

# Building Blocks of a Digital Caste Panopticon: Everyday Brahminical Policing in India

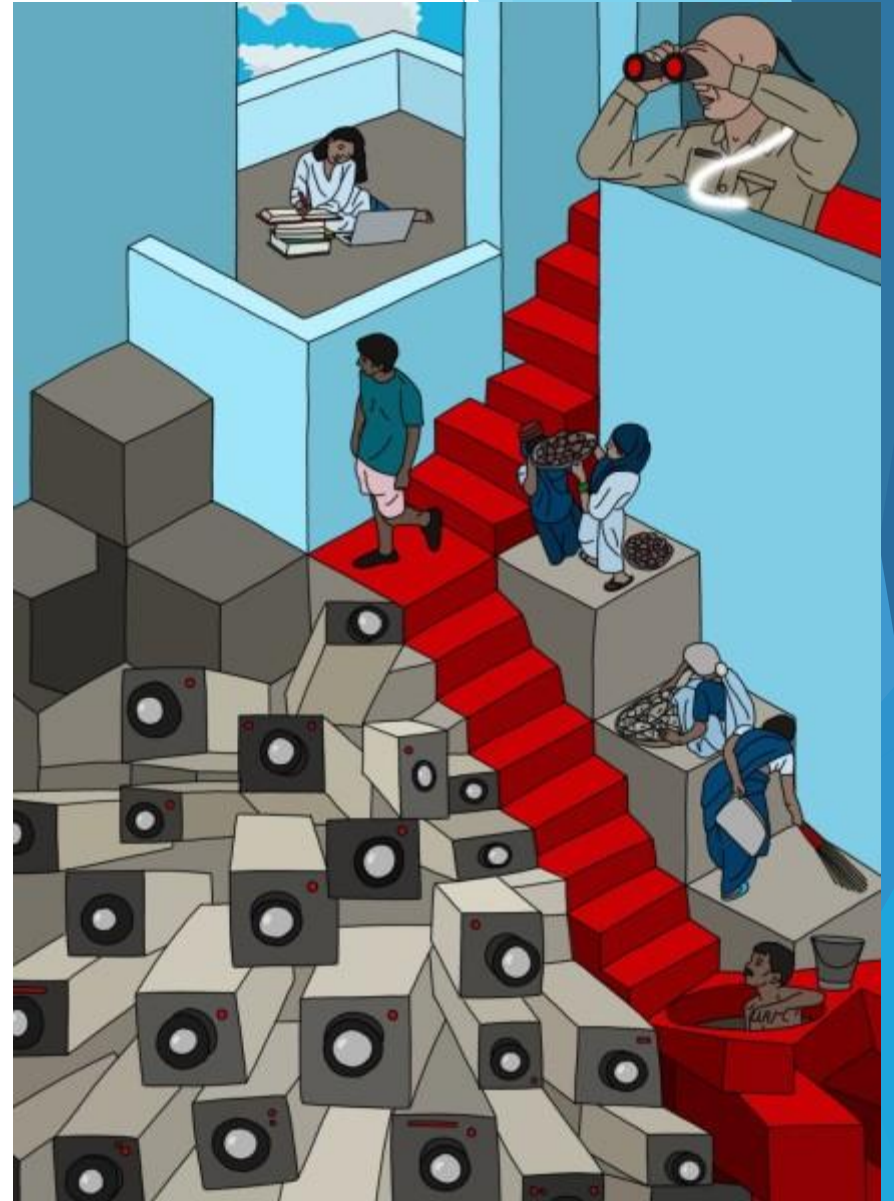


Illustration Credits –  
Siddhesh Gautam

# Central Argument

- ▶ The argument centers around the confluence of colonialism and caste in Telangana's growing digitization of policing, labeled as "Brahminical policing," imposing a caste hierarchy with eugenic tenets beyond public spaces into marginalized communities' everyday lives.
- ▶ The analysis challenges the notion of castelessness in religion, advocating for an anti-caste framework to address policing questions in the Indian subcontinent and potentially beyond.

# Hyderabad: Neoliberal Silicon Valley

- ▶ In August 2022, Telangana completed a state-of-the-art policing and surveillance headquarters in Hyderabad, named the Integrated Control and Command Centre after the NYPD 1 police plaza.
- ▶ Telangana's Command Centre, established in 2014, aimed to attract foreign investment by transforming Hyderabad into a "Silicon Valley" through significant changes in the policing system, positioning it as a hub for informational growth and ensuring safety for foreign investments.
- ▶ The digitization of policing is seen as solidifying the convergence of colonialism and caste, with a focus on the casteist digital datafication of marginalized bodies.
- ▶ The term "Brahminical policing" is used to describe an ideology that positions Brahmins as the epitome of purity in the caste hierarchy, incorporating eugenic tenets of colonialism.

# Caste-ing Criminalization of Muslims in Hyderabad



\*Additionally, the Nizam ruled state of Hyderabad promulgated a discrete regulation called the Lambada Dustur-ul-Amal due to the colonial government's pressure.

- ▶ Despite Hyderabad's rich Muslim culture, over 81% of Muslims in Telangana are socially and educationally backward. Caste influences Islam; the British colonial administration institutionalized caste-based policing.
- ▶ The Criminal Tribes Act, 1871, labeled certain tribes as "criminal." Despite Hyderabad being a princely state, it promulgated its version in 1896, targeting nomadic tribes.
- ▶ The act aimed to surveil, resettle, and sedentarize nomadic tribes, employing discriminatory measures.
- ▶ In 1952, India repealed the act, but surveillance continued, especially after the Nizam's resistance in 1948.

# The curious case of Habitual Offenders

- ▶ The Habitual Offenders Act, 1962, continues the surveillance legacy of the Criminal Tribes Act, marking individuals based on convictions and extending registration periods.
- ▶ A police station in Hyderabad extensively surveils "habitual offenders," restricting their mobility and even sending them to corrective settlements.
- ▶ Police manuals expand and refine surveillance methods, creating documents like "Suspect sheets" and "History sheets" to classify individuals, perpetuating caste-based constructions of criminality.
- ▶ Surveillance encompasses details of physical and behavioral traits, family members, and associates, creating databases shared extensively within the police hierarchy and even at the national level.
- ▶ The Telangana government's 2018 Comprehensive Criminal Survey collected fingerprints, photos, and family details, even including acquitted individuals. The recent Criminal Procedure Identification Act, 2022, allows federal storage and sharing of this data for seventy-five years.



# Data Driven Policing

- ▶ The extensive surveillance history can now be accessed through phone numbers, state-issued IDs, and national biometric databases like **Aadhar**, developed by **WinC** and **Tecdatum**.
- ▶ Concerns arise as these companies, with relatively unknown backgrounds, were awarded contracts to build state surveillance architecture based on technologies from Singapore, New York, and Israel.
- ▶ In Hyderabad, the **T-S Cop** portal acts as a fulcrum for the creation of these “**criminal hotspots**.”
- ▶ The **Dragnet** app is designed to compile informant tips, especially those related to "sensitive" individuals, organizations, rallies, and meetings. This app is exclusive to Special Branch officers, aggregates and analyzes tips for tracking movements, associations, and threat levels.



# Hotspots of Criminality

- ▶ The KiteEye software system geotags distress calls, accidents, and incidents, tracking police officers' patrol vehicles using GPS chips.
- ▶ Utilizing a Geographic Information System (GIS), it breaks down data points like patrolling and incident categories, generating reports on "crime hotspots" and mapping "repeat offenders."
- ▶ The software collates patrol data against crime occurrence, creating maps to assess patrol frequencies in areas with frequent distress calls.
- ▶ This digitization of policing, grounded in caste logic, stigmatizes DNT communities by attributing criminality to the physical spaces they inhabit, affecting their access to public spaces.

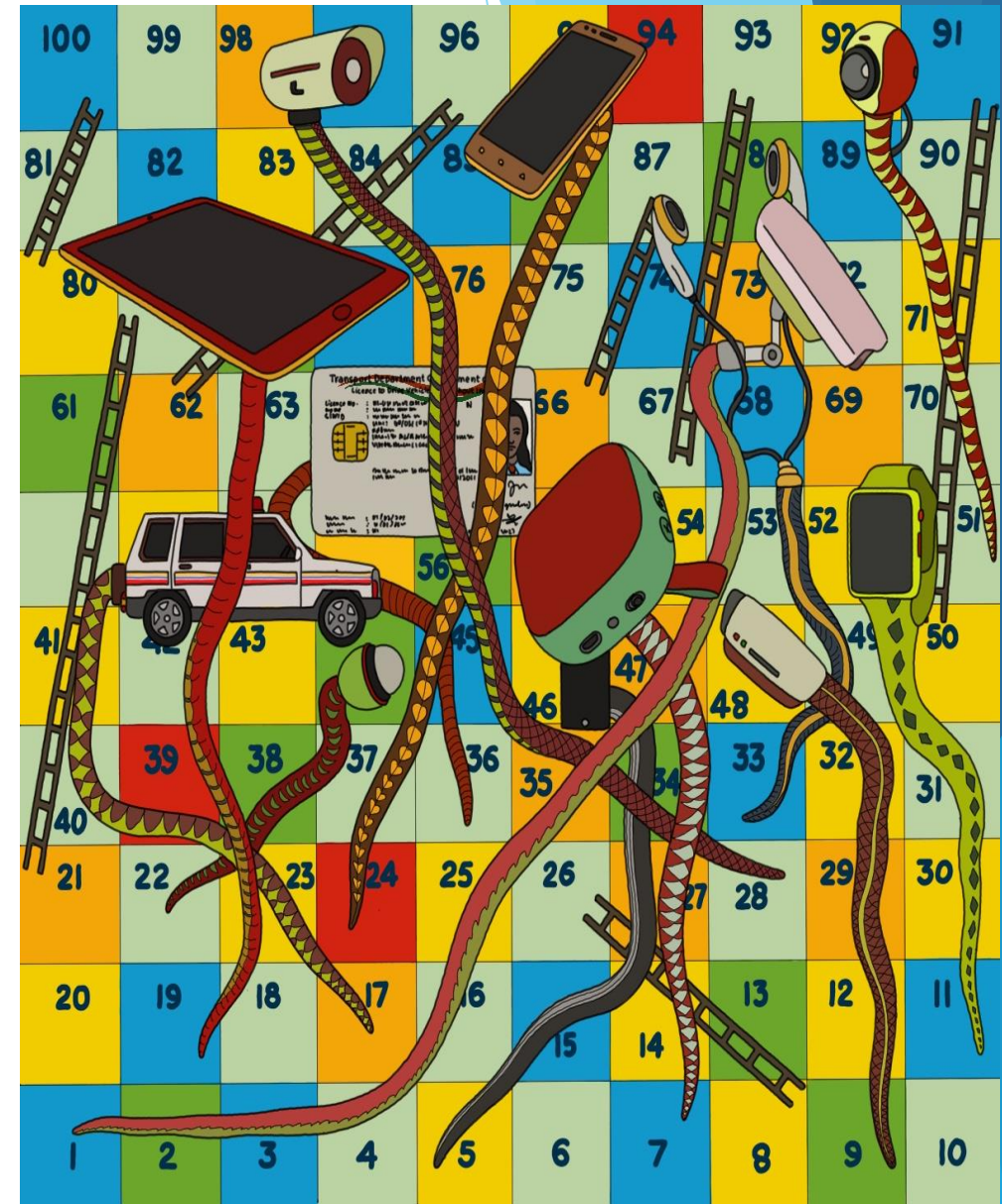


Illustration Credits –  
Siddhesh Gautam



# Unify and Punish

## CCTNS

- ▶ In 2009, India's federal government introduced the Crime and Criminals Tracking System (CCTNS) as a nationwide IT-based networked infrastructure for police stations.
- ▶ The plan aimed to be implemented by 2013 but faced delays, extending into 2017.
- ▶ The CCTNS, launched to centralize crime data like arrest records and charge sheets nationwide, aims to enhance criminal investigations and crime prevention.
- ▶ In addition to traditional crime data, larger centralized repositories for fingerprints and facial recognition databases are being populated and linked within the CCTNS database.

## ICJS

- ▶ The Interoperable Criminal Justice System (ICJS) has emerged as a concern alongside the CCTNS, connecting e-courts, e-prisons, forensics labs, and the CCTNS.
- ▶ Unlike simple interlinking, the ICJS extends its reach beyond the police department, raising new considerations about the scale and implications of predictive policing.

# Conclusion

- ▶ Digital data-aided policing in India encodes casteist carceral spatiality by identifying "criminal spaces" through hotspots and predictive policing, expanding carcerality beyond designated institutions.
- ▶ The article emphasizes that carcerality in India is historically and currently synonymous with the Brahminical caste order, urging recognition of this link to accurately address and challenge the digital caste panopticon emerging from everyday digitized criminalization.

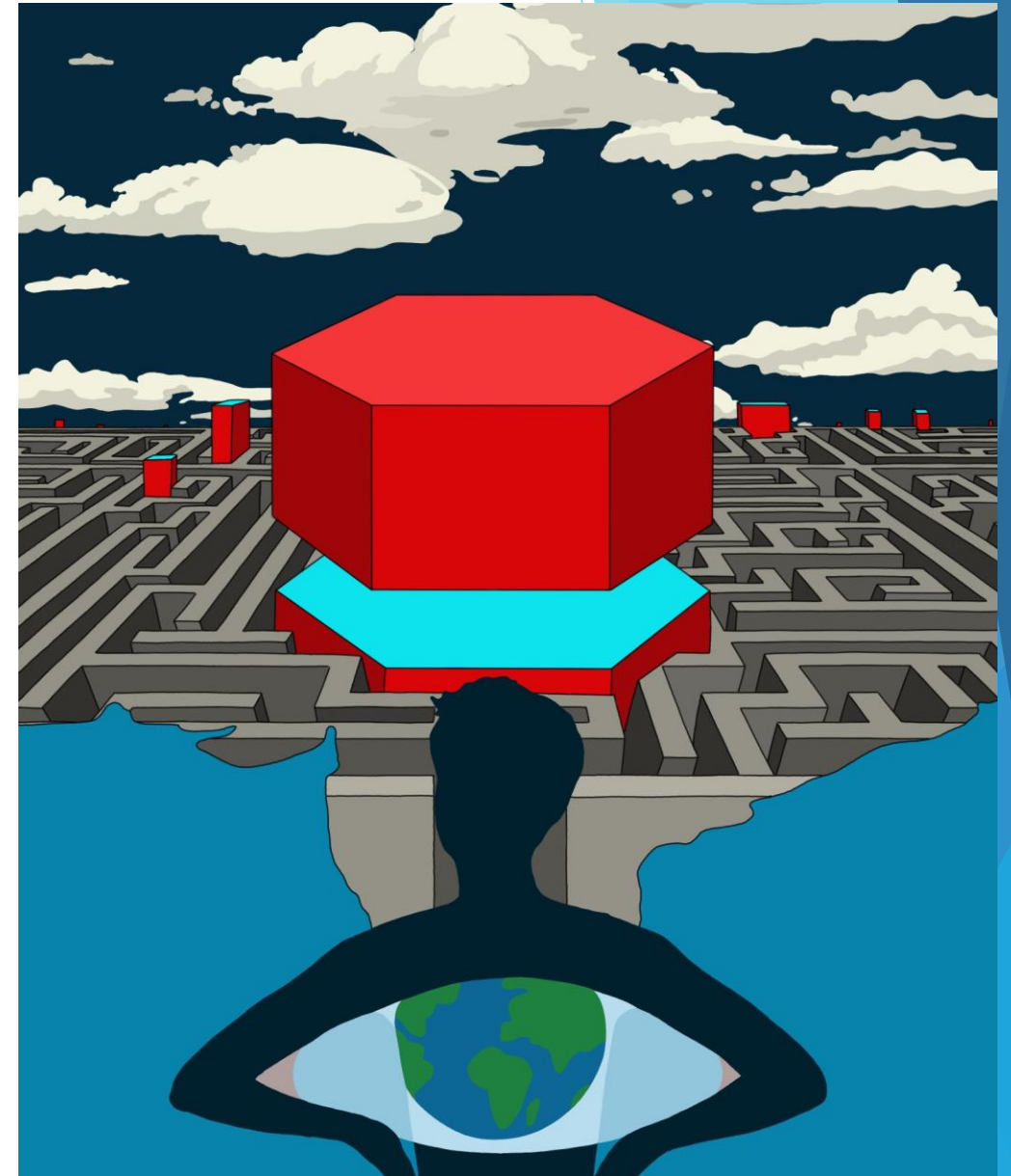


Illustration Credits –  
Siddhesh Gautam

# Credits

- ▶ **Building Blocks of a Digital Caste Panopticon: Everyday Brahminical Policing in India** by Nikita Sonavane, Mrinalini R, Aditya Rawat, Ramani Mohanakrishnan and Vikas Yadav.
- ▶ Link - <https://logicmag.io/policy/building-blocks-of-a-digital-caste-panopticon-everyday-brahminical-policing/>
- ▶ Illustration - **Siddhesh Gautam (@bakeryprasad)**
- ▶ Presentation - **Himanshu Mehra**