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Social Psychological Explorations of Caste: Unravelling Challenges and Discovering Opportunities

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Abstract

Despite our expectations that technological advancements, globalization, and the ensuing modernity and equality would strip away the relevance of caste hierarchies, caste remains a significant aspect that drives Indians' social experiences. Casteist attitudes and behaviours persist despite the implementation of affirmative action policies, and social norms discouraging casteism. Psychology must understand the persistence of caste in a globalized and technology-mediated world like ours today. However, the invocation of psychology to explicate caste issues is not straightforward. While psychology has much to offer for the study of caste and casteism, it is vital to remember that psychology has been, at times, complicit in maintaining inequality and oppression in society. Significant methodological challenges exist in the discipline, and a psychology researcher must confront them while addressing caste. In this article, we discuss some of these challenges. We argue that researchers need to be aware of the crises prevalent in psychology and look for ways to turn them into opportunities to improve psychological research on caste. We also encourage researchers studying caste to ensure the compatibility of psychological theories and methods to the Indian context. We recommend that researchers make a moral commitment to address the agency of the oppressed caste groups in challenging the status quo. We also shed light on some specific malpractices within the methodological domain that researchers studying caste may fall into and suggest ways to prevent them. We believe these challenges provide opportunities to expand the horizons of psychology and social scientific research on caste.

Keywords

Caste, oppressed, WEIRD, conformity bias, agency, resistance

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Introduction

Caste oppression against Dalits continues to be ubiquitous in Indian society despite radical changes in the caste structure in the past fifty years (Amnesty International 2022; Jogdand et al. 2016). This reaffirms Dr B.R. Ambedkar's statement that caste is "a state of mind" (1936) that mere socio-economic changes, laws and policies, will only go so far in eradicating. Many people acknowledge the importance of psychology in addressing caste. A small but promising body of research addresses caste from a social psychological perspective (e.g. Jaspal 2011; Jogdand et al. 2016; Mahalingam 2007; Pathania et al. 2023). Many social psychologists from India and other parts of the world are interested in examining caste. However, there are complexities within the discipline and in the social context of caste that numerous social psychologists find difficult to navigate. Importantly, there are various methodological challenges in developing empirical studies to examine a caste-related phenomenon from a social psychological perspective. In this article, we attempt to highlight these complexities and methodological challenges involved in studying caste. We also suggest ways to address them. We believe that if these complexities and methodological challenges are left unaddressed, social psychological research may unwittingly go counterproductive to the spirit of social justice and become complicit in maintaining inequality and oppression in society.

We start by highlighting the prevalent crises in social psychology: i) crisis of relevance, and ii) crisis of evidence. While the former corresponds to questioning the applicability of laboratory studies to the real world, the latter concerns the lack of replication of certain psychological findings when examined again in different times and settings. The discussion is carried forward by reviewing the relevance of these crises for the psychological study on caste and identifying how they can provide critical avenues to refine our research. We also briefly touch upon the need to overcome reliance on theories that might be inadequate to address caste concerns. We urge researchers to remain wary of the indiscriminate application of Western theories and methods in studying a social system as complex as the caste system. Furthermore, moving away from a social psychology of *domination* to one of *resistance* (Reicher 2011), we caution researchers against conceding to the conformity bias—a tendency to assume that individuals are passive beings who conform to group norms unresistingly. We consider our moral imperative as researchers to acknowledge and examine the agency of oppressed caste groups in challenging the status quo, above and beyond merely coping with it. Finally, we end our discussion of the identified challenges with some specific methodological concerns relevant to studies examining caste. Methodological concerns at various levels of research are raised, and suggestions are provided to address those concerns.

Crises of Social Psychology: Lessons for Studying the Problem of Caste

Social Psychology is WEIRD?

As a field, social psychology has had its fair share of 'crises'. Brought to attention as early as the 1960s and 1970s, the first crisis, noted particularly in social psychology, was the crisis of relevance. It arose out of dissatisfaction with the field's emphasis on laboratory studies that failed to be directly applicable to the real world, and even when they were, the findings were not relevant across cultures. Despite studying many social issues, the field's inability to contribute to social change and real-world problems became a source of dissatisfaction among social psychologists (Pettigrew 2018). This critique was also pointed out in the early ICSSR (Indian Council of Social Science Research) reports by Indian social psychologists (Mitra 1972; Pareek 1981). Some of the reasons that contributed to the emergence of the crisis have been overreliance on student samples (Giner-Sorolla 2019; Rad et al. 2018), researchers' tendency to make broad generalizations (Pettigrew 2018), lack of critical consciousness among psychologists (Mishra & Padalia 2021), developing ideas of 'normality' of concepts and beliefs based only on studies with samples from specific regions of the world, and sticking to a positivist paradigm that regards reality as context-independent and universal (Adams et al. 2015).

The second crisis: the crisis of evidence or methodology, highlighted the replication failure in social psychological research. That is, certain social psychological phenomena and processes failed to be observed when examined again (Open Science Collaboration 2015). This crisis may be understood in relation to the relevance crisis, which arises partly due to studies being conducted with Euro-American samples and their findings generalized across contexts. For example, in a replication frenzy, social psychologists equated caste with race, communalism with anti-Semitism, and untouchables with the Blacks in America (Nandy 1974). Since most published studies fail to report sample characteristics besides gender (Rad et al. 2018), replication studies often end up being conducted on samples quite different from those of original studies, and unsurprisingly, the original findings fail to be replicated (Pettigrew 2018).

Why are these crises relevant to the social psychological study of caste in India? We agree with Pettigrew's (2018) argument that these crises are not crises per se but avenues for critical advances to be made in the field. The replication crisis, for example, exemplifies the need for contextual work—studying psychological phenomena and processes as rooted in specific social and cultural contexts. Theories emanating from the Global North have been considered ineffective in understanding people from the Global South. The latter is a population not only marked by a colonial past but also one which gives significant importance to identities of caste and religion. The effects of such a context on behaviour and thought cannot be fully understood if relying only on Euro-American production of social psychological knowledge (Sophan & Nair 2023). This argument is predicated on the fact that all social sciences emanate from

particular cultures and are 'cultural' or 'ethno-' in their origins (Marriot 1989). Even examinations of supposedly "basic" psychological processes like visual perception have demonstrated significant variations across populations (Henrich et al. 2010a). Interestingly, these variations are better explained by socio-historical processes like urbanization and institutions like religion than genetic factors (Henrich 2020). Such work raises critical questions about how much knowledge emanating from particular contexts applies to others, eventually raising concerns about psychology's overreliance on samples called 'WEIRD' (Henrich et al. 2010a, 2010b). The acronym stands for 'Western, Educated, Industrialised, Rich, and Democratic' societies, and *WEIRDness* refers to the fact that these societies have been the crucible of all mainstream theories and methodologies in psychology. People from WEIRD societies represent as much as 96 per cent of study participants in psychological research published in top journals, while representing only 12 per cent of the world's population (Arnett 2008, as cited in Henrich et al. 2010b). Recent tests of claims about generalizability from this population to the entire human population have shown WEIRD societies to be "among the least representative populations one could find for generalizing about humans" (Henrich et al. 2010a). Additionally, Marriot (1989) hinted at the invisibility of competing epistemologies from non-Western societies in published literature as a betrayal of the imperial posturing by Western social sciences.

A Critical Approach to Social Psychological Theory is Useful

Against this backdrop, we draw attention to the uninhibited reliance on theories that fit some contexts but may not be well suited to studying caste in the Indian context. Consider, for example, ideological variables like social dominance orientation (SDO; Sidanius & Pratto 1999) and right-wing authoritarianism (RWA; Altemeyer 1981). SDO refers to an individual's general orientation or preference for group-based inequalities in society. RWA has been conceptualized in terms of three dimensions: submission to authority, aggression towards 'others', and conventionalism or adherence to orthodox values. Both SDO and RWA are widely examined in studies on intergroup relations (e.g., Hässler et al. 2021; Hoskin et al. 2019) and are robust predictors of prejudice towards an outgroup (e.g., Asbrock et al. 2010; Bilewicz et al. 2017). Despite such robustness, RWA has shown unexpected relationships with outgroup attitudes in certain contexts (Bilewicz et al. 2017; Khan 2011; Roets et al. 2015). As discussed below, the conceptualization of these constructs raises concerns when applied to the context surrounding caste hierarchies in India.

Naive superimposition of Western theoretical models in the study of caste was seen, for example, in Cotterill and colleagues' (2014) summary designation of SDO, RWA, and Karma as the ideological underpinnings of the caste system (Cotterill et al. 2014). In response to that work, Jogdand and others (2016) point out that the researchers' conceptualization and operationalization of SDO and RWA had failed to capture context-specific meanings. The study ignored caste differences in the endorsement of Karma and eventually took behavioural asymmetry among the oppressed castes for granted. It further succumbed to the conformity bias that has already proliferated

the literature on caste-related psychological research by adopting the simplistic *Varna* model of caste (Jogdand et al. 2016).

Another critical issue relates to the understanding of social structures themselves. The *Varna* model of the caste system is an oversimplified and predominantly Western understanding made popular by Louis Dumont (1980, 1991). The hierarchy presented in the model poses a problem for psychological research because it pays no attention to the sub-categories (*jatis*) subsumed within each caste. The problem is complicated further by these sub-groups varying across the Indian landmass despite the broad caste categories remaining uniform (Dirks 2001). Moreover, Dalits have severely contested the *Varna* model and their subordinate ritual status since the 1930s (Banerjee-Dube 2014). In reality, caste practices are local institutions rooted in ecology, local traditions, language, and culture. Caste and *jatis* are polyvalent terms and display regional variations. When we, as researchers, follow the same model, we do away with important distinctions and categorizations that have implications for people's lives, cognitions, and behaviours. We also remain ignorant of how identity contestations and negotiations occur within these sub-castes (Jogdand et al. 2016) and run the risk of making gross overgeneralizations about people belonging to different caste categories.

In a critique of the essentialist and universalist mainstream psychology approach to humiliation, Jogdand (2023) pointed out the individualistic bias in the conception of self or personhood. This bias has led to the conceptualization of humiliation as a self-conscious emotion experienced at an interpersonal level, ignoring group-based emotions and the cultural and societal dimensions of humiliation, which involve complex issues of status, power, and social structure. Similarly, even seasoned researchers run the risk of imposing an alien ontology and epistemology on the respondents (particularly in rural India unexposed to the Western worldviews) when they operationalize constructs like selfhood, hierarchies, oppositions, ideologies, values, etc., that precipitate Western social, intellectual, and academic categories. Such attempts highlight the risks and futility of uncritically importing Western concepts or constructs into non-Western cultural contexts.

Overreliance on WEIRD samples and, more importantly, overgeneralizing from them then skews our understanding of human behaviour, especially in understanding a system that is not only complex but utterly distant from the Western life world. This becomes even more relevant when the domination of Western knowledge systems in the discipline of social psychology in India has been pointed out to have a hegemonic influence (Mishra & Padalia 2021). This calls for caution in adopting ideas and practices to a new cultural context because psychological ideas and methodologies applied beyond the cultural boundaries of where they originated, as Christopher and colleagues (2014) warn, "risk imposing the assumptions, concepts, practices, and values… on societies where they do not fit." We remind researchers studying caste to be attuned to non-Western experiences, realities, and meaning-making processes. This will usher in a practice of contextualized social psychology while promoting incisive hypotheses formulation, analyses, inferences, and theoretical innovations.

Navigating *Conformity Bias*

Having elaborated on the need to take account of context, we, concomitantly, do not wish to imply an unconstrained reliance on context, for it may mislead us to one of the most notorious challenges of social psychology, namely, *conformity bias.* Conformity presupposes that individuals follow group norms passively and, thus, lack agency. In fact, social psychology has oftentimes been accused of being complicit in perpetuating the conformity bias (Moscovici et al. 1969; Reicher 2011). The term refers to the tendency in psychological studies to ascribe more power to the context in determining individuals' behaviour, hence discounting their agency (cf. Moscovici et al. 1969). Before discussing the grave consequences it may have for social psychological studies on caste, it is crucial to look at some notable contributions to social psychology that earmarked the burgeoning of conformity bias.

As early as the 1950s, The Robber's Cave experiment by Muzafer Sherif (1954) revealed how two previously unknown groups of boys came to see themselves as rivals when conditions of competition and contestation were created between them. Then a series of experiments on obedience, conducted by Milgram in the 1960s, demonstrated how seemingly sane individuals can be made to deliver deadly shocks to other individuals by exercising authority over them (Milgram 1963). Taking this further, Zimbardo's Stanford prison experiment, conducted in 1971, proved to be a beguiling example of ordinary individuals turning into hostile ones owing to the imposed roles and norms (Zimbardo et al. 1999).

Taken together, these studies insinuate two things. One, the power of the context, and second, the powerlessness of the individuals grabbed within that context. While certainly the former is not a negative point in itself—we know that context shapes human behaviour (see Hornsey 2008) —it becomes problematic when combined with the latter, i.e., the powerlessness of individuals. The conformity bias has led researchers to regard individuals as passive beings who have surrendered to the context in which they are caught. As a result, the focus of psychology, in general, and social psychology, in particular, has centred more on the processes of domination and oppression than resistance (see Reicher 2011).

However, as Reicher (2011) rightly pointed out, the field studies in social psychology over-emphasizing the power of context, or at least interpreted as doing so, are themselves not devoid of resistance. This is, however, rarely acknowledged. Among Sherif's other unpublished work based on the boys' camp paradigm, sometimes researchers also failed to pit the two groups of boys against each other; on the contrary, the groups divided by the experimenter united to challenge the imposed reality (see Reicher 2011). Also, the variation of obedience in Milgram's experiment, i.e., 0 to 100 per cent, clearly shows that individuals even have the agency to deny what is being ordered by an authority. Moreover, the ethically sound replication of Zimbardo's prison experiment by Reicher & Haslam (2006)—the BBC Prison Study—demonstrated how groups under certain socio-structural conditions could challenge systems of inequality and oppression. These studies spell out the need to acknowledge the agentic

nature of human beings who are not only passively influenced by the context but also have the potential to influence it actively. Conformity bias, which takes away this acknowledgement, may pose serious challenges for researchers studying caste.

The institutionalized and historic nature of caste structure may lead researchers to unwittingly assume that individuals unquestioningly comply with the existing social order owing to some of their shared beliefs, *Karma*—for example, the most cited one (Cotterill et al. 2014; Rafanell & Gorringe 2010). The false presumption of passive acceptance of fate by oppressed caste groups may render their efforts to challenge the status quo unaddressed. Addressing conformity bias, then, becomes particularly important while studying oppressed caste groups: failure to do so can potentially undermine their agency and power, further contributing to their marginalization. For example, one theoretical extension of the conformity bias may be seen in theories such as system justification theory and social dominance theory. Both these theories attempt to explain the individuals' preference for maintaining the existing social structures by different means. While system justification theory does so by adverting to the psychological needs for certainty and security (Jost et al. 2004), social dominance theory refers to processes such as prejudice and cultural legitimizing ideologies (Sidanius & Pratto 2012). Although there is no apparent harm in using these concepts to understand complex social structures, the problem arises when these constructs are assumed to be a stable group difference (Reicher 2011). Insofar as system justification and social dominance are treated as constants in understanding the caste system, they do nothing but make inequality look like an ineluctable circumstance and social change an unachievable state of affairs. As stated earlier and pointed out by Jogdand et al. (2016), Cotterill and colleagues (2014), in their attempt to explain caste-based hierarchy using social dominance orientation, also fell victim to the conformity bias. Such a practice inadvertently feeds into reproducing knowledge that maintains the status quo (Haslam & Reicher 2012).

Researchers should be wary of making such assumptions while employing these theories in studying caste since it may naturalize the oppression and tyranny that the oppressed groups are going through without acknowledging their power to resist. The power of Dalit resistance is in fact evident in their radicalization through movements such as Dalit Panthers (Gokhale-Turner 1979), an increasing assertion of Dalit identity in their writings (Oza 2019), Dalit women's mobilization against their objectification (Talat 2023), and many similar defiant anti-caste practices. However, most social psychological research on caste has paid limited attention to oppressed caste groups' attempts to resist (Mishra et al. 2009). To borrow the words of Reicher, the psychological research on caste has "dramatized domination but downplayed resistance" (Reicher 2011: 208). This practice not only takes away the agency of the oppressed caste groups to challenge their subjugated status but also finds them complicit in maintaining their own subjugation. To avoid further marginalization of the oppressed castes, it is essential to be aware of the conformity bias while studying caste. It is important to go beyond the assumption that people internalize existing

social norms without actively attempting to challenge or coerce them. An important first step is acknowledging their agency and taking appropriate steps to examine it.

Although there have been few significant attempts to understand large-scale mobilization and collective action among oppressed caste groups in its conventional sense (e.g., Sinha 2020), the complex nuances of their agency are yet to be examined. Challenging one's subordinate position can be achieved through different means, of which large-scale mobilization is only one part. Another critical way of examining the agency of the oppressed caste groups in challenging their subjugation is by examining incidences of everyday resistance. As Haslam and Reicher (2012) suggest, there exist minor incidents of everyday resistance between the extremes of accepting one's subjugation and large-scale collective actions. It is equally important to examine how the oppressed caste groups deal with the everyday challenges thrown at them owing to their identity position. For example, Jogdand (2023) suggested that one form of resistance could be the mere appraisal of humiliation. Along the same lines, the mere existence of Dalits in a digital context dominated by opposing and suppressing voices maybe perceived as an act of resistance. Numerous other non-conventional means of resistance such as Dalit writings, poetry, music, and artistic expression form a useful tool of investigation. These, along with many small acts of resistance, however trivial they may seem, are nevertheless essential to be investigated by researchers studying caste since they can have wide-reaching implications not only for oppressed groups' identity management but also for how they challenge domination by the outgroups.

It is imperative that psychologists develop a moral commitment to study not only the negative consequences of oppression, humiliation, and discrimination for oppressed caste groups but also how those negative experiences can, in fact, foster something as positive as a politicized identity for social change. Researchers who wish to study caste in a psychological framework must regard oppressed caste groups as active creators of reality who can bring social change and take necessary measures to examine it.

Specific Methodological Considerations

Formulating Research Problems

Some specific methodological issues may arise at different stages while studying caste dynamics. These methodological concerns may not be restricted to the processes of data collection and analysis. Instead, they may begin much before that, i.e., while making decisions about the problem to be studied. We call attention to two critical influences that may distort the research problem formulation. First, the previously discussed methodological influence from the West, which itself is smitten by specific scientific methods that are deemed impeccable for studying any phenomenon. In fact, there is a tendency in psychology to accredit research to the extent that they have used sophisticated scientific methods and data analysis techniques (Mishra & Padalia 2021). As social psychology is already criticized for imitating the West's research

trends (Pareek 1981), researchers are more likely to formulate research questions and hypotheses that can suitably accommodate these glorified methods (Mishra & Padalia 2021). While working with marginalized populations, such as oppressed caste groups, this does more harm than good as the real problems may go unaddressed in researchers' quest to employ the most sophisticated methods and techniques. Thus, it is advisable that researchers studying caste ask appropriate and socially relevant questions and then find adequate ways of answering them (for a discussion on socially relevant research in psychology, see Deutsch 1980).

The second influence on formulating research problems may come from researchers themselves, particularly when they are from a caste group different from the one being studied. The predisposed beliefs of researchers about oppressed caste groups may affect not only the problem formulation but also the data analysis, especially when it is qualitative in nature. Khanal (2021), a Brahmin researcher, talks about how he practised reflexivity to challenge his unconscious predispositions towards Dalits and females during his sociological inquiry. Reflexivity, understanding one's social position and the behaviours emanating from it (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992), may be used as a methodological tool (Khanal 2021) to avoid such biases. Thus, it is vital that researchers establish their identity position before formulating the problem and specifying objectives. This involves clarifying one's own identity location with respect to the group being studied in terms of the privileges, resources, or power one has (or does not have) owing to their social identity. Clarifying identity positions would help researchers reflect on their beliefs and judgments that may further affect their research practice. Failing to do so might result in the research problem being framed as counterproductive for the oppressed caste groups. Besides establishing one's identity position, other ways to frame socially relevant questions while working with marginalized groups would be to avoid: i) naturalizing their experiences as fixed social reality, and ii) neglecting their subjective experiences (Kagan et al. 2002). Participatory-oriented research that gives Dalits an opportunity to frame research questions that they think need attention might be a crucial way forward.

Operationalization: Caste is not Just a Demographic "Variable"

A prevalent research practice involves putting caste as a simple demographic variable in the study design. Caste is indeed an important socio-demographic variable that is helpful to understand various patterns of responses across the social structure in a survey design. However, some critical consideration is required while operationalising and interpreting the variables and their associations. When attributing much explanatory power to caste as a demographic variable, a researcher risks essentializing differences among various caste groups. Essentialism, the view that social groups have "deep, immutable, and inherent defining properties" (Toosi & Ambady 2011: 17), is intricately related to questions of power and hegemony. Particularly since oppressed caste groups are already stigmatized, merely reporting statistically significant differences among castes may 'naturalize' differences in social categories and legitimize existing power relations (Mahalingam 2007), succumbing

to conformity bias as previously discussed. For example, research employing caste as a demographic variable has consistently shown the inferiority of the oppressed castes to the dominant castes in terms of economic behaviours (Dasgupta et al. 2023), personality traits (Anant 1967; Dasgupta et al. 2023), and self-evaluation (Majeed & Ghosh 1989; Rath & Sircar 1960). Differences across caste groups, hence, need to be carefully explained and discussed so they do not justify existing caste-based inequalities. This will happen when one's caste, like any other demographic variable, is also considered a psychologically meaningful membership of a social group. Such group memberships place people of one group in relation to another and, thus, inform their status and power in the social world (Muldoon et al. 2021). When examining and discussing caste-related outcomes, such dimensions associated with the caste identity ought to be given careful consideration.

Even when caste has been deployed as a demographic variable, researchers can take adequate steps to address the related concerns. First, caste as a variable should be carefully operationalized within relevant socio-environmental, political, and ideological contexts. This must provide the scope for self-definition and one that is acceptable to the participants in the study. Second, we urge researchers to use statistical analyses aligned with the study's conceptualization and operationalization, i.e., to provide a thorough interpretation of results beyond simple reporting of statistical significance. The simple use of data analysis techniques such as ANOVA (Analysis of Variance) may result in a crude and deficient analysis unless the researcher is acquainted with enough nuanced understanding of the issues concerned. Thus, researchers should also be well-informed about the socio-political history of caste that may inform their analysis.

Sampling

We encourage researchers to pay attention to the samples they work with. The student population, a commonly used sample in psychological research (Hanel & Vione 2016), comes with education and class privileges not afforded to many of the same social group. While working with such samples is a start, we ought to be careful in painting the experiences of the entire group with the same brush. For example, Dasgupta and colleagues (2023) carefully acknowledged the limitation of working with a student sample while concluding about the behavioural and personality differences between oppressed and dominant caste groups. While student samples are the most convenient for many practical reasons, attempts ought to be made to incorporate more community samples. Furthermore, considering the social hierarchies also inherent *within* castes, it will help to take some steps to avoid overrepresenting some castes/sub-castes more than others within one's sample. We readily acknowledge the difficulties inherent in such sampling, especially when working with marginalized groups; perhaps it would help to start by acknowledging the limitations of our samples and considering just how far one can go from studying these *samples* to talking about these *groups*.

Tools and Measures

Another methodological issue concerns the choice of tools and measures for data collection. While researching caste-based prejudices and attitudes, researchers should be wary of using scales and questionnaires uncritically as some measures developed in the West may not be able to capture the shared and ideological nature of caste-related beliefs and attitudes. There is a need to adapt these measures to make them sensitive to the caste context. Additionally, open-ended interviews and focus groups may play a crucial role in laying the groundwork for psychological research on caste, particularly in light of the paucity of theorization and research on the subject. However, since expressions of prejudiced attitudes are strongly dictated by social norms (Crandall et al. 2002) and caste discrimination is normatively discouraged and legally penalized in India, prejudice towards oppressed castes may prove challenging to measure using explicit measures. Thus, assessing such constructs demands consideration of the macro-level influences on them, which can even be incorporated into one's research design for a more multi-level, contextual analysis of the phenomenon of interest (Pettigrew 2021). Incorporating implicit measures such as the Implicit Association Test (IAT) may also help address social desirability concerns. Moreover, in today's technology-mediated world, where many societal attitudes are expressed online, working with big data may help to understand emerging patterns and trends in the realm of caste relations (see Heng et al. 2018, for a discussion on archival social psychological research using online data sources).

Concluding Remarks

The focus of this article has been on delineating the challenges and opportunities in the social psychological study of caste. We shed light on some pertinent issues in psychological science that may be taken for granted, if not overlooked, when undertaking social psychological work on caste. First, we urged researchers towards adopting a more contextual approach while undertaking social psychological study of caste. In doing so, we cautioned against an uncritical adoption of Euro-American psychological theories and practices in researching the caste system. Even with the best intentions, theoretical naivety or a lack of critical stance of researchers can inadvertently bring grave injustice to the already oppressed. Then, we highlighted the persistence of conformity bias in psychology that may naturalize the oppression and tyranny in inter-caste relations and thereby undermine the resistance and agency of the oppressed. With this, we emphasized the need to examine the agency of oppressed caste groups in challenging the status quo. We discussed specific methodological concerns including adequate problem formulation, choosing appropriate methods, tools, and samples for data collection. A major limitation of our discussion is our focus on the quantitative approach to social psychological study of caste. It is important to note that a qualitative focus might provide different solutions to many of the issues

we discussed but might also involve a different set of interpretative and ethical complexities. Notwithstanding this limitation, we believe that social psychologists and other social science researchers might find our intervention useful. We certainly need more discussion on these concerns. Through a gingerly approach, we are hopeful that social psychology can be a potent catalyst in ending the scourge of the caste system.

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