The Development Paradox: The Globalization of Education and its Effect on Culture and Poverty in India

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“The fate of empires depends upon the education of the youth.”
-Aristotle

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INTRODUCTION

This study sought to explore interconnections between education, poverty, and culture in the context of modern globalization as an attempt to establish a causal relationship between modern development and cultural marginalization. In doing so the study observed the formation of the global knowledge economy, rooted in neoliberal ideology, and how the globalization of this modern development orthodoxy has resulted in widespread cultural marginalization.

Education has become a formally recognized strategy for poverty alleviation due to its potential to increase human capital production and therefore contribute to overall economic growth. Within the context of the modern development paradigm, educational institutions serve to perpetuate dominant western values through the diffusion of modern knowledge systems. This results in a mismatch between the conceptualization of development and progress and alternative knowledge systems that do not adhere to the globalized value systems emphasizing economic growth. This mismatch has lead to what is referred to here as the development paradox: within the context of globalization, development strategies targeting poverty alleviation overlook localized social and economic factors that not only contribute to a population’s socio-economic status but also define and give meaning to alternative ways of life. Therefore, the modern development model, as is imposed and perpetuated through the processes of globalization, effectively isolates and marginalizes populations that do not conform to western values and ideologies, leaving these groups at an economic disadvantage and invalidating localized cultural experience.

India’s colonial history has rendered the country more susceptible to this type of globalized cultural imperialism. For a country with such enormous cultural, social, linguistic and economic diversity, as well as one with a very high poverty head count ratio, the development
paradox inherent in the modern global economic system has serious implications for both the country’s large impoverished population as well as for the integrity of its cultural diversity. The study explores the experience of Indian *Adivasis*, or indigenous populations, within this context of globalized modernity, to evince the realities of the cultural and economic marginalization that has come to define modern development.
PART ONE: THE INCEPTION OF MODERNITY

Globalization, Development Policy and the Global Development Paradigm

The modern age of development began in the post-World War II era with a shift towards targeted poverty alleviation strategies gaining prevalence within the development discourse (Buarque 220). Global poverty in the modern sense was defined by the spread of capitalism and the market economy, leading to the construction of the “underdeveloped” economy and the conception of the Third World (Escobar, 18–23). It was within this context that poverty became an organizational category, to which the modern concept of development was applied with the intention of extending the features of “advanced” society onto a global framework (Escobar, 4).

The economic conception of mass poverty was fueled by the belief that poverty, representing the opposite of development, was a threat to both economically deficient societies as well as the modern world (Escobar, 3). This lead to the rapid and globalized spread of industrialization, urbanization, and agricultural technology with the intent of increasing material production and consumption in order to raise living standards within the impoverished societies of the world. The western conceptions of capitalism and modernity were thus extended to underdeveloped societies on a global scale in order to inculcate the modern goals of material prosperity and economic advancement (Escobar, 4). In this way the modernization of poverty inflicted new mechanisms of control, transforming the poor into the “assisted”, resulting in the production of the Third World as a modern concept. The nature of the conception of the Third World within the globalization of poverty meant that it was inevitably defined by its poverty status, and therefore in need of economic growth as the solution to this condition.

Modernity as a concept was derived from capitalist economic theory that equated continuous expansion, improvement, and progress with development (Dale & Roberstson, 112),
framing development as a self-evident and necessary process to achieve poverty reduction (Escobar, 24). The rise of capitalism within this framework consequently conceptualized wealth in terms of quantitative economic values, specifically annual income and consumption per capita and material accumulation. These measures became standardized in national and international institutions and were similarly applied to poverty alleviation strategies without exclusion. Within this context the World Bank further quantified the condition of poverty with the definition of the poverty line threshold (Buarque, 220). However, economic approaches to poverty alleviation did not result in increased income distribution as modern development theory posited – rather, this period of development resulted in economic stagnation and increased income concentration within the highest income brackets (Emmerij, 4).

The failure of economic-driven poverty reduction lead to the incorporation of more humanities-based approaches within modern development discourse. The late 19th century was defined by a global shift towards more human needs based approaches to facilitate poverty relief, emphasizing not only economic growth but increased distribution of the benefits of such growth (Escobar, 5). This transition marked a paradigm shift within the discourse of development theory in the establishment and diffusion of neoliberal economic policies focusing on privatization and liberalization. The new hegemony of neoliberalism based on the principles of economic globalization came to define development in terms of western standards of growth and progress (Emmerij, 1, 4). As the new development orthodoxy became manifest in international institutions of governance, an asymmetry of power and political relations developed between developed and categorically underdeveloped countries, resulting in Third World capacity for successful internal governance becoming contingent upon and defined by participation in the global capitalist system (Emmerij, 3). Such an approach to poverty alleviation operated on the implicit
assumption that western standards should serve as the standard with which the economic, political, and social statuses of Third World minorities should be measured (Escobar, 5). As such, the dominance of this development worldview increasingly penetrated and transformed the economic, social, and cultural structure of Third World societies (Escobar, 18), which both standardized western influences within the system and also fundamentally changed the role of the state both nationally and internationally within this new world order (Emmerij, 9).

Development based on globalization imbued the principles and norms of the larger global culture within international organizations preoccupied with development such as the World Bank, the OECD, and UNESCO. These institutions came to be seen as emissaries of a globalized culture, allowing them to further perpetuate the western superiority inherent in the system (Dale, 443). At the turn of the century, the establishment of the Millennium Development Goals named poverty alleviation as the highest priority for development in the new millennium (Carr, 729). This framework redefined poverty in terms of a population’s access to essential goods and services, where previously it had been defined by purely quantitative economic measures. In this way, poverty came to be seen as indicative of the level of inclusion in modern society (Buarque, 222). By employing such targeted poverty alleviation strategies, states and their institutions submitted to the influence of the westernized orthodoxy advocating the spread of neoliberalism as the dominant form of capitalism (Bloom, 113). State activity and policy became informed by universally accepted norms centering on progress as being representative of development, and these in turn contributed to gradual cultural homogenization on a global scale that had been initiated by globalization. Development based on western organizational structures and institutions has thus devolved into ubiquitous cultural prescription adhering to the larger neoliberal economic theories embedded in global development discourse (Dale, 427-430).
**Education in the Context of Globalization: Perspectives on Culture and Poverty**

Development of the modern state in the era of globalization seeks to maximize both individual equality and collective progress, as is dictated by the international neoliberal agenda. Within this context, education takes a central role in the achievement of human development as the overarching goal of modern development processes (Bloom, 71). Education has come to be viewed as a vital means of development and the extension of economic growth, leading to the global spread of homogenous educational expansion as a means of poverty alleviation (Dale & Robertstson, 116). Modern development discourse construes education as both a fundamental right and a means through which to escape poverty; educated individuals (in the formal sense) are more likely to find employment, as well as hold more lucrative positions within the formal employment sector. Education makes an individual more likely to maintain a higher quality lifestyle and to demand adequate political representation (King, 355). These pursuits are designated facets of modern society, which implies that participation in formal education, as designed and informed by the globalized capitalist system, leads to a more productive and equitable society through contribution from an educated public. As national governments began to stress the importance of economic development and employment in contribution to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals, education came to be seen as an acceptable, if not ideal, means through which to promote both human and economic development (King, 355).

Globalization has increased the importance of education within the new global development paradigm as it relates to success in the global economy. Increased competitiveness, as a product of the capitalist system, means that success within this context is directly correlated with educational attainment (Bloom, 72). Education enables students to be more efficient and
productive within the increasingly competitive global economy as human capital inputs, ultimately contributing to increased productivity fueling national and international development within the conception of progress (Bloom, 68). This is based on the international imperative that increased production, as indicative of economic growth, is achieved through the cultivation and dissemination of modern scientific and technical knowledge (Escobar, 3). Globalization has created a knowledge economy wherein the capacity for rapid adaptation, comprehension and innovation are valued as modern skills which raise the threshold for economic mobility. In this way the creation of the knowledge economy defined both the role of education as a catalyst for development, through the creation of relevant human capital, and as a mechanism of poverty alleviation, by facilitating economic mobility. This conceptualization therefore asserts that the lack of these modern skills restricts development (King, 352), implying that without education employment within the modern global economy is inaccessible and poverty reduction goals are unattainable.

The rising threshold for economic mobility through education has been accompanied by a shift in values based on the global development paradigm. Social capital fostered within the formal education system has transcended into the knowledge economy, making the expansion of education requisite for greater development within the global capitalist economy (King, 350). However, development goals influencing policies emphasizing educational expansion have in fact exacerbated economic differences both within and between countries. Global income inequality is now mirrored by global inequality of education, leading to growing differences between the rich and poor as education expansion further marginalizes the poor and uneducated (Bloom, 62).
Global support of educational expansion is supported by the assumption that poverty reduction is both contingent upon and synonymous with increased levels of economic growth (King, 350). However, the formal education system provides skills that are applicable within the modern formal economy. This puts pressure on schools, especially in poor or “underdeveloped” countries, to conform to the values and needs of the labor market within the formal sector. Resulting educational homogenization on such a global scale therefore results in the reduction of individual and social benefits that education should provide (Colclough, 586). The expansion and domination of western ideologies within the global capitalist system framed modernity as the expansion of possibilities and choices. Education therefore became the foundation of such new possibilities, while subsequently destroying old routes of knowledge acquisition. This transition initiated the conception and universalization of “legitimate” forms of knowledge and knowledge accession based on the modern western neoliberal hegemony. As such, modern formal education is responsible for perpetuating this hegemony of ideology and reproducing the underlying western social and political imaginaries (Baker, 2). Educational expansion thus established western modernity as the universal standard of civilization, becoming the metric through which all other cultures are validated and legitimated (Baker, 1). As a result, conformation of and assimilation within this western values framework has become essential for successful educational and occupational advancement, economic growth, and ultimately poverty reduction.

Through the processes of globalization education has become both a feature and agent of the values and norms of modernity (Dale & Roberstson, 116). Modern, western education institutions both produce and are products of the western conception of modernity. As mass educational diffusion has increased in the 20th century, such institutions have become agents of western reformation and management of modern economic and political organizations on a
global scale (Baker, 3). Modern education now forms the foundation of the principles and practices which govern political, economic and cultural spheres worldwide, which subjects the recipients of educational expansion and reform to the dominance of western values. As a result, modern educational institutions reproduce decontextualized knowledge within the assumed interpretive framework of modernity (Baker, 3).

Modern development strategies have relied exclusively on the western knowledge system, and the dominance of this knowledge framework has dictated the marginalization and disqualification of alternative, non-western, knowledge systems (Escobar, 13). Western modernity is institutionalized and taught within modern educational systems, and learned through popular culture and media inputs (Baker, 4). Globalization has lead to widespread cultural diffusion, as these concepts of development and modernity are used and reproduced in myriad social contexts throughout the world (Escobar, 13). Western modernity now permeates traditional cultures through both social and political institutions. As a result, local conceptions of development are being influenced by their contemporary reality within the global economy (Escobar, 13).

As globalization has transferred political authority between national and supra-national governing bodies, the eminence of neoliberal social values in global education policy is being fortified by the growing role of international organizations in shaping development policy (Nagahara, 373). Institutions such as the OECD, UNESCO, the European Union, and the World Bank have vested interests in maintaining and perpetuating the modern capitalist system to further their own agendas of development. However, development strategies imposed through international development agencies often undermine national ownership of education policy through the implementation of modern development orthodoxy (King, 349). This interference
leads national policy to conform to globalized development norms, resulting in development policies that facilitate the authoritative institutionalization of western values and ideologies (Nagahara, 372). Education, as a function of the state, perpetuates this cultural domination through the implicit assumption that participation in formal education will allow individuals to achieve maximum economic mobility through diminished or resigned social sovereignty (Dale & Roberston, 118). In the globalized world social value has come to be defined by and dependent upon participation in globalized social contexts, resulting in widespread cultural marginalization of any values systems that do not adhere to the criteria of western modernity.
PART TWO: THE INDIAN CONTEXT

India: Development and Globalization

India’s independence from British colonial rule in 1947 initiated a period of unprecedented rapid economic growth in alignment with the mainstream development orthodoxy. At independence, the country had an average annual growth rate of GDP of around 3%. Between 1947 and 2005 this rate increased over 200% as the implementation of modern development policy and practice propelled India into the global capitalist economy and the era of globalization (Basu, 145). Operating within development discourse emphasizing economic growth, annual growth rates averaged at about 5% until the mid 1970s when the global development paradigm shift redirected development strategies to target human development standards as a means through which to achieve increased economic growth. As India shifted governance policies towards the modern development orthodoxy, annual growth rates began to steadily increase (Basu, 148). High growth rates and improved economic performance established India as a “newly emerging and dynamic economy” (Basu, 148) within the global capitalist system. However, this growth has been accompanied by similarly increasing levels of economic inequality, particularly between urban and rural populations (Bhaskar, 138).

Today, India’s total population is at about 1.2 billion, an estimated 37% (UNDP, 2010) of which live below the national poverty line based on a maximum consumption expenditure of Rs. 32 per day in rural areas and Rs. 47 per day in urban areas (Planning Commission). Of the approximately 826 million people (almost 69% of the total population) living in rural areas, 47.2% live below the poverty line, and 80% of the rural poor belong to marginalized communities. While initial development strategies emphasizing integration into the international economy resulted in massive national growth, this focus also resulted in increased economic and
social inequalities. Employment levels are not growing at the same rate as the working-age population; wage rates are not rising in proportion to per-capita income growth (Basu, 162). As these inequalities indicate, the adherence of national governance institutions to globalized neoliberal ideologies has resulted in the institutionalization of social stratification within the country’s development policies and procedures (Sharma, 4).

**Education Policy Reform: A New Direction?**

India’s education system as it stands has had mixed results in terms of driving development and economic growth. In 1947 the literacy rate stood at only 18% (Basu, 144). Literacy, along with annual GDP growth rate and other economic indicators of development, increased rapidly as the globalized development strategies were employed by the national government. By 2005, the literacy rate had increased by over 300% (Basu, 144). Despite these advances, India is still home to nearly half of the world’s illiterates due to widely differential access to quality education on the basis of socio-economic status (Basu, 139).

The 2009 Right to Education Act, as an investment in human resource development, was thus predicated on the assumption that education is the determining factor in improving quality of life, eradicating poverty, and accelerating economic growth (Kaushal, 43). In this context, education was framed as an inalienable right because it served as an indispensible platform for modern life and the cultivating a living. This premise also implies that livelihoods, knowledge systems, and cultural norms not based in formal education are both irrelevant and illegitimate within the modern global economy (Kaushal, 42). The Act is considered very comprehensive in addressing nation-wide barriers to access for primary education, which is why it has by and large been considered a success. However, challenges have arisen regarding implementation actually
serve to perpetuate the social and economic inequalities the Act was intended to alleviate. Broadly, these include the unequal distribution of funding, reflected in the higher concentration of schools and of qualified teachers within the urban sector, and the general mandate of progress irrespective of educational quality (Kaushal, 46). Not only do these failures serve to lower the standard of the government school system as a whole, but they also lead the inequalities within the system further marginalize already disadvantaged populations by creating new socio-cultural barriers to access into formal education.

The main objective of the mass expansion of education in India has been to foster learning that aligns with international prescriptions of knowledge in order to participate in the globalized ‘knowledge economy’ (Devy, 14). Indeed, education has proved successful in fostering economic growth, contributing as much as 34.4% of the country’s economic growth potential throughout the second half of the 19th century (Tilak, 437). India’s schools were originally established to promote literacy within the official languages demarcated by state lines at the time of independence (Devy, 7). This has lead to widespread marginalization on the basis of education, as communities who do not fall into these language categories are therefore systematically excluded from the formal education system, leaving at the very end of the spectrum of the modern conception of development. Westernized knowledge and values have come to dominate the country’s formal schooling system, creating an implied cultural dominance over traditional cultures and knowledge systems that do not conform to the prescribed modern imperatives of what constitutes higher learning (Devy, 14). As a result, the formal education system as a whole, and the western knowledge system it perpetuates and participates in, has become inapplicable within localized contexts. In terms of poverty alleviation, India’s modern education system is unable to provide increased opportunities for economic mobility, and
therefore overall regional and national economic growth, to a huge portion of the population, while disproportionately offering these opportunities to a smaller elite. This problem has become increasingly potent as the international knowledge economy has expanded through the processes of globalization, increasing the requisite of educational attainment necessary to participate within a larger economic context. As such, India’s push to extend literacy and primary education on a national scale is actually fostering an environment for the ‘poverty trap’ (Tilak, 436). India’s educational system has standardized basic education that has the potential to provide just enough economic mobility to raise individuals over the poverty threshold, but not enough to propel them into the international formal economy, and thereby perpetuates both educational and income poverty on a national scale (Tilak, 436).

The Adivasi Condition: Poverty in an Era of Development

Adivasis are India’s indigenous population, constituting over 8% of the nation’s population (Joshi & Basu, 467). Adivasis are categorized by the Indian government as ‘Scheduled Tribes’; the government recognizes over 700 Scheduled Tribes throughout the country, each with their own distinct cultures, social practices, religions, dialects, and occupations (Joshi & Basu, 470). However despite this formal recognition, India’s indigenous population is one of the most impoverished and socially disadvantaged groups in the country, especially with respect to educational attainment (Joshi & Basu, 467). The formal social classification system in India, while designed to ensure equitable distribution of institutionalized government aid, is predicated on socio-cultural distinctions that originated under British colonial rule. Adivasis and other indigenous groups were labeled as “criminal tribes” under British rule, and the stigmas attached to this categorization of traditional cultural and economic practices has extended into modern Indian governance (Kumar). As such, the indigenous population of India
remains the most disadvantaged ethnic group in terms of health, education, and income despite their recognition within the constitution (Joshi & Basu, 470).

Adivasi and other traditional indigenous communities are primarily categorized based on the relative isolation of their settlements from modern development and urbanization, which has lead to the evolution of culturally distinct conceptions of modernization and development (Ramdas). Cultural differences between Adivasi populations have been influenced by not only the environment which they live in, but also by the degree to which they have been exposed to mainstream Hindu culture, specifically in terms of government involvement in their daily lives (Joshi & Basu, 470). Often these communities are still highly dependent on localized natural resources, a dependency that is neither legitimized nor viable within modern society, making such livelihoods and ways of life irrelevant within the mainstream economy (Joshi & Basu, 470). Such distinctions, as contributing to the modern conception of traditional life as “backward”, have lead to widespread political, economic, and social discrimination of Adivasi cultures, resulting in the idea that the systematic marginalization of Adivasi interests within the formal education system is actually in their best interests.

There are several barriers to access that Adivasi children face in terms of educational attainment that are not addressed by economic and educational reform policies such as the Right To Education Act. First and foremost, there are financial barriers placed on indigenous communities involved in livelihood practices that operate within economies of scale. Many of the poor living in isolated areas participate in small jobs and marginal agricultural practices. These activities require a large part of the student-age population to participate in order to be sustained, making families within these contexts less likely to send children to remote government schools (Malyadri, 101). For indigenous communities living in close proximity to
areas undergoing rapid urbanization, or populations that have chosen to move to urban areas to gain access to increased economic opportunities, children are inherently less able to contribute to economies of scale that their communities traditionally rely on, which not only further embeds these populations in the structural poverty they already experience, but also removes younger generations from their cultural context, making them less likely to use their educational attainment for the betterment of the indigenous community (Bloom, 72).

Barriers to access created and perpetuated within the formal educational system also prevent Adivasi youth from achieving economic mobility through educational attainment. Dropout rate and the likelihood of repetition is significantly higher among the indigenous community in India due to the low quality of schooling available to them, especially in relation to the quality of schooling provided for members of the mainstream economy (Joshi & Basu, 474). Educational expansion within India has been at the cost of the quality of education, most noticeably in terms of teacher training, employment, and distribution, and widespread curricular homogenization (Bloom, 72). Curriculum reform within the modern education system is designed to show individuals where they fit into the globalized world, leading to the exclusion of the contextualized and localized knowledge that is valued and utilized within indigenous communities and economies of scale. Not only has this phenomenon resulted in the widespread marginalization of the ‘local’ in favor of the ‘global’, but localized education and knowledge systems have come to be seen as having negative effects on the larger community and modern society as a whole (Bloom, 73). The negative effects of such inappropriate curricula within indigenous communities have been reinforced by the negligence of teachers within the government school system, resulting in high drop out rates among Adivasi children. Teachers positioned in tribal schools coming from a non-tribal background do not find it necessary or
prudent to participate in the local culture: teachers are unable and unwilling to learn to speak in tribal dialects; government-produced educational materials exhibit a dearth of knowledge relating to tribal values. Overall, non-tribal teachers tend to adopt an attitude of indifference toward tribal languages, traditions, cultures, and lifestyles, using only government-mandate pedagogies which offer non-contextualized information that is irrelevant to tribal lifestyles (Malyadri, 102). The gap between the socio-cultural environment of the Adivasi lifestyle and the school curriculum imposed upon them reinforces their cultural irrelevance within the modern globalized economy (Malyadri, 102).

Overall, the mainstream education system fails to acknowledge the contemporary conditions, challenges, and diversities within traditional societies, making it inapplicable to address the needs and aspirations of most Adivasis (Ramdas). The systematic marginalization of Adivasi interests at the political and administrative levels has resulted in the imposition of an education system that fails to provide adequate, relevant, and quality education to one of the most economically disadvantaged populations in India. As a result, the modern educational institutions in place employ educational programs through a mode of “assimilation and domination” that serves to reproduce the inequalities and disadvantages most Adivasis already face (Ramdas). Education has been shown to have a profound effect on human development as it provides a means through which to escape poverty via the cultivation of skills applicable to the modern economic environment. As such, Adivasis and other traditional populations are not able to access this means of economic mobility due to barriers to access that target culturally distinct groups and marginalized economic practices (Bloom, 57, 70). The neglect of Adivasi knowledge systems, languages, and cultural practices have been detrimental not only to the ability of these
communities to use education as a means through which to escape poverty, but also to the cultural core of Adivasi life that informs their conceptualization of identity (Ramdas).
PART THREE: EDUCATION AND THE DEVELOPMENT PARADOX

India’s Development Paradox

Adivasi education has consistently shown low levels of access, enrolment, and therefore produced low educational achievement within indigenous populations. However, while these problems are indicative of the structural inequalities within the education system itself, the perceived shortcomings of indigenous communities are used to frame the problem as the result of the distinct socio-cultural circumstances that define Adivasi life (Veerbhadranaika, 2). The global spread of the neoliberal development hegemony classifies Adivasis, as participants in traditional non-modern livelihoods, cultures, and localized economies of scale, as backwards. This classification leads to the perception that the solution to their poverty is modernization across the board, leading to an increased quality of life based solely on economic indicators of success. The education system in India has therefore become a part of the systematic exclusion of marginalized students (Veerbhadranaika, 9). State-based, internationally influenced educational institutions have become the mechanism through which the Adivasi and other traditional populations become assimilated within and dominated by the global conception and performance of modernity. The formal education system has created an environment with which Adivasis are unlikely to identify, making it exceedingly difficult for them to participate, enjoy, and thrive within educational institutions. Education has thus become a contradictory resource in that it perpetuates the poverty trap: makes upward mobility available to only a few while creating and enforcing social and economic divisions.

However, the inability of Adivasis to participate within this system reinforces the perception of their “backwardness”, and those who fail are deemed incapable of learning, putting the blame on the cultural environment of the individual rather than the system of inequality in
which they operate (Ramdas). Modern educational reform policies, such as the Right to Education Act, only serve to reinforce these perceptions and inequalities by inflicting systematic barriers to access on the basis of cultural values, beliefs, and practices. Policies, political trends, economic priorities have not served to incur reduced social and economic inequality but instead have inhibited tribal autonomy, self-determination, and right to sustainable living (Veerbhadranaika, 11). Mass education is now embedded within development discourse emphasizing economic growth based upon a western definition of modernity. In this way, education’s purpose has been shifted to a goal-specific mechanism for development. Education serves to matriculate Adivasis into the larger social, cultural, and economic norms of modern society ‘for their own good’, portraying education as the path that will lead them into development and out of poverty. India’s formal education system, as a mechanism for development through poverty alleviation, has thus entered the nation into a development paradox, where the mechanisms through which these goals are to be achieved have actually incurred the opposite, both inducing cultural marginalization and creating barriers to access of the formal economy. Within education, the focus on the modern development model seeks to integrate Adivasis into the dominant society through forms of submissive assimilation that subjugate the cultures, languages, values, and practices that define their livelihoods and identities. However, because the dominant education system does not challenge structural inequalities, the subordinate position of these people is reproduced, not only perpetuating the cultural and economic poverty in which they already exist, but making it increasingly difficult for them to escape from it in the future.
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