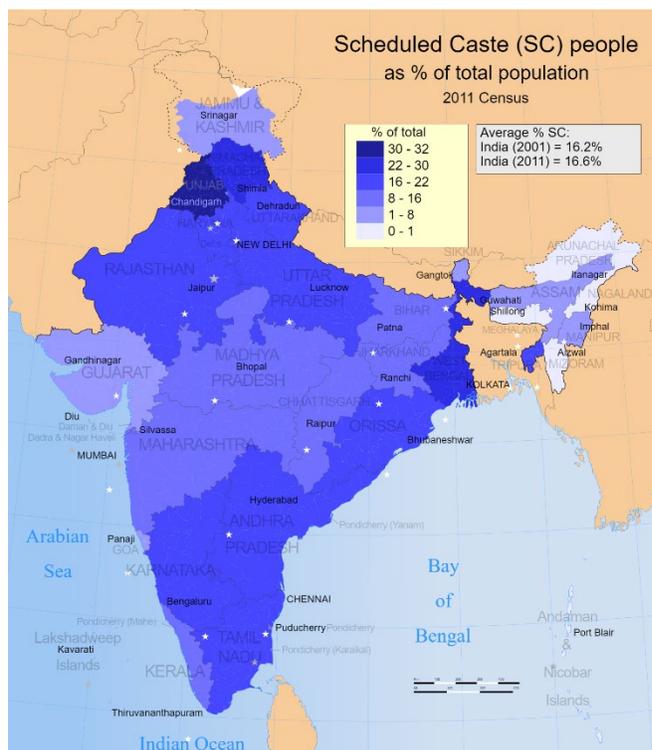


## FARF's attempts to uplift the Musahars, the poorest Dalits



All developing countries struggle with issues of socio-economic inequality, and often invest huge resources to rise against this vicious divide. The Indian constitution, to mitigate this evil, has special schemes and policies which favor scheduled castes (16.6%)<sup>1</sup> and tribes(8.6%)<sup>2</sup>. These are the defined group of people who have historically suffered from extreme social and economic disparities, with reasons rooted in multiple factors including, but not limited to a) geographic isolation, b) untouchability (now illegal), c) familial poverty, and d) caste discrimination. For much of the period of British rule in the Indian subcontinent, they were known as the Depressed Classes<sup>3</sup>.

Since Independence, special efforts have been made to safeguard the interests of this section of our society, both from Central and State governments. Examples of such laws include the Untouchability Practices Act, 1955, Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989, The Employment of Manual Scavengers and Construction of Dry Latrines (Prohibition) Act, 1993, etc. Despite legislation, social discrimination and atrocities against the backward castes continued to persist.<sup>4</sup>

20% or 35 million of the total Scheduled Caste population reside in Uttar Pradesh, the state where FARF operates. Here, FARF works on different levels of governance,

- a) Awareness: making people aware of the various government schemes in place,
- b) Accessibility: making those schemes accessible by helping people with relevant paperwork, and filing of the same
- c) Direct aid: funding different educational, health, and agricultural focused programs for the young (school students), and the old.

<sup>1</sup> 2011 Census; Scheduled Castes represent 8.6% of India's population

<sup>2</sup> 2011 Census; Scheduled Tribes represent 8.6% of India's population

<sup>3</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Scheduled\\_Castes\\_and\\_Scheduled\\_Tribes](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Scheduled_Castes_and_Scheduled_Tribes)

<sup>4</sup> Sengupta, Chandan (2013). Democracy, Development, and Decentralization in India: Continuing Debates. Routledge. p. 23. ISBN 978-1136198489.



## The Musahars<sup>5</sup>

One such group of people, which FARF is directly working with, are the Musahars, possibly the "poorest community" in India. "They are the poorest amongst the poorest and rarely hear about or get access to government schemes," said Ms Sudha Varghese, who spent three-decades working among Musahars in the northern state of Bihar, where most live and survive as dollar-a-day labourers.<sup>6</sup>

The motivation behind this directed effort is the motivation of this community itself. Despite centuries of ostracization and poverty, they do understand the power which education can bring to their kids, and their future generations. When FARF's team interacted with ~40 of the kids who reside in the small town of Bhadohi, all they felt was a deep desire to study.



*File photo from FARF team's visit to Mahuapur, Bhadohi, October 2019*

<sup>5</sup> <https://peoplegroupsindia.com/profiles/musahar/>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.straitstimes.com/asia/south-asia/the-rat-eaters-of-india>

However, despite the strong will, many of these families have strong reasons against sending their kids to government schools. **The biggest challenges** cited were:

- a) huge transportation costs (village being far away from government school),
- b) the fear of kids being run over by the train due to the railway line crossing,
- c) opportunity cost of education (Rs 450/day)

To address these concerns, while also providing free-accessible education to these kids, FARF is working to hire special instructors and tutors for both kids and parents. The idea is to educate the parents about the long-term benefits of education, facilitate transportation to school, and fund education-costs such as books, uniform and stationary.

The current target is to start this service from April 2020, and encourage student enrolment from this section in nearby government schools.

For more information, you can read this report: <http://farf.in/farf/wordpress-4.8/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/Education-Schedule-Tribe-in-School.pdf>

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