was largely rejected/invisibilised in public spaces, yet its circulation remains entrenched, particularly in private realms. While the Brahminical delineation of 'clean' versus 'dirty' food has seen declining acceptance in Kerala [79], caste practices such as food-giving through backdoors for caste-oppressed groups and food-sharing amongst caste-privileged households persists [161]. Caste, therefore, persists, continuing to evolve and adapt its forms.

Similarly, studies have observed shifts in dietary habits among South Indian Hindu Brahmins. Working women's time constraints have increased reliance on convenience foods, while younger Brahmins are more likely to consume meat-based dishes [38, 90]. These trends reflect changing gender roles and the influence of neoliberal capitalism in expanding dietary choices beyond the home. At the same time, caste has found new ways of coexisting with capital, as seen in the opening of Brahmin hotels and messes, and the growing trade in 'carryout' food prepared by Brahmins[48]. Moreover, when Brahmin food products are branded, proximity to traditional values and purity is implied by the homely representation of caste-privileged women [152].[8] For Brahmins seeking to sustain their caste pedagogies, gastro-politics, the contestation over cultural and economic resources as mediated through food, has entered new terrains [6]. As Teltumbde argues, that unlike capitalism in its early stages, which promoted modernity to overcome feudalism, its later colonial and neoliberal forms are coexisting and benefitting from social systems such as caste rather than dismantling them. Against this backdrop, we examine the cultural production of Kerala's Brahmin women vloggers.

4 Methods and Data

For "studying up" caste-privileged groups through digital ethnography, we identified the niche of Kerala Brahmin food vlogging as a productive entry point. This choice was shaped by the first author's positionality as someone from Kerala, with situated knowledge of the region's caste, linguistic, and food cultures.

4.1 Constructing the Dataset

Data collection began on February 03, 2022, using purposive keyword queries [111] such as "Kerala Brahmin vegetarian recipes" and "Kerala Brahmin recipes." We manually catalogued metadata (e.g., channel names and URLs) into a spreadsheet database. Given YouTube's infinite scroll architecture for search results, we established a stop criterion where collection ceased once algorithmic recommendations diverged significantly from the domain of vegetarian food cultures.

To ensure relevance, we conducted a preliminary content audit by randomly selecting and reviewing a few videos per channel to verify thematic focus (vegetarian vlogs). In this process, we also leveraged the platform's recommendation engine to "snowball" the sample, using suggested videos to identify adjacent food vloggers.

This initial process yielded 32 potential channels (23 female and 9 male vloggers). We applied the following inclusion/exclusion criteria: a) we excluded men vloggers, as most of them frequently featured food cultures in commercial settings (e.g., restaurant reviews, promotion of catering services); b) we excluded non-Malayalam speaking vloggers, as they were primarily from the diaspora, and c) we retained only those channels with a minimum of 1,000 subscribers to avoid extremely low audience engagement. Applying these criteria resulted in a corpus of 11 women vloggers.

We collected additional metadata for this cohort of vloggers (account creation date, subscriber count, and total views), and selected a sample of six channels to capture diverse textures of cultural production: three with larger followings (30,000–175,000 subscribers) and three with smaller audiences (1,000–2,000). We deliberately included channels with lower subscriber numbers because, upon close screening, we observed high community engagement, reflected in channel views ranging from 20,000 to nearly 50,000 and an average of over 50 comments across more than 20 videos. In the context of "studying up," cultural producers with higher audience engagement — not only higher subscriber counts — were important, as they reflected greater circulation and influence of their vlogs.

4.2 The Processes of Observation and Analysis

From February 22, 2022 to October 10, 2023, the first author watched the videos and took field notes by rotating through videos from each of the six channels in a cyclical manner.

Following an initial review of 50 videos by the first and third authors, we refined our research process to include analysis of the comment sections in response to observed caste-related discourse, while maintaining the primary analytic focus on the cultural producers themselves. This decision reflected our intent to trace not only how caste power is staged by Brahmin vloggers, but also how viewers recognise, affirm, contest, or ignore those stagings. Accordingly, the sampling criteria for watching videos were revised to prioritise vlogs with high audience engagement (comments > 20). We then proceeded through each channel from the earliest to the most recent uploads, while cycling through the channels, treating comment threads as an extension of the field site rather than as detached. Based on our situated knowledge of Kerala's caste and religious naming conventions, we used the presence of caste-based surnames or religious markers (Muslim or Christian) as general signifiers for social identity, allowing us to ask how caste-coded publics converged around particular vlogs without presuming definitive knowledge of individuals' caste locations.

Although the full dataset during this period comprised more than 600 videos across six channels, with run times ranging from 4 to 23 minutes, the first author concluded data collection with a sample of 374 videos, as the data had reached analytic saturation with no new patterns or meanings emerging. During this period, the largest channel grew to 240,000 subscribers, while the smallest reached 2,100.

The viewing experience itself was non-linear — a few videos were watched repeatedly to review conversations and interactions in detail. The first author dedicated approximately two to four hours, four days a week, over the course of the study period to this observation process, making it a time-intensive process. This slow engagement was important for "studying up," as it enabled us to notice how caste privilege appeared less as spectacular violence and more as banal repetition, minor gestures, and seemingly casual

[8] Similarly, but with different goals, there are currently efforts underway to represent "Dalit" branded foods, but with little to no success. See [92].

remarks around concepts like purity, domestic order, or "traditional" Brahmin life.

While observing, the author paused the content as needed to dictate audio notes on the dialogue. These notes focused on the verbatim reproduction of relevant conversations (e.g., excluding technical cooking instructions but capturing descriptions of the food's history, its relation to the cultural producers, and the memories it evoked). Given the importance of visual elements in shaping the setting, the field notes also included brief descriptions of the visual narratives accompanying the audio. Analysis of these notes captured codes such as: explicit assertion of Brahmin identity; subtle assertion of Brahmin identity; caste-identification of food; making the past familiar; circulating memories; transferring knowledge on caste customs; critique of being modern; archiving community practices; claims of purity, health benefits, and authenticity; and non-food elements with sub-codes such as vessels, ornaments, and architecture. To capture the mutual shaping of technical affordances and cultural practice, these codes also moved between what was said, how it was staged, and how YouTube's interface (titles, thumbnails) framed the vlogs as cultural objects.

A subset of vlogs (n=27) was also transcribed into English to create an accessible dataset for the multilingual research team. Due to the resource-intensive nature of transcribing a large corpus of Malayalam videos, speech was selectively transcribed where required for analysis and reporting. Priority was given to segments relevant to the coding framework — specifically indexed caste-coded paratext and staging — and insights derived from the field notes. The first author regularly met with the third author during the data collection process to continuously iterate and revise the codes, tracking themes emerging from the dataset. The final transcripts and field notes were jointly analysed by all authors, who collaboratively determined the themes to report, mindful that our choices about which patterns to emphasise or downplay are themselves part of the politics of "studying up."

4.3 Minimizing Amplification Across Research Stages

Although the vlogs we studied are publicly accessible, we approached them with careful consideration of the benefits and challenges of "studying up" caste-privileged communities, especially by researchers from caste-oppressed groups. To minimise algorithmic amplification of caste-privileged discourses, we avoided subscribing to channels and minimised re-watching content after the initial observation. To reduce the need for re-watching, audio notes were recorded meticulously during the initial viewing, capturing both verbatim dialogue and detailed visual descriptions, and field notes were drafted immediately after each viewing to ensure accuracy. However, the first author occasionally revisited specific timestamps to clarify visual details, as storage constraints precluded the possibility for offline archiving of the full data corpus. Further, we did not like, comment on, or share videos, limiting our participation to observation alone, a stance aligned with the position of "lurking" [50]. While this entailed enumeration of our presence on the platform through view counts [50], we tried to avoid other forms of engagement that might boost circulation.

We also made methodological choices to reduce re-identification risks. we paid close attention to translating Malayalam conversations into English and removed or altered words that could uniquely identify channels or creators. Audience comments were paraphrased when necessary to reduce re-identification risks while preserving their meaning. To protect participants' anonymity, all creator names, channels names, and identifiable markers were carefully anonymised in our field notes and transcripts.

4.4 Considerations of Reflexivity

We are three meat-eating South Asian men and non-Brahmin authors, with collective expertise in HCI, CSCW, Political Science, and Anthropology, and extensive experience in ethnographic methods. The first and second authors are also involved in anti-caste organising at a North American university. Our own positional experiences also reflect how caste power is enacted through seemingly ordinary practices. We have faced discrimination and hostility for eating meat, including exclusion in the housing market and hostile confrontations in everyday social spaces. While we do not enumerate our caste affiliations here, we recognise that, for readers familiar with South Asian caste markers, our caste locations will be at least partly inferable from our last names.

These positional relations clearly shaped the study's motivation and its analysis. They afforded particular insights into caste-coded infrastructures and everyday practices, thereby orienting the study toward caste as a primary axis of power, yet at the same time, produced blind spots with respect to other positionalities — for example, around how patriarchy is negotiated within families, or to the differentiated risks faced by women and gender-marginalised creators whose content we analyse.

Nonethless, navigating narratives of caste pride, nostalgia for a feudal past and the visual monotony of vegetarian preparation required significant affective labour. To manage this discomfort, the first author adopted a strategy of 'slow consumption' of vlogs, taking adequate breaks while watching and allocating extended time for each observation round, helping maintaining sensory focus and the attention to detail required when immersing in digitally mediated contexts.

5 Findings

In this section, we trace the *niche* of Brahmin vegetarian food on YouTube. We find this to be a socio-technical space actively produced by Kerala Brahmin women food vloggers and their audience. Our corpus, mainly comprising Brahmin women, is not incidental — scholarship on caste and gender show that, despite their caste privilege, Brahmin women continue to be solely responsible for domestic management, with cooking remaining a gendered role [24]. We show how these creators leverage YouTube to convert historically guarded culinary pedagogies into platform-mediated branding and visibility, with Brahmin identity itself becoming a claim to authenticity. This nichification — the organisation of cultural production and consumption via datafication and algorithmic personalisation [120] — is sustained by making caste codes legible and searchable, translating private Brahmin lifeworlds into publicly discoverable archives, that both consolidate visibility among insiders and spark curiosity among wider publics.

5.1 Nichification: Discovering Brahmin Food Pedagogies

Gayatri is among the many cultural producers who took to food vlogging during its surge in popularity within Kerala's digital landscape amid the COVID-19 pandemic. Although food vlogging initially served as a means to navigate the monotony brought on by the pandemic, it quickly developed into an ardent pursuit, sustained by the growing stream of appreciation from her YouTube audience. In one of her early videos, she reflected on her culinary exploration in Udupi, Karnataka, a town in the southern Indian state[9], in the following manner:

> "While dining at a Brahmin restaurant in Udupi, I was served a dish that resembled white-coloured chutney. Initially, I mistook it for chutney, but upon tasting it, I discovered a distinct sour flavour. It was then that I realised it was not a chutney. Driven by curiosity, I inquired about this dish from the person serving me. He said it's Onion Tambuli. Though we are also Brahmins, we have never heard about Onion Tambuli. I then requested the person serving to share the recipe with me."

In this video, Gayatri foregrounds not merely the Udupi Brahmin origins of *Onion Tambuli*, a curd-based side dish made with onion, but also her self-positioning as a Brahmin woman excited to discover a parallel yet unfamiliar culinary lineage. She was undertaking a deep exploration of food culture, intricately rooted in the socio-cultural power dynamics of caste, while simultaneously uncovering the internal heterogeneity within Brahmin food geographies — an aspect that would later become the focal point of her niche exploration. However, incidental encounters with recipes in restaurants or cookbooks seldom constitute the primary pathways through which food vloggers such as Gayatri, and other women in our study who have cultivated a niche around Brahmin cuisines, acquire and refine their culinary pedagogies. These vloggers rely predominantly on intergenerationally transmitted culinary knowledge, drawing upon orally shared recipes and the embodied memories of elder family members. For instance, Asha says, "I am familiar with some of these traditional recipes. Many were passed down to me by my grandmother and mother, and I am now trying to bring back all those culinary traditions."

Similarly, Vrindha explained,

> "Whenever I came to hometown, I spend most of the time in our family "tharavadu" where I gained much knowledge, explored ancient utilities and many more. I am mainly focusing here on different varieties of vegetarian food items maintaining our tradition and authenticity."

The cultural production of Kerala Brahmin vegetarian food on YouTube entails accessing food pedagogies[10] through processes of cultural recovery, wherein their authenticity and culinary authority are drawn from 'going back to the roots.' Consequently, Brahmin food pedagogies are marked as special and authentically accessible only through embodied knowledge, such as practices, ingredients, techniques, cooking ethics, and the symbolic meanings of dishes, transmitted through caste-based structures of social memory.

Furthermore, many Brahmin communities historically enforced practices of untouchability and unseeability against caste-oppressed groups, whose bodies were deemed polluting by both touch and sight. Consequently, knowledge of the Brahmin way of life, including their food pedagogies, was closely guarded, restricted, and transmitted only within the caste, reinforcing exclusivity and social boundaries. This historical exclusivity contributes to the contemporary mystique surrounding the Brahmin lifeworld for non-Brahmin audiences, which in turn attracts audience beyond the Brahmin caste and sustains the nichification of their cultural production.

In this way, Brahmin food vloggers leverage YouTube's platform-mediated access to create and grow an audience for their[11] content by transforming historical caste privilege and caste-specific embodied knowledge into a mode of branding, where their caste identity also becomes the marker of claim making for authenticity of their vlogs. Rather than concealing the cultural, symbolic, and social capital of being Brahmin, they visibilise/highlight these markers to attract audience both within and beyond their Brahmin community. In this process, Brahmin identity becomes central to the process of nichification, acquiring distinctive significance within India's caste society, where it represents not merely any cultural practice but one positioned at the top of the social hierarchy.

5.2 Socio-Technical Practices of Nichification: Caste-Coding Food Vlogs

Socio-technical practices of nichification are central to the cultural production of Brahmin food vloggers and are manifested in two key dimensions: (a) caste-coding within YouTube video metadata, and (b) caste-coding in the presentation and content of the vlogs.

5.2.1 Caste-coded Discoverability through Youtube Video Metadata. The food vloggers on YouTube we studied primarily presented their niche as vegetarian food vlogging, yet this framing often relied on implicit markers of Brahmin identity. Some content could be fully understood only by attending to these caste-specific cues. As cultural producers, the vloggers strategically crafted elements such as titles, descriptions, and tags to optimise search engine visibility (SEO), thereby enhancing both the discoverability and reach of their content. This practice was central to the nichification of their vlogs.

A key tactic was crafting titles that emphasised the culinary origins or preparation sites, specifically foregrounding their Brahmin homesteads, a traditional household where a Brahmin family lives, with historically caste-segregated entry and access — referred to as *agraharam*, *illam*, or *mana* — or associating their culinary heritage with *temple dishes*, where Brahmins traditionally served

[9] Readers may be familiar with Udupi restaurants worldwide, run by the Udupi Brahmin community and renowned for vegetarian fare such as idli, upma, and vada. In this sense, Udupi serves as an important place-universe for Brahmin belonging.

[10] By Brahmin food pedagogies, we refer to the the discursive, institutional, and embodied practices through which Brahmin-caste actors and allied apparatuses teach, learn, and circulate caste-coded dietary norms.

[11] All the vloggers we studied consistently encouraged audience to subscribe to their channels and explicitly stated that sustaining the channel depends on subscriber growth — however, the absence of both transparent channel data or interview data limits our ability to infer if they were able to monetise. We also did not observe any collaborations with, or promotions for, commercial firms or brands integrated into their content.

as the cooks. [12] Examples include "Special Dish from Agraharam," "Healthy Lunch at Illam," Temple-Style Pulingiri," "Illam-style Sambar", "Temple-Style Varuthu Kuzhachathu" as well as references to regional (for e.g.,"Palakkad Brahmin Style," "Kerala Brahmin Style,") or sub-caste identities (for e.g., "Kerala Iyer Recipe," and "Namboothiri Recipes"). These titles function as markers of symbolic capital, signalling authenticity and reinforcing the caste-specific knowledge embedded in these Brahmin culinary practices.

In addition, keywords included in video descriptions and titles — both general (#Vegetarian, #Healthy, #Pure, #Traditional, #Authentic) and caste-coded (#Brahmin, #IyerSpecial, #VadakkanNamboothiriSpecial, #NamboothiriStyle, #AgraharamDish) — served a dual function. They guided audience seeking vegetarian or traditional recipes while simultaneously operating as implicit caste markers, signalling the moral authority of Brahmin cuisine as 'pure' and 'healthy.' In the Indian context, purity and vegetarianism are central to social stratification [54], with distinctions between the pure and impure reinforcing caste hierarchies. In this light, the strategic use of caste-coded titles, tags, and keywords is essential for niche creation, rendering Brahmin culinary knowledge both intelligible and desirable to audience familiar with caste-specific social codes.

Furthermore, when explicit caste coding (or its proxies) was absent from vlog titles, descriptions, or hashtags, audience actively requested such references. For example, audience asked Savithri and Deepa:

> "Please add "Kerala vegetarian" in your video titles so that they come up in search results when we look for veg recipes. So far, whenever I search on YouTube, genuine vegetarian dishes do not appear on the front."

> "These are great recipes of the GSB (Gaud Saraswat Brahmins) community; it will be good to add this in the title and description."

These requests indicate that audience treat caste identifiers — or proxies like "vegetarian dishes" [54]— as key metadata, actively seeking content within their niches. The prominence of caste codes in content consumption is evident, as audience expect videos to be searchable by these markers. This reflects a demand-driven push for the visibility of Brahmin food vloggers and and with that caste-specific embodied knowledge, reinforcing caste identities in digital spaces.

5.2.2 Caste (re)coding in Presentation and Claims to Authenticity. The narratives of these food vloggers, while ostensibly centred on recipe sharing and not explicitly denigrating other communities, also functioned as performances of caste-based cultural capital and material excess. Through carefully curated visual framing, the inclusion of artefacts, and the display of Brahmin homesteads and habitus, which signal material wealth and a glorified past, alongside the presence of elders as caste-tradition-bearers and having access to authentic culinary knowledge, these vlogs unveil everyday domestic spaces as sites of cultural authority and legitimise caste privilege in digital publics.

[12]Food cooked or handled by oppressed caste members/meat eating caste was considered 'impure' and dirty by Brahmins, and hence they relied on their own cooks for food preparation.

Although most vloggers we studied did not permanently reside in *illam*, *agrahara* or *mana*, instead living in modern apartments or urban settings, they often staged temporal 'returns' to these ancestral homes. In doing so, they performed acts of claim-making, seeking to recover the purity of lost traditions. In this sense, the vloggers took preemptive action in response to a perceived future loss and the anxieties emerging from it, as against the "victimhood" narratives of caste-privileged groups studied by Akhil Kang [75]. These return visits to agraharas and illams, historically primarily restricted to Brahmins, not only signified the vloggers' social position within the caste hierarchy but also expanded the conventional frame of food vlogs to include narrations of elders' memories, myths, and gossip, embedding culinary practice within broader cultural and symbolic worlds.

These videos often featured elderly, shirtless, sacred-thread-wearing Brahmin men. In some cases, there would be Brahmin women in traditional attire, respectfully identified as *antharjanam*.[13] Their presence, serving as a testimony to Brahmin lineage, reinforces the authenticity of caste-specific traditions and practices that the vloggers curate and perform. For instance, one vlogger returned to her family in Palakkad [14]to interview two elderly Brahmin women for a special segment on *Agraharam* dishes. While demonstrating the preparation of *nonbu ada* — an offering made from rice powder and jaggery — the elderly women elaborated on the ritual context of fasting observed by Brahmin women for their husbands. This food preparation, along with other offerings such as sweet and savory *adai*[15], were closely tied to the *karadiyan nonbu* tradition, where women pray for their husbands' well-being and longevity. The vlogger also detailed accompanying prayers and chants, highlighting the symbolic presentation of unmelted butter and *adai* to God as a wish for their husbands' well-being and fidelity. By dedicating extensive screen time to these practices, the episode foregrounded the explicit link between Brahmin culinary traditions and caste-based rituals. Hence, these vlogs also illuminate the intricate relationship between food, ritual practice, and expectations that women maintain a state of 'purity' in order to fulfill domestic responsibilities, revealing how caste and gender are mutually shaped.

Even the audience comments also make these relations explicit. For instance, one comment requested the vlogger: "Please do not cut any vegetables or fruit horizontally; always cut them vertically. Every vegetable or fruit resembles a woman's womb." Here, caste norms around food preparation and the desire to control women's wombs render their reproductive and domestic roles central to the maintenance and reproduction of caste hierarchies.

Furthermore, in crafting visual narratives of traditional Kerala lifestyle and culinary culture, the vloggers implicitly invite the audience to admire the grandeur of Brahmin homesteads and their

[13]Women belonging to the Namboothiri Brahmin caste of Kerala, India — known as *antharjanams* — had limited or no contact with the outside world and were traditionally confined to the domestic sphere, being prohibited from being seen by anyone outside the immediate family.

[14]Palakkad in Kerala is another place where like in the case of Udupi in Karnataka, is known for Tamil Brahmins who found themselves to be part of the new state of Kerala when the erstwhile Madras Presidency was reorganised into multiple provinces in the 1960s along linguistic lines.

[15]*Adai* is a thick South Indian lentil-and-rice pancake, spiced and served as a breakfast or snack.

artefacts. Carefully framed shots highlight architectural features such as spacious courtyards, verandahs, and intricate woodwork, emphasising the richness of rosewood and teak. Scenes of large granaries, bronze and silver utensils, sacred idols, flourishing agricultural produce, well-cared-for cattle, and gold jewellery as family heirlooms further convey prosperity. The visuals also draw attention to ponds, sacred groves, and adherence to Brahmin dress codes and etiquettes, among other cultural markers.

For example, in one of the vlogs, an elderly Brahmin woman narrated why her *Neyyappam* (a vegetarian snack) is special and distinct:

> "The batter is made out of rice flour, jaggery, and plantain, and is poured into 'Appa Karal' [a specially made metal-mold], where ghee is heated and fried until deep brown. My 'Appa Karal' is a cherished family heirloom passed down from my grandmother, who, in turn, received it from my great-grandmother. It is made out of bell metal, and it's pretty heavy."

Historically, cookware and utensils functioned as markers of caste distinction, with items made from precious metals reserved for caste-privileged communities, while those belonging to caste-oppressed communities were limited to copper, iron, or bronze [73]. By attributing the 'specialty' of their dishes to intergenerational heirlooms — celebrated as artefacts — Brahmin vloggers enact and reinforce caste pride. Beyond preserving flavours through the superior heating properties of metals, these utensils operate as reminders of past caste-based inequalities and oppression. In effect, the vlogs, in documenting the everyday practices of Brahmin households, simultaneously reveal histories of excess, privilege, and social hierarchies embedded in mundane life.

In another notable example, Anjali, a Namboothiri Brahmin woman, exemplifies this dynamic as she walks her audience through a day in her ancestral home, or *illam*, as she affectionately calls it — an act she frames as "retrieving happiness from her heritage." Her day begins with her graceful steps into the kitchen, where she tunes the radio for its melodic hum and morning news, marking the commencement of the day. She then applies coconut oil to her hair before walking toward the bathing pond within the compound. On the return, she plucks vibrant flowers, some to adorn her long black hair and others to keep aside. Her movements within the *illam* compound — watering the tulsi plants, washing her feet with a *kindi* (brass vessel) before entering, and walking around the *naalukettu*, the quadrangular structure whose four halls surround an open courtyard — retrace the spatial and symbolic core of her Namboothiri heritage. In its courtyard, she crafts a *kolam* (floral design) from the morning's flowers, an act that layers aesthetic expression with a reaffirmation of caste identity. From there, the narrative flows into the kitchen: the preparation of *dosa* (rice batter pancake) and the churning of curd in a mud pot with a rope-tied wooden whisk. As morning shifts into midday, vegetarian lunch is prepared and clothes are pressed in a heritage room using a brass iron box fuelled by coconut shell embers, and then shifted to her antique wooden *almirah*. With evening's arrival, the atmosphere transforms. Lamps are lit, prayers are offered, and the *bhasma kotta* (divine vessel) becomes the devotional centre. An elderly woman, seated on the floor, sways gently as she recites the *Ramayana*, a foundational Hindu epic. Through these orchestrated sequences, the vlog stages her embodied habitus in which caste-coded dispositions are naturalised and displayed, and translates inherited privilege into aestheticised content. These acts are framed not merely as routine but as carriers of cultural continuity, which romanticises women's domesticity as a moral and aesthetic ideal. Her embodied heritage constitutes a caste-inflected habitus, where domesticity is gendered and caste-coded, transformed into symbolic capital [86] and projected as a site of empowerment rather than drudgery.

This digitally staged performance not only aestheticises inherited caste privilege but also mediates how audiences encounter caste hierarchies. Even non-Brahmin audiences frequently express curiosity and fascination when engaging with the Brahmin lifeworld. Comments such as "It was truly fortunate to be able to see all this," "What a beautiful illam, such grandeur!" and "Thanks for recreating it. I have only heard about this lifestyle. Viewing it was an altogether different experience," illustrate how platform-mediated visibility enables audience to observe and reproduce caste-based hierarchies. The affective register of these comments — "fortunate," "grandeur," "altogether different experience" — signals aspirational spectatorship, an implicit acknowledgment of Brahmin authority and social privilege, enacted digitally under the guise of admiration/appreciation or curiosity. Similar sentiments proliferate in the comment sections: "I have always been curious about it after hearing about it in stories. Thank you for showing such a generous thamburaattii and her service before us", "This is a blessing to be able to live peacefully and in such places", and "The house, garden, everything is great to watch. I also wish to have this Ayurveda lifestyle." Crucially, one of the audience comment remarks, "I didn't know this is our real Kerala traditions." Here, it becomes evident that non-Brahmin audiences are not only interpreting caste codes as a pure and healthy lifestyle, but are also unveiling a more troubling dynamic in which Brahmin cultural life is decoded as the national/authentic culture of the state.

Furthermore, these vloggers actively manage audience reception, using disclaimers to navigate sensitive boundaries while enacting caste coding in their presentation and claims to authenticity, thereby shaping how their content is perceived and circulated on the platform. For instance, in one of Deepa's vlogs, she casually references the graded caste superiority and intra-caste divisions among Namboothiri Brahmins, immediately following this with a disclaimer that reflects her awareness of audience sensitivities in Kerala.

> "In the past, we used to distinguish whether someone was an 'aadyan' or 'aasyan.' These days, we do not adhere to such distinctions seriously. 'Aadyan' refers to a higher rank among Namboothiris, while 'aasyan' suggests a slightly lower position in the hierarchy. Just because I said this (laughing), please do not roast me. My YouTube channel is also viewed by people outside of the Namboothiri community. I mentioned this just to enlighten people from other communities."

This illustrates that the framing of caste cues is not incidental but intentional. Disclaimers serve as a rhetorical strategy to neutralise potential criticism while still embedding and circulating caste-coded knowledge. In doing so, such content not only popularises Brahmin

culinary repertoires but also normalises and makes caste hierarchies visible.

5.3 Motivations of the Creators: Popularising the Brahmin Menu Card

Observed food vloggers who explicitly self-identify as Brahmin women articulate distinct motivations for documenting the internal heterogeneity of Brahmin cuisines: correcting dominant sensory assumptions about Kerala cuisine by advocating for the Brahmin vegetarian menu, documenting intra-Brahmin diversity to expand what counts as a Brahmin vegetarian menu, as a form of cultural preservation recovering "forgotten" recipes, and transmitting intergenerational knowledge through the popularisation of the Brahmin menu card.

For Gayatri, her vlogs responds to what she perceives as a widespread Keralite view of Brahmin culinary traditions as "bland and uninteresting." In one of her videos, she explains:

> "I am introducing a Udupi style *palya*. This is temple style; I am drawing from Karnataka style. In Karnataka they don't add onion to dishes. Here [in Kerala], we have this understanding that only if there is onion, thoran will be tasty. I am introducing this video to change that belief — even without onion, *thoran* can be very delicious and tasty."

Among South Indian Brahmins, a section strictly observes the prohibition against consuming non-Sattvic foods, which are believed to stimulate passion or carnal energy. Consequently, their diet is light, subtle, and free from strong smells or flavours. In this context, Brahmin food vlogging functions as an ideological intervention, contesting the dominant sensory expectations associated with Kerala cuisine, which is otherwise renowned for its use of exotic spices.

Similarly, even when vloggers anticipate that their caste-specific vegetarian cuisines may not appeal to Keralite audience otherwise comfortable with meat, they aim to foreground the specificity of Brahmin subcaste culinary traditions. For instance, Greeshma showcases Konkani Brahmin dishes, reflecting the culinary heritage of her subcaste within the broader Brahmin community, which she perceives as marginalised in Kerala. She acknowledges that "the Konkani palate may be challenging for most people in Kerala, since the flavours here are typically richer in spices and masalas." Moreover, she notes that other Brahmin communities have a more prominent presence in Kerala's culinary landscape than her own Gaud Saraswat Brahmin community. Hence, her vlogging serves to foreground, preserve, and document the food practices and culinary repertoire of her subcaste.

Furthermore, a recurring concern among these vloggers is the younger Brahmin generation's disconnection from cultural roots, which they argue has led to the consumption of foods considered inadmissible within the community. For Asha, her motivation lies in recovering the "forgotten" recipes, and thereby preserving and ensuring the continuity of Brahmin culinary traditions. She asserts:

> "What I intend to do through this channel is that, among our Brahmin community itself, there are many tastes and foods we are forgetting. Some such traditional recipes, I am knowledgeable. Some of them were told to me by my grandmother and mother. I am trying to bring all those old culinary traditions back. We Brahmins do a lot of varieties — podi, rasam, sambar — there are different types. I am not trying to share new recipes; I am trying to build old tastes."

The effort to rebuild and preserve traditional tastes is appreciated both by the audience and the elder members of Brahmin community featured in the vlogs. In one of the vlogs, when a Brahmin woman vlogger featured her grandmother to share culinary knowledge, the grandmother expressed concern that "the current generation is disconnected and becoming unfamiliar with our [Brahmin food] traditions," while also appreciating her granddaughter's efforts to document and share Brahmin culinary knowledge that she feared might otherwise be lost. Similarly, another vlogger observes, "If we do not teach them, we cannot blame them for not knowing." She reflects self-critically on the modern urban lifestyle she leads, noting that "rushing to work and taking shortcuts with our food compromises tradition, which is not good."

These vloggers not only emphasised the recovery of "old tastes" but also sought to make vegetarian food and Brahmin cuisine legible in contemporary contexts, where ingredients, utensils, and kitchen equipment differ from those of the past. Their efforts often involved demonstrating how traditional recipes could be adapted to modern settings.

For instance, Vrindha emphasises:

> "Through my videos, my intention is to recreate old lifestyle and cooking techniques and visualise those memories for the new generation. I also try to present current food-cooking styles in traditional ways when I stay in the city."

Similarly, Gayatri says:

> "I am showing you Brahmin-style preparation. It's very easy to make. We do not need a huge preparation time. I am showing you tips to make it easy and fast."

She also later displayed her experimentation with new dishes, such as vegetarian fried rice and a range of snacks and lunch options titled "easy school, office lunchbox items." These efforts underscore how the vloggers attempt to adapt and hybridise culinary traditions in order to appeal to Brahmins navigating fast-paced urban lives, who they fear are increasingly drawn towards culinary cultures outside their caste. This reflects both the disruptions that urban living and expanded choices of neoliberal world for consumption have introduced into Brahmin lifeworlds, and the ways in which these creators seek to revamp and reconfigure caste norms and culinary traditions, making them feasible and resonant within a neoliberal society where older values and ways of living are increasingly perceived as redundant or difficult to sustain. Furthermore, given that many of these vloggers, some based in cities, showcase vegetarian quick lunches as part of their culinary experimentation, they also serve as a display of domestic management, teaching women in their community how to be good housewives. This is noteworthy, as audiences often respond to traditional vegetarian dishes by expressing the difficulty of navigating their household duties. For instance, two women audience noted, "I wish I could make homemade *rasam* powder, but these days it's hard to find time to do things in traditional ways." Similarly, another commented,

"Thanks for showing us the healthy recipes. *Kozhakkattai* feels easy. It is going into our lunchboxes." While the former viewer expressed guilt at not being traditional enough, the latter indicates how the recipes allow working women to participate in their culinary culture without the prohibitive time cost. These gendered anxieties about navigating modern-day contexts are caste-shaped, as historically caste-privileged women who stepped outside private spheres were perceived as losing honour [24, 105].

The Brahmin women vloggers we studied position themselves as cultural intermediaries, bridging intergenerational knowledge gaps while actively curating a repository of Brahmin culinary heritage. Through the mediation of digital platforms, they negotiate visibility, authority, and legitimacy for their caste-specific practices, consolidating cultural influence among community insiders while also familiarising a wider audience with their lifeworld.

6 Discussion

Our analysis traced how Kerala Brahmin food vlogs constitute a niche in which Brahmin food pedagogies are rendered legible, searchable, and durable on YouTube. In this section, we first map what the Brahmin women vloggers and their food pedagogies reveal, capturing Brahmin anxieties over mourning a lost way of life. We then read their formations as *'conservative caste enclaves'* and clarify how platform affordances and nichification help resignify caste traditions. We then reflect on "studying up" via digital ethnography — its affordances and reflexive challenges for researchers from marginalised positionalities — before turning to implications for HCI in contexts of nichification and extremist/unsafe publics, including the design of non-amplificatory research infrastructures and practices that support researcher safety and well-being.

6.1 Brahmin Anxieties and Food Pedagogy: Mourning a Lost Way of Life

Our findings show how Brahmin women food vloggers negotiate a perceived loss of symbolic space in contemporary Kerala. This sense of loss does not stem from any decline in their community's material wealth or social power, but from anxiety that their value systems and caste-determined cultural traditions are increasingly disregarded, even by members of their own community, and no longer command the deference they once held among caste-oppressed groups. These concerns align with trends identified in previous literature, particularly among caste-privileged groups in neoliberal cities, who are navigating a more deregulated caste life shaped by dietary changes, increasing meat consumption, and liberalised sexual norms [38, 74, 90]. Such disruptions far exceed what past generations have experienced and imagined, and unsettle those in Brahmin communities who seek to uphold caste traditions.

Within this context, the vloggers we study turn to YouTube as a site for reasserting Brahmin cultural authority. With an internalised sense of moral superiority and entitlement to caste privilege, they seek to socialise these values with a wider public, but notably without engaging in overt hate toward oppressed castes, rendering their cultural production a mutated form of caste reproduction. Their digital food pedagogies, then become a medium for popularising the Brahmin menu and associated caste traditions, educating younger generations about their roots, and also to circulate and normalise their yearning to reclaim respect for their caste traditions.

These dynamics relate to arguments made by Rudolph and Rudolph [131], and by Teltumbde [156, 157], who note that caste is not a vestige of an ancient past. Rather, it adapts and transforms to meet the needs of a modernising society, with the logic of caste shape-shifting in response to new socio-economic conditions. As our work demonstrates, caste persists and travels in pleomorphic forms, even leveraging the openings afforded by digital platforms and being actively reproduced through the agential work of Brahmins. The relationship between tradition and modernity is dialectical [131], and the realm of 'digital' is another arena where this interplay is enacted.

Our case must also be read alongside both extreme social violence such as mob lynching against meat-eaters [34, 146, 163] and more banal reassembling of social spaces, where caste-based solidarity and identity seek to establish or maintain social hegemony through new tactics and strategies.

6.2 The Conservative Caste Enclaves: The Politics of Cooking Caste

YouTube's platform affordances enable the formation of what we term 'conservative caste enclaves,' the digital clusters surfaced and curated through the cultural production of Brahmin women vloggers via the socio-technical process of nichification. Within these enclaves, caste-privileged actors articulate, archive, and circulate caste-coded visuals and texts, while partially insulating themselves from anti-caste normative frameworks legible in the broader public sphere. By meticulously embedding caste codes in video metadata and in the visual–textual staging of their vlogs, they translate the otherwise opaque sphere of the Brahmin lifeworld — or gentrified social spaces — into a digitally legible terrain [51], accessible both to members of their caste and to curious audiences beyond it.

6.2.1 Caste, Gender, and Nostalgia. 'Conservative caste enclaves,' coalesce around anxieties over the potentialities for egalitarian transformation set in motion by the Indian Constitution since 1950 which first abolished untouchability as a practice and subsequently, through affirmative action, offered modes of social mobility for those relegated to bare life for centuries prior to it. Furthermore, these digital enclaves mourning for a lost way of life that signals a perceived loss of power and control are also a response to how neoliberal transformation in the world over the last thirty to forty years have transformed social relations that have come at the cost of declining caste prestige for many erstwhile caste elites.

Notably, the vloggers signify vegetarianism as a marker of a healthy, disciplined, and pure lifestyle. They counter perceptions of it as "bland," recover "forgotten" cuisines, and introduce new dishes anchored in the vegetarian core yet suited to the fast-paced demands of urban life. In doing so, they aim to reclaim Brahmin community members who have drifted away from caste codes (e.g., reduced hesitation towards meat-eating), and to seek validation for their caste-based culinary traditions and nostalgia for a glorious past within Kerala's predominantly meat eating society.

Visual and narrative strategies further consolidate these conservative caste enclaves. Vloggers encode caste-inherited material excess within their visual frames of culinary practices, presenting

it through the aesthetics of seemingly innocent historical artefacts (e.g., heirloom utensils), architectural marvels (e.g., Brahmin homesteads) and divinity (e.g., sacred groves). These objects and spaces are imbued with hierarchical meaning while being stripped of aggressive rhetoric, rendering invisible the violent histories of caste oppression and agrestic slavery [97] that enabled these material accumulations. The success of this hegemonic project is evident in the aspirational spectatorship within these enclaves, where non-Brahmin audiences admire these displays of wealth and the traditional Brahmin way of life, thereby consenting to and participating in the reproduction of caste hegemony.

Gendered arrangements are central to this politics. Through these food vlogs, Brahmin women not only romanticise domestic labour, but also offer techniques for navigating the anxieties of modern temporality, such as suggesting "quick" vegetarian meals intended for working Brahmin women. Despite their own status as educated subjects, and in some cases employed, their content aligns with the argument that "while women's education is instrumental to Brahmins being 'modern,' it has not translated into the democratisation of gender relations within the household"[24]. Here, we observe how gender ideology serves to legitimise and sustain the everyday organisation of caste [105, 129, 130].

By blending ritual practice with food preparation, as seen in the case of *nonbu ada*, an offering made in the context of fasting observed by Brahmin women for their husbands, these videos reinforce and valorise gendered hierarchies and position women as the designated bearers of family and community honour [23, 129] whose embodied purity helps sustain caste boundaries. We observe a striking parallel with the TradWife movement in the West, which embraces traditional feminine roles as an expression of longing for a glorified White past [28]. In a similar manner, conservative femininities longing for an idealised past are aestheticised, repackaging exclusionary orthodoxy as a wholesome, disciplined, and aspirational lifestyle.

Crucially, these conservative caste enclaves are distinct from explicitly far-right or vigilante publics. Prior scholarship has characterised digital caste hate speech [16] as a spectrum, ranging from incitement to violence and dehumanisation to expressions of hatred, discriminatory speech, and the assertion of caste pride that reinforces the perceived inferiority of marginalised groups [102, 143]. Here, the focus is not on expressing prejudice or hate against an "other," nor on engaging with caste-oppressed groups. Instead, they circulate vegetarian cuisines and caste-coded domestic routines, bringing interior perspectives on identity into public conversation even as they consolidate social privilege and recast Brahmin life as the authentic cultural centre of Kerala. This positioning of their cultural production in a grey area makes it hard to counter them through either content moderation or counterspeech.

[16]Caste hate speech refers to "forms of communication, such as speech, writing, behaviours, codes, signs, or memes, that manifest hierarchies, invoke humiliation, serve to dehumanise, incite discrimination, degrade self-worth, or perpetuate caste-based inequality, and which are often sources of physical, mental, or material harm to individuals or groups based on caste identity [143]."

6.3 "Studying Up": Digital Ethnography as a Methodological Entry Point

We advance digital ethnography as a critical entry point, enabling researchers from marginalised positionalities to study the privileged by providing access to lifeworlds and practices otherwise restricted by entrenched power hierarchies and exclusive social geographies[17] — such as Brahmin agraharams or homesteads, which have historically been socially conservative, restricted to their community, and considered polluted if entered by caste-oppressed individuals, with violations historically punishable. For most qualitative methods, the researcher's positionality is inseparable from the power/knowledge relations that configure what can be observed, documented, and interpreted within these fields. Digital ethnography allows researchers from marginalised positionalities (such as caste-oppressed groups) to bypass challenges in establishing rapport with privileged participants — even when they are not hostile — that arise from social positionality, the impossibility of blending in, fears of not being taken seriously, or the discomfort of entering spaces historically designed to exclude them. In comparable contexts, past studies have observed that researchers of colour or women researchers have historically faced difficulties studying far-right white or male-dominated spaces, which are often hostile or exclusionary and impose the added burden of constant vigilance over how their presence is monitored, documented, and perceived [56, 126]. It also creates an auditable record of socio-technical practices (for e.g., titles, tags, descriptions, comments, staging) through which privilege is enacted, while reducing/mitigating the need to rely on privileged communities' self-disclosure. Furthermore, the invisibility of researcher in digital ethnography also constrains the ability of powerful gatekeepers to suppress investigations.

In the context of caste, digital ethnography enables a political act of resistance for caste-oppressed researchers, whose "experience-near" accounts are often dismissed as emotional, descriptive-empirical, or polemical [53] or deemed insufficiently objective. While "experience-distant" perspectives are often inaccessible to them, caste-privileged researchers can access both social worlds [160, 161], making this method crucial for attending such epistemic asymmetries. This study also enabled us to anchor critical caste and technology scholarship beyond "victim narratives" and the vulnerabilities of caste-oppressed groups, toward examining the mechanisms and logics through which caste operates among caste-privileged groups [123], particularly as they unfold in digital spaces. Hence, for researchers from marginalised communities, digital ethnography provides a toolkit for examining cultural and organisational settings of the privileged, especially as social life becomes increasingly mediated through digital platforms, and helps navigate challenges related to safety, access, power dynamics, and other forms of potential harm that may constrain research aimed at "studying up."

6.3.1 Reflexive Challenges of "Studying Up". We want to stress that the goal of "studying up" is to excavate the workings of power [132] — as Priyadarshini [122] argues, "rather than take an adversarial or oppositional stance to power ... take an inquisitorial stance."

[17]Access to privileged lifeworlds as they unfold in closed digital enclaves, such as Brahmin-vetted Facebook groups, can still be challenging.

Reflexivity, in this context, then becomes a means of mapping power as it unfolds, and accounts for how our own orientations contour the research. Ethnographers have argued at length that that our intersubjective positionalities continuously trouble neat binaries of privilege and oppression. Both the researchers and the researched can simultaneously hold privilege and be vulnerable [116].

Further, given the objective of excavating power, how then does "studying up" align with justice-oriented field methods? Given that digital ethnography, by its very nature, will rarely disrupt platforms flows; rather, it can inadvertently amplify existing content by incrementing the views counter, making us complicit. Following Becker and Aiello [12], we argue that this means thoughtfully calibrating our decisions so that mapping power does not lead us into reproducing it. We argue how this is particularly important as we, as researchers, use these methods seek to reveal unsafe/hidden spaces of extremism, as we discuss in the next section.

6.4 Methodological Implications for Digital Research

Within HCI, CSCW, and critical caste and computing, calls for caste-informed content moderation have been forcefully articulated [3, 80, 102, 143], yet methodological reflection on how to study platforms in caste-just ways has received comparatively less attention. Our work suggests that "studying up" privileged communities requires methodological designs that centre structural power — for example, not treating vlogs and other digital artefacts as neutral "user-generated content." Instead, these artefacts should be treated as sites where caste hierarchies and other relations of domination are actively reproduced, and allowing this orientation to shape methodological choices around sampling, analytical focus, and interpretive frames. Although our empirical case concerns caste and food, this approach is transferable to other contexts in which structurally advantaged actors use digital media to consolidate authority or legitimise exclusion. Similar studies might, for instance, design inclusion and exclusion criteria that explicitly highlight already-visible privileged groups, and treat apparently mundane content and everyday platform practices as primary sites where power is normalised and hierarchies are made to appear ordinary.

Treating "studying up" as a methodological contribution also opens a design agenda for research infrastructures and tools. Platforms, such as YouTube, may have little incentive to constrain privileged publics or support critical inquiry into their practices. Therefore, methodological innovation cannot rely on platform cooperation alone. Instead, we call for researcher-facing tools that make it easier to "study up" while minimising amplification of harmful content. Examples include capture or archival tools that can allow researchers to work with cached videos, transcripts, social media posts, comments and other public data without repeated engagement. Designing such non-amplificatory research tools positions HCI and digital research not only as designers and analysts of sociotechnical systems, but also taking our own role in reproducing or resisting power more seriously. We elaborate on two facets of a research agenda in relation to digital ethnography that engages with nichified and extremist publics and centring harm and researcher well-being in such work.

6.4.1 Digital Ethnography, Nichification, and Extremism. Digital ethnography is valuable not only for examining privileged communities but also for engaging the broader spectrum of far-right and extremist actors. It enables researchers to access unsafe or hidden spaces, uncover underlying motivations, and trace the sociotechnical practices through which these groups organise, propagate ideology, and leverage digital platforms. In HCI and CSCW, past studies have focused on documenting the harmful activities of such actors, including racism, misogyny, and harassment, with an emphasis on how computational systems can detect or remediate these harms [93, 109, 114]. For the critical computing community, it would be valuable to understand how these communities are formed, sustained, and made attractive, including in contexts often considered unsafe for researchers, or avoided to preserve researchers' moral hygiene [10].

Here, "studying up" via digital ethnography offers a way to trace how nichification and platform logics are appropriated to build publics that produce conditions of oppression for marginalised groups, such as racially oppressed and caste-oppressed populations, while possibly allowing marginalised researchers to remain invisible [83, 85]. Instead of focusing on only overt expressions of hate, such work can attend to how these cultures are normalised through everyday practices, aesthetic choices, and platform affordances. In doing so, it can inform strategies for dismantling privilege [135], confronting power asymmetries, and fostering more egalitarian and socially just socio-technical arrangements.

6.4.2 Digital Ethnography and Harm. At the same time, researchers themselves can become targets of harm, particularly when engaging with politically sensitive or controversial topics, which may shift across time and context — for example, extremism, LGBTQ+ issues, reproductive justice, climate change, and critical race theory [37, 117]. Researcher well-being is frequently neglected in the consideration of ethical review protocols and institutional risk assessments [173]. In this context, the Association of Internet Researchers has developed guidelines on "risky research," defined as work that can expose researchers to harm from external actors, including states, technology companies, anti-intellectual communities and far-right groups [5]. Such harm may manifest as harassment, physical or mental health impacts, privacy violations, online security breaches, doxxing, trolling, job loss, or reputational damage [26, 94, 173].

Digital ethnography also entails affective harms that accrue through routine exposure to graphic content and to discourses that target the researcher's own identities or to nostalgic idealisations of exclusionary pasts. These harms are unevenly distributed, as nichified publics often organise around identity-based antagonism, making researchers from marginalised communities especially vulnerable. However, such risks do not negate the political value of "studying up," rather, they highlight the need to design this work in ways that make research sustainable by centring researcher well-being and embedding protective practices into methodological design. Beyond non-amplificatory research tools, this might also be around planning for digital security and psychosocial support. Careful planning around traceability and identifiability, and collective practices of care within research teams are not ancillary to digital ethnography — these considerations are integral for making

the "studying up" possible, and so critical examinations of power in socio-technical systems do not themselves lead to harm.

7 Conclusion and Future Directions

"Studying up" is critical for the HCI and CSCW community. It lays the groundwork for dismantling privilege, confronting the evolving structures of power that sustain it, and shaping just futures. By examining Brahmin food vloggers in Kerala, through digital ethnography, we show how YouTube has become a site for constituting conservative caste enclaves, where caste codes are enacted through the socio-technical practices of nichification to articulate, archive, preserve, and circulate the "glory" of caste traditions. These enclaves are emerging in response to anxieties regarding the potential for egalitarian transformation set in motion by the radical possibilities of fraternity enshrined in the Indian Constitution eight decades ago [39]. This transformation initially abolished untouchability as a practice and subsequently introduced affirmative action, providing modes of social mobility for the vast majority of Indians who had been relegated to abject poverty and extreme oppression for centuries prior to 1950. Secondly, these digital enclaves, which mourn a lost way of life and signal a perceived loss of power and control, are also a response to how neoliberal transformation has wrought/reshaped social relations among different caste groups over the past three to four decades. Although still limited, there has been a nominal increase in inter-caste relationships and marriages, but this has come at the expense of declining caste prestige for many former caste elites. By situating caste as a key axis of privilege and social stratification, our study extends the justice-oriented computing scholarship of HCI and CSCW beyond its focus on marginality.

Methodologically, we advance digital ethnography as a critical entry point for studying elite and exclusionary publics on digital platforms such as YouTube, where access is relatively open and does not require formal vetting [58]. For researchers from marginalised positionalities, digital ethnography opens access to otherwise restricted lifeworlds. As our study implies, "studying up" also requires recognising the uneven risks and vulnerabilities that researchers themselves face, shaped by their positionalities [58]. We also emphasise that using social media to advocate a return to tradition is not unique to the Brahmin food vloggers examined here. Future research could investigate how such conservative aesthetics travel transnationally, as well as how intra-caste hierarchies operate within these enclaves and shape the wider Hindu audience.

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