

Caste as a Socio-Psychological Construct: Theoretical and Empirical Expositions

G.C. Pal¹

Abstract

Caste in India is intricately and inevitably linked to multiple issues specifically in the context of intergroup relations and behaviours, and social inequality. Despite the perceived changes in the caste system and its manifestations, it is acknowledged that caste continues to exist in the Indian psyche as part of everyday life. An engagement with the 'caste question' as a matter of socio-psychological analysis has significance given the fact that caste involves social, cognitive and emotional elements that contribute to having different meanings for social groups, and generate different forms of affective and behavioural responses. With the recognition of the dearth of research on 'psychology of caste', this article attempts to provide insights into underlying socio-psychological processes in the persistence and pervasiveness of caste, and caste-based oppressive behaviours. Building on the recent debate and contestation on the transformations in caste, gaps in the mainstream psychological research on caste in India, and Ambedkar's psychological expositions of caste, the article focuses on the issues of socio-psychological construction of caste, the protuberant manifestations of caste in the forms of caste-based discrimination and violence, and responses to such oppressive behaviours through the lens of socio-psychological frameworks. It is argued that changes in the expressions of caste in contemporary society influence the social cognition of caste groups to espouse varied responses. The increased resistance to the perceived 'identity threats' makes the social groups strive to strengthen their 'collective identity', in turn, sustaining the caste in contemporary society. The article calls for research to explore shades of caste from socio-psychological perspectives rather than looking at it primarily as a demographic variable. It also advocates for strategic psychological interventions using both legal and social tools at the societal level, with a specific focus on blurring 'caste boundaries' and breaking the 'caste wall in mind'.

Keywords

Caste, social psychology, oppression, resistance, identity threat, salience of caste

¹Director, Indian Institute of Dalit Studies, New Delhi
Email: gcpal24@gmail.com

Introduction

Caste in India is an age-old conceptualization of a social system. Over the years, it has been understood through different signifiers. The ideas of caste as an institution and an ideology, however, have been dominant in the discourse of understanding it. As an institution, caste has provided a framework that organises social groups into categories, and as an ideology, it is deeply associated with certain beliefs and values that legitimize and reinforce the caste edifice. Caste therefore, has had a significant influence on social relationships and human behaviours for many years. However, the relevance of caste in present-day society remains a contentious issue. Some scholars suggest that the caste system in India has undergone considerable changes over the years whereas for some others, caste identities continue to remain strong and many factors contribute to the continuance of caste influence in contemporary Indian society. Jodhka & Manor (2018: 3) note that ‘caste is a dynamic reality, constantly changing and evolving with varied trajectories’, similar to the observations of Hoff & Pandey (2006: 206) that ‘caste identity is contingent and contextual rather than fixed’. While looking at the changes in the traditional caste system in India, Beteille (2012) is of the view that the role of caste is in decline but new forms of influence open up. It is pointed out that ‘old rules of exclusion are often replaced by more subtle and flexible codes whose social effects are similar’ (p. 43). Jogdand, Khan & Mishra (2016) see the changes in the weakening of traditional power relations between caste groups, the declining role of ideological beliefs in the legitimation of the caste system, and growing consciousness and assertion among low caste groups. According to Waghmore (2017), the expressions of caste have changed. Caste is often manifested in subtle ways but tends to generate different forms of affective and behavioural responses between caste groups.

Notwithstanding the perceived changes in the caste system and its role in society, scholars across disciplines recognise that caste continues to exist in the Indian psyche as part of everyday life. The prejudice attached to caste continues to deeply affect intergroup relations and the lives of a large number of people. A recent survey reveals that a majority of Indians today identify with a caste regardless of their religion (Sahgal et al. 2021). Based on an anthropological survey, Manor (2020) notes that caste sometimes gives way to ‘accommodations’ by high-caste groups. However, he recognises that accommodations among the high castes should be based not on a change of heart but on a change of mind. As Pal (2020b) finds, the initiatives towards accommodations sometimes take place in the aftermath of caste-based violence with the increased resistance against such acts and fear of legal challenges. Interestingly, the survey on attitudes about caste in India (Sahgal et al. 2021) reveals that a majority of Indians do not see widespread caste discrimination in the country, which may be a reflection of their recent experience with caste discrimination. They expressed the feeling that they would be comfortable living in the same neighbourhoods as people of different castes. They still conduct their social lives largely within caste hierarchies. For example, a majority have reported that their close friends are mostly members of their

caste, and that they believe in prevention of inter-caste marriage. Likewise, Coffey, et al. (2018) report that a majority of members from low caste or/and other social groups may not have personally encountered discrimination, but assert widespread discrimination against the members of low caste groups, and high-caste people also admit to practising discrimination.

The significance of caste in the present day has been increasingly demonstrated through caste-based practices and interactions experienced and performed in different spheres of life (Bhoi & Gorringe 2023; Murugan & Lakshmi 2018). Caste continues to shape the opportunities and outcomes of the social groups (Jodhka 2016; Kumbhar 2016; Mosse 2018). Thus, several studies assert that the continuity and distinctiveness of caste are manifested in many ways, affecting society in one way or another. Although caste manifestations are found to vary in different social and institutional contexts, yet the pervasive effects of caste remain almost similar. However, caste often intersects with other identity characteristics such as class, gender, occupational status, and so on, to have differential effects. As observed, caste interplays with factors of power and prosperity to create conditions for manifestations of caste differences (Jodhka & Manor 2018; Mosse 2018), and the power of caste groups is reinforced by a variety of 'sanctioning mechanisms' (Rafanell & Gorringe 2010: 616). While the aforementioned observations may call for further research on the changing forms that caste assumes in contemporary India, and the intersection of caste with other identities to influence social relations and human behaviours, it is essential to understand the processes that lead to its transformations and persistence from interdisciplinary perspectives. Considering the enduring nature of caste and its 'unjust' manifestations (Ambedkar 1989) in terms of denial of basic rights and other oppressive behaviours based on social values, despite the protective social measures and institutional support for anti-caste practices and behaviours, an engagement with the caste question as a matter of socio-psychological exploration holds significance.

Psychology of Caste: A Neglected Dimension of Psychological Science

Sociological and anthropological research initiatives into caste have undoubtedly enriched our understanding of the genesis, distinct ideological principles, workings, effects, and transformations of the caste system. Salient features of caste have also been understood through the lens of economics and politics. However, the manifestations of caste in cognitive, affective and behavioural domains of individuals as well as groups affirm that caste is an important psychological phenomenon. Social psychological frameworks have offered explanations to understand how the thoughts, feelings, and actions of individuals and groups are influenced by features of socio-cultural contexts and beliefs (Allport 1985). Psychological theory on social categorisation (Tajfel 1981; Tajfel & Turner 1986) explain how group membership and socio-religious capital of being members of a group bring differential experiences to have implications for the psychological functioning of the individuals, and intergroup relations and behaviours.

Moreover, although the complexities in caste boundaries are rooted in a wide range of notions, they are intertwined with religious doctrines. As Ambedkar (1987) puts it, the concept of caste cannot be understood without viewing it in the context of religion and social ideology, i.e., the underlying set of ideas and images as these determine human relationships. He therefore affirmed that habitual conduct with the backing of religion is not easy to change. Like the identity of religion, caste represents descent-based identity and can be compared to being in a religious sect (Das & Khurana 2010). The cultural psychology of religion (Kakar 1996) looks at religion as an institution to understand human relations and experiences. The importance of psychological research in the context of caste has also been recognized by scholars from other allied disciplines as the key issue remains confronting intergroup identity threats between caste groups (Oommen 2002; Mosse 2018). There are socio-psychological frameworks which can provide insights to understand how caste operates in daily life and is a psychological construct in many ways. However, they need to be contextualised in changing situations of caste. It is widely recognised that caste is less understood in the domain of psychological science and the psychology of caste has not emerged as a legitimate field of social scientific study (see, Gorur & Forscher 2023; Jogdand et al. 2016; Pal 2019a, 2023; Sophan & Nair 2023). It is also believed that research on the psychology of caste would help in understanding how intergroup processes operate across the scale of human experiences.

Another issue is that the analysis of caste has essentially focused on its structural elements and social and economic implications, besides the experiences of low caste groups as victims of the caste system. In past years, several psychological studies concerning caste largely revolve around the disadvantaged position of low caste groups on various psychological attributes (Pal & Swain 2009; Sinha 1994; Sinha et al. 1982). But, caste manifestations in the forms of prejudice, discrimination, stigmatisation, humiliation, violence, and so on are triggered mostly by the individuals or groups standing at positions of power in the caste order. In the changing socio-political contexts, the perspectives of the high caste members as 'actors' or 'performers' or 'oppressors' whose relative privileged positions are maintained and legitimised by caste-based practices and behaviours cannot be overlooked. In recent times, there has been a growing recognition of understanding caste-related phenomena with a focus on high caste groups (Pal 2019a, 2023; Pathania et al. 2023; Sophan & Nair 2023). This was also emphasised by Ambedkar in his thoughts on the psychology of caste, discussed in the next section.

In recognition of the persistence of caste and its varied manifestations in different spheres of social life and the scarcity of research on the psychology of caste, this article focuses on four issues. First, the psychological research on caste in India sets the context for understanding the psychology of caste. Second, Ambedkar's psychological expositions of caste shed light on the relevance of research on the psychology of caste. Third, the processes through which caste feelings gather strength in contemporary society, and play a role in caste-based oppressive behaviours. Fourth,

socio-psychological frameworks that can contribute to our understanding of the persistence and pervasiveness of caste, and caste-based discrimination and violence.

The article draws evidence from different sources that include—the literature on caste as a social system in general and psychological research on caste in particular, limited official data on caste-based discrimination and violence reflecting on the patterns of such oppressive behaviours; a series of recent studies on caste-based discriminations and violence in different social contexts; and a few theoretical frameworks used in the context of intergroup processes explaining relations and behaviours between groups. It is expected that an understanding of these issues supplements the sociological and anthropological explanations of caste and its implications for strategic interventions.

Caste and Psychological Research in India: A Critique

Historically, caste has been one of the most important pervasive cultural and social systems in the Indian context which has had a perceptible influence on the thoughts and behaviours of individuals and groups. Mainstream Indian psychological research has relatively overlooked the core issues underlying caste and its larger consequences. This is often attributed to the influence of Western or Euro-American psychological principles and practices deeply entrenched in behaviourist ideology, on Indian psychological research for many years (Dalal & Misra 2010; Mishra, Akoijam & Misra 2009; Mishra & Padalia 2021; Mitra 1972; Nandy 1974; Pareek 1981). In the past, there have been some psychological studies which looked into various social and cognitive dimensions of caste, such as—caste beliefs and prejudices (Anant 1970; Paranjpe 1970); meta-cognitive processes, attitudes, self-evaluation, self-esteem (Das 1982; Majeed & Ghosh 1989; Rath & Sircar 1960); and cultural imagination of caste (Kakar 1992). Several studies, especially in the fields of developmental and educational psychology, followed the overriding paradigm of ‘deficits and disadvantages’ to understand differences between caste groups on a variety of cognitive tasks/skills and psychological attributes/traits. Most of these studies argued that in Indian conditions, low caste groups had suffered deprivations for many generations and entered the so-called ‘vicious circle’ of social and psychological deficits. They reported differences between caste groups on *cognitive* attributes like self-esteem, cognitive skills, and aspirations; and *affective* aspects like helplessness, anxiety, insecurity, and achievement motivation (Pal 2019a).

The psychological research in India on caste primarily used caste as a demographic variable to examine the social group differences in psychological attributes to reflect on the role of cumulative deficits. Based on a survey of psychological studies relating to caste, Sinha, Tripathi & Misra (1982), observed that a few studies mentioned caste as a psychological variable instead of caste being labelled as cultural deprivation or cultural disadvantage. Moreover, there was an overreliance on student samples in most psychological research; perhaps a convenient method to have a reasonable sample size to justify differences. According to Sinha

(1994), the degree of deprivation due to limited experiences and impoverished environmental conditions is a prime determinant of psychological functioning and cannot be attributed to the caste of the individuals.

It was even argued that since low caste groups were already excluded and stigmatized, the concern is that simply reporting significant differences between caste groups might naturalize differences (Mahalingam 2003). Based on a review of the psychological research on caste, Das & Khurana (2010) proclaimed that Indian psychologists were interested more in cognitive markers associated with caste. According to them, there seems to be a lack of perspective blurring the distinctions between the 'deficits versus differences' approaches, which offer explanations for social group differences in terms of deprivation of privileges. It must be noted that despite the advancement of socio-psychological frameworks and their relevance in explaining intergroup relationships and behaviours, there has been a dearth of psychological research on how caste as a systemic and structural micro-level variable differentially affects people, and brings changes in the responses of caste groups. The discourse of psychological research puts a skewed emphasis on the workings of caste through a psychological analysis to shed light on psychological processes that sustain caste, and also have implications for human development.

The fact is that caste is a complex social system. It has structural, institutional, relational, and behavioural dimensions to affect human and social development (Pal 2015, 2019a, 2019c, 2020b). In the changing socio-political contexts of present-day society, caste has been one of the most socially sensitive issues. So, psychological research on caste in India would involve many methodological challenges. Research engagement with the 'psychology of caste' needs to build knowledge around the 'everydayness of caste' using an integrated mixed-method approach involving an interplay of competing data sets to have a better understanding of processes of caste-related issues and responses of caste groups. Although caste needs to be studied within the local socio-cultural contexts, one cannot overlook the relevance of existing socio-psychological frameworks in the context of intergroup processes. There is a need to extend their aptness and generalisability in addressing real-life problems across socio-cultural contexts and for critical advances in the field (Pettigrew 2018).

Psychological research on caste in India needs to be concerned with the implicit processes implicated in social cognition to determine the human behaviours of many people, creating disabling conditions for some sections of people to perform, and depriving the fundamental needs of belongingness and social acceptance. This was also echoed by Amartya Sen who affirmed, that mechanisms of discrimination and violence have wider socio-psychological consequences because it indirectly affects the basic human need of belongingness and holds up the drive for human development (Sen 2006). Thus, the critical questions are: (i) Why does caste, which has a strong historical link, still operate as a relevant social category and continue to influence different aspects of life?, and (ii) How can social psychological frameworks contribute towards understanding the persistence of caste and caste-related phenomena? Before

addressing these questions, an attempt is made here to provide an overview of how B.R. Ambedkar recognised caste as a psycho-social reality and had addressed caste-related phenomena at cognitive and affective levels of individual and groups.

Ambedkar's Psychological Expositions of Caste: Some Reflections

Caste has been extensively studied by academics for a long time. B.R. Ambedkar's reflections on caste however have been the most influential, and he has emerged as a motivational force that influences the mind and characters of many. Many of his writings, speeches and socio-political actions provide psychological thinking that essentially attempts to understand how caste beliefs mould the mind to influence the social relations and behaviours of social groups. There are several instances where Ambedkar's analysis of caste has special references to psychological dimensions and interpretations. But, this has not been understood the way it should have been. This might be due to the more prevailing images about him as an economist, lawmaker, philosopher, social reformer, visionary political leader, and so on. Jogdand (2023) asserts that, 'Psychology in India and elsewhere has remained caste-blind' (p. 37), and 'psychologists have either ignored Ambedkar's psychological thinking or discredited it as political activism' (p. 39).

Ambedkar's psychology of caste stems from his personal experience of caste inequities, socio-philosophical explorations of the conditions for a 'just' society, the influential work of Dewey (1922) on 'human nature and conduct', and of course, his unmatched scholarship to understand caste from multidisciplinary perspectives. This section makes an attempt to shed light on the psychological perspectives of Ambedkar on caste as a psycho-social reality. His psychological insights can be useful to build an understanding of the persistence of caste, and how a change in psychological processes underlying social-group relations is the key to understanding caste-based discrimination and violence.

On the issue of the genesis of caste, Ambedkar (1979) believed that one social class, influential in nature, first enclosed their community by becoming an endogamous class, and became a separate social unit. Having the superior status, the group remained a 'role model' for others. Some followed this policy of exclusiveness voluntarily, but others did it under compulsion. He described it as the infection of imitation, referring to how caste spreads through mechanical ritual imitation. In Ambedkar's words, 'some closed the door; others found it closed against them' (Ambedkar 1979: 18). While one is a psychological construal and the other is mechanistic, both are complementary and necessary to explain caste formation in its entirety. He recognised that social position in the caste system was determined apparently by the occupational practices that one observes; but on a much deeper level, they reflect accumulated merit in past lives, commonly called 'karma' (i.e., to do something now because you had done wrong acts in your previous birth). The endorsement of this belief built into the existing

prejudices about the caste system and remained as a mechanism of caste legitimation and ideological justification. This made Ambedkar envisage caste as nothing but a feeling of superiority-inferiority (Ambedkar 1987: 44).

Ambedkar clearly articulated the caste-mind relationship during his fight against the abolition of the caste system. Going by the notion of caste structure and its norms, he was of the view that 'caste is a notion, a state of mind' (Ambedkar 1989: 68), so 'destruction of caste means a notional change'. He described untouchability as an 'aspect of social psychology of intergroup perceptions, a sort of social nausea of one group against another group' (Ambedkar 1948: 143). According to him, the concepts of purity and pollution are representative of emotional states wherein 'the artificial barrier of caste is constructed'. What is to be valued or despised remains indistinguishable in a person's mind? Ambedkar therefore, claimed that 'all reforms need a change in the notions, sentiment, and mental attitudes of the people' (Ambedkar 1989: 59). While emphasising the need to bring about a radical transformation in people's cognition, emotions and behaviours, he called for changing the minds of both high and low caste members. Given the structure of caste-ridden society he emphasised on promoting the assertion by the deprived classes of their rights in all spheres of life and to sensitize all the other classes to the message of equality and social justice. His call, *educate, agitate, organize* at the all-India depressed classes conference in 1942, aimed at building critical agents of change among the depressed classes by raising consciousness and promoting resistance to oppression and disadvantage to undermine the power structure of caste. Rodrigues (2017), while reflecting on Ambedkar as a political philosopher recognises that his approach has 'celebrated human agency' and this has 'changed many low-caste people to assert for their rights and change the mind of others' (see, Jogdand 2023: 39).

Ambedkar's analysis of caste brought new insights into the role of religious ideology in the formation of norms or beliefs that form group prejudice and bias. He observed that, 'people as physical entities are not wrong, but what is wrong is the religious and social ideology that determines the relationships' (Ambedkar 1936: 286). However, he distinguished between religion that realizes the human core values, and one that does not. He valued 'conduct regulated by individual conscience rather than customary morality' (Fuchs 2020: 5). He strongly believed that 'the caste order does not recognize the individual as a centre of social purpose'. It rather provides for a regulatory social mechanism to enforce the social order and the moral philosophy (Ambedkar 1987). The moral principle of 'graded inequality' produces 'an ascending scale of hatred and a descending order of contempt' (Ambedkar 1979: 48) forming the basis of the observance of customary laws by everyone. All these expose Ambedkar's idea of how caste system has defined the status of social groups to inflict feelings of superiority and inferiority. It is argued that 'when social (caste) relations are governed by social order with the backing of religious ideology, it is not easy to change habitual casteist conduct because it springs from an ingrained habit of the mind' (Dhanda 2020: 1). Ambedkar, in his last speech to the Constituent Assembly in November 1949

therefore cautioned, 'we are going to enter into a life of contradictions, the sooner we realise that we are not yet a nation, in a social and psychological sense of the world, the better for us' (Ambedkar 1979: 48).

Ambedkar was aware of caste prejudices and bias in the Indian administrative and judiciary system. While advocating for special treatments for the 'depressed caste' through social provisions, he cautioned that 'the power to administer law is not less important than the power to make laws. The spirit of the legislation may easily be violated if not nullified, by the machinery of the administrators' (Ambedkar 1989: 265). 'Since the law enforcement agencies are very much part of the same caste-ridden society- expecting the law to ensure justice to victims of caste crimes is rather an impractical solution to this perennial social problem' (Ambedkar 1989: 252). He therefore emphasised that the assimilation of the objectives of marginalized groups of society in rules and policy is not sufficient for ensuring social justice, but representations of individuals from these groups in the administration is also required.

The relevance of some of Ambedkar's thoughts has been highly recognised from the ways the caste plays its role in social relationships, caste-class coalition, impunity endorsed by the ideology of caste, continued caste-based oppressive behaviours, caste inequalities and ensuring social justice in contemporary Indian society (Pal 2020a). In line with a few thoughts of Ambedkar on the salience of caste, Allport's theory of prejudice (1954) proclaims that the processes of categorization and prejudice are banal aspects of the human condition. Later on, Tajfel (1981) based on his work on identity processes argued that the processes of categorisation with excitatory and inhibitory cognitive mechanisms promote and demote different social categories both in our perceptions of others and ourselves. Understanding caste prejudice is therefore vital to have insights into 'why caste and caste oppressions persist.' Among other caste manifestations, caste-based discrimination and violence in daily life are enough to attest to its presence. The ubiquity of caste discrimination within the Indian diaspora also points to how cultural values based on caste shape people's cognition and behaviours even under unfamiliar social and cultural conditions. Against the above backdrop, the second part of the article seeks to understand the dominant ideas on the survival of caste and the relevance of a few socio-psychological theoretical frameworks in explaining the persistence of caste in general and caste-based oppressive behaviours in terms of discrimination and violence, in particular.

Survival and Salience of Caste: Overarching Ideas

Before the discussion on socio-psychological frameworks to shed light on how caste is a socio-psychological phenomenon, this section highlights some prevailing ideas on processes in the social, cultural, political and legal spheres that help caste to sustain or survive. It is widely recognised that caste-based norms continue to apprentice cognitive processes specific to domains of moral obligation. Certain sections of society still strongly believe that one must act according to caste rules and fulfil the code of

social and moral behaviour. While it plays a role in constructing social actions and serving to reinforce and legitimize the social order of caste, it constrains the sense of agency among the disadvantaged caste groups to act otherwise. The former maintains social distance to manage relationships between caste groups, more so, in the face of assertions of the latter, often through the mechanisms of social ostracism and socio-economic boycott, besides psychological violence (Pal 2014; 2020b). For Jodhka & Manor (2018: 3) 'caste survives as a relationship that signifies power, a system of domination that often breeds violence and signifies hierarchy and inequality'. While looking at the 'psyche of the oppressor', Siphon & Nair (2023) identify four factors associated with oppressors (dominant caste): colonial mindset, intergenerational transmission of caste attitude, socially-favoured caste behaviour, and delusion of caste superiority that explain how caste is reproduced in various forms to play a role in contemporary society.

Another factor that contributes substantially towards the continuance of caste influence is the politicization of caste in electoral politics particularly at community level (Jodhka 2015). Caste is used as a pragmatic measure to get electoral support, often sharpening caste identity (Vaid 2014). Caste assertiveness often gets intensified. Any opposition of low caste members to the dominance of high caste during the electoral process is perceived by high caste groups as deviance from established social morality, initiating efforts for maintaining caste influence and structure of social relationships.

There are cultural practices of caste communities that sometimes reinforce the tenacity of caste. As reported in recent time, specific arrangements of cultural celebrations by some communities to celebrate their caste heritage and other historical achievements upsurge and deepen caste feelings and identity. The ideas of 'caste *panchayat*' (council) and 'caste village' in some parts of India tend to reinforce caste categorisations and identity. As Guru & Sarukkai (2019: 13) argue, the 'appearance of caste in various modes in everyday life become the markers and signifiers of caste, and the affective, embodied, and lived aspects produce and reproduce caste'. They emphasise that an analysis of caste reproduction should not focus only on caste as structures and institutions. In a similar line, Bhoi & Gorringer (2023) argue that the performed nature of caste on an everyday basis reinforces the 'meaning-making of caste' in contemporary society.

The critical and contested issue is that the legal measures are aimed at protecting the rights of people and the policy approach in the form of positive discrimination is to manage caste inequality. But these often produce prejudice and stronger caste feelings through constant resentment to structure the social relationships between caste groups and make caste more salient. These are used by the high caste groups as mechanisms to symbolically remind low caste groups of their social status, and create 'otherness' against them. As Jodhka (2015) observes, the institutionalization of caste through state policy contributes to the survival of caste and is often perceived as a mechanism of preservation of caste. Thus, social relations that have long been reinforced by caste norms are sometimes maintained on certain preconditions, making low caste groups fall into a 'vicious cycle'.

Caste, Discrimination and Violence: Changing Patterns

In contemporary society, the issue that has drawn wider attention is that caste often constrains intergroup relations and widens cleavages among social groups. These often translate into various forms of violations of human rights against the group placed lower in the caste hierarchy. Among others, the problems of caste-based discrimination and violence have gained prominence. Caste-based discrimination is commonly referred to a situation where low caste groups have differential or unequal access to resources and opportunities as their citizenship rights, and they also encounter unfair treatment owing to the social identities. Although the fall-out of caste discrimination is multi-faceted, the most depressing features for the discriminated people are deprivation of something and mistreatment, and these have significant bearing on their human and social development. In this article, caste discrimination underlines the idea of 'othering' that happens in different spheres of life on an everyday basis. The term 'caste violence' is often interchangeably used with the term caste atrocities, and both carry similar undertones. However, in India, the term 'atrocities' has a legal connotation in the context of caste. In legal parlance, it refers to offenses committed against members at the lower position of caste hierarchy (scheduled castes and scheduled tribes) by other social groups, denoting 'the quality of being shockingly cruel and inhumane', and signifies 'having ingredients of infliction of suffering in one form or the other' (Government of India, 1989). However, under the law, there are specific offenses against low caste, which are called 'atrocities'. This often does not cover all forms of social disabilities. The term 'caste violence' therefore is used to include a wide range of aggressive actions/reactions associated with caste identity. Moreover, it is used to refer to the actions characterized by 'power dominance'. Both the manifestations have been pervasive, and tend to affect low caste people in diverse manners.

It is a fact that in the community context, caste discrimination forces low caste groups to live a life of subordination. Any challenge to such practices often invites various forms of retaliatory action from members of 'other' castes as a matter of disrespect to their social position. So, there has been a continuum of violence from discrimination, humiliation and threats although these cannot be always put on a linear scale. For example, while everyday experiences of caste discrimination may feed into aggression, assertions and challenges to caste norms, these can fuel caste violence as a form of reactive aggression. Thus, caste violence can be seen in relational terms. It is contended that these happen to be the reasons for persistence of caste.

In past decades, the problem of continuing practices of caste-based discrimination and violence has been extensively reported in social science literature. Given the scope of the article, a detailed emphasis on the two caste manifestations has been kept out of detailed discussion. Before the discussion on the socio-psychological context of the continued culture of caste-based discrimination and violence, this section offers insights into the changing nature and patterns of caste-based discrimination and violence in both quantitative and qualitative terms. Given the legal provisions of protection from various forms of discrimination and violence, it would be expected

that a low caste would avail their due rights with assured dignity. But, the macro level evidence indicates that caste violence continues to prevail in contemporary Indian society, adversely affecting the protection needs of low caste.

The official data provided by the National Crime Record Bureau (NCRB) indicates a consistent increase in the number of registered cases of caste violence against low caste. However, the data on caste discrimination is contested. Although the data on violations of civil rights provided by the NCRB reflect the extent of discriminatory practices based on caste, the insignificant figures do not indicate the actual magnitude of caste-based discrimination. However, several empirical studies and reports of civil societies validate the persistence of caste and its role in intergroup relationships and caste discrimination.

According to the national crime data, on an average about 37,000 incidents of violence were registered annually in the last two decades (NCRB, 2001–2021), indicating an increase of about 48 per cent during the corresponding period. The percentage increase was considerably higher from the mid-2010s. The heinous nature of violence against the low caste people accounts for a substantial proportion and shows a notable increase in recent years. There are many registered cases of violence which are psychological in nature—like intimidation, harassment, insulting, humiliation, dishonouring or demeaning, threats, outraging modesty and other malicious acts, these constitute a substantial proportion. Contrary to the social experiences, the NCRB data on caste-related discriminatory practices was found negligible. A glance at the data might lead one to believe that the discriminatory practice is non-existent and, hence, is not an important issue in India.

The figures on caste violence and discrimination are recognised as underestimations and, hence, might not represent the actual situation. For example, despite daily media reports and literature on caste pointing to widespread caste-based discrimination, the official data does not validate it. This suggests that the majority of the cases of caste-based discrimination in particular are not recorded. It is a fact that discriminatory behaviours very often result in violent appropriation in the name of deviance from social norms, leading to the registration of many cases under caste violence. Like the cases of caste discrimination, numerous incidents of violence are not registered for various reasons, which usually range from oppressive tactics of perpetrators to pressure from members of high caste communities, deterrence emanating from other societal and institutional arrangements, and casual attitude of the administration towards implementation of the law (Pal 2012, 2019b, 2021). Many victims of violence are often forced to pull out of registering complaints under certain socio-economic compulsions, the fear of further retribution, and little hope for justice based on the social experiences of significantly low conviction rate, referred to as ‘repelling effects’ (Pal 2019a, 2020b).

However, it often drives the low caste members to look for required social support within the community and strengthen social networks beyond the community for collective actions to elude vulnerabilities to similar behaviours. In many cases caste victims ensure registering incidents of caste violence with the support of

either community members or close associates, or other influential members or non-governmental organisations, despite deterrence and coercion (Pal 2019b, 2020a, 2023). Despite the underestimation of the actual prevalence of caste violence, the increase in registered cases of violence may point to the increased oppressive responses against the low caste members who dare to assert equality, considered by the perpetrators as offensive conduct, as also the increased resilience of low caste through ‘collectiveness’ in countering deterrence and getting their complaints registered.

Despite caste-based discrimination and violence being outlawed, these insidious behaviours are sustained in modern society, sometimes in different forms and subtle ways. There has also been a change in its motives and intensity (Pal 2018, 2019b, 2023; Teltumbde 2011). Now, many violent acts are committed in vengeance against low caste assertion. Changes are also seen in terms of the manifestation of contempt and deep resentment against the state privileges meant for low caste groups. Despite the amendments in the Prevention of Atrocities (PoA) Act 1989 in 2015 to strengthen the law and increase the legitimate protection of the rights of low castes, and even increase public accountability, the most recent NCRB data exhibits an increase in the rate of caste violence. In recent years, caste violence has increasingly become collective and organized, and multi-dimensional (multiple forms of violence are committed simultaneously) (see, Pal 2015, 2020b). Caste violence against women is deliberately promoted to reinforce caste domination and maintain power relations in society (see, Pal 2018).

With the recognition that caste-based discrimination and violence are social realities in present-day society, these can be reference points to understanding the salience of caste to exist in contemporary society. The key questions are: (i) what is the underlying motivation to make caste discrimination and violence happen and persist? and (ii) is it intentional or situational, or both? These hold relevance for understanding these caste-related behaviours through the lens of socio-psychological theoretical frameworks.

Caste-Based Discrimination and Violence: Socio-Psychological Perspectives

In the past, considerable socio-psychological literature on social cognition and social identity has contributed tremendously towards the understanding of socio-psychological underpinnings of intergroup relationships and conflicts. While the socio-psychological frameworks need to be validated in the context of caste, they can be used to explain the persistence of caste as a system of social categorisation or stratification and its manifestations like caste discrimination and violence. There can be a two-way process for optimising knowledge-building on the psychology of caste: use of the constructivist grounded theory, involving the interrogation of human communication and languages of conversations to evolve a framework based on evidence from local context, or contextualising widely used theoretical frameworks on intergroup processes. Both would hold promise for theoretical advancement and

the psychological study of caste. In this section, an attempt is made to use a few psychological theories defining intergroup relations and behaviours and providing insights into the potential factors that contribute to caste-based behaviours; and research evidence to discuss why and how high castes perpetrate violence and what social advantages they might have as a matter of protecting their self-esteem, social position and social identity.

Psychological research on implicit prejudicial attitudes provides a new understanding of how it is the principal motivating force behind social discrimination (Quillian 2006). This captures the cognitive, affective and behavioural elements of caste. The psychology of prejudice, a function of 'individual feelings' (Allport 1954), and 'group mind' (Blumer 1958) becomes an operative instrument for psychic benefit. In the context of caste, prejudice based on the philosophy of the caste system produces false beliefs about the low caste. This yields discriminatory behaviours towards them, which assumes a functional role in deriving greater psychological satisfaction and preserving a privileged position.

However, the social identity theory (Tajfel 1982; Tajfel & Turner 1986) is one of the few most influential approaches in social psychology, which has been instrumental in explaining the origins of conflicts across various contexts. The theory proposes that identification with a group is a psychological transformation in which one's self-interest, social status, and selfhood are defined in collective terms. There is always a desire for an identity to be both distinct from other groups and positive, referred to as 'psychological distinctiveness' (Tajfel & Turner 1986). Downward comparisons are sometimes made to elevate the self-esteem principle of identity (Wills, 1981). When confronted with negative perceptions of group identity or with actions that create a perceived threat, members of the social groups would strive to ensure a positive identity. Social identity therefore provides a basis for shared social action. The responses range from indirect to more direct strategies as a response to identity threats. The theory can be useful in understanding caste-related behaviours like caste discrimination. Caste identity is primarily a 'community identity and caste group status is relational; the latter can be affirmed by the possible defensive strategies to enhance the relative positive distinctiveness of the in-group. Jaspal (2011: 34) argues that 'collective caste identity has important consequences at the individual level.'

Evidence suggests that members of high caste groups tend to essentialise their caste identity based on beliefs that identity is inherited by descent or is ascribed by birth (Mahalingam 2003). They permit themselves to discriminate against low castes and use the strategy of downward comparison through discriminatory practices with the motive of strengthening group identity and reproducing the 'social representation' of low caste as per caste norms. The importance of the 'meaning principle of identity', therefore, sustains caste-based discrimination. On the other hand, for the low caste groups, the negative behaviours of high caste groups may positively influence 'collective identity', i.e. a shared sense of belonging to the group, and respond to high caste behaviours. When social context makes them vulnerable, identification with the in-group becomes a source of resilience, social support and collective identity. These

are likely to positively influence a sense of well-being by playing a moderating role in challenging the negative attitudes and behaviours and buffering the disadvantaged self from an identity threat (Leach & Livingstone 2015). Further, response to identity threats may be influenced by the changes in caste consciousness and power dynamics operating in the group. According to Jogdand (2023), members of low caste groups can contest the dominant perceptions and social devaluation through collective actions to modify their relationship with the social reality. So, responses of both caste groups to the 'perceived identity threat' put them in situations of power struggles to cause the persistence of caste and caste discrimination.

As mentioned earlier, opposition to caste discrimination is often transmuted to violent acts, having larger consequences on social life. Although factors explaining caste discrimination, as discussed above, have relevance for social behaviours like caste violence, still there is a need to understand the socio-psychological underpinnings of caste violence, often rooted in caste discrimination. A dominant sociological explanation of the persistence of caste violence is the traditional hierarchical caste structures with unequal 'power' and 'authority', which continue to shape violent behaviours against the low caste even in the presence of stringent laws on caste violence like the PoA Act. That is why, the implementation gaps in the PoA Act were consistently held as the major cause of the increase in the number of caste violence, even by government monitoring bodies like the National Commission for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (NCSCST) and National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) (see, Pal 2019a, 2023). However, in recent years, there has been a change in focus from the more structural and legal explanations to the intergroup dynamics in explaining the tenacity of caste violence, as it is considered to be a social phenomenon that mostly takes place at the community level. An attempt has been made in the following sections to draw insights from a few interrelated socio-psychological frameworks on intergroup processes to offer socio-psychological explanations for the persistence of caste violence. Although, it is often argued that the psychological study of caste may not be adequately explained by the theoretical frameworks developed and used in Western contexts, it is still held that integrating some interrelated theoretical strands would provide a deeper understanding of group-level processes shaping caste violence as an oppressive behaviour against the low caste.

Following the seminal work of Allport (1954) on prejudice, Blumer (1958) proposed that the prejudice-based 'group position' is at the root of many group behaviours, including social conflicts. According to Blumer, four types of group feelings exist among dominant groups: (i) being naturally superior or better; (ii) being intrinsically different from subordinate groups; (iii) being entitled to exclusive rights and privileged positions; and (iv) the fear and suspicion, and an apprehension that the social position is under threat from the subordinate groups. These feelings play an important role in maintaining 'group position'. In the context of caste violence, it can be argued that the fourth feeling is at the root of many cases of caste violence. In line with the first three feelings, while the experiences of high-caste groups shape their sense of 'privileged group position', the fourth feeling causes perceived 'identity

threat'. The legitimate protection of rights and assertiveness of the low caste groups against unfair treatment and social dominance is taken as non-compliance to the ideology of caste, and a 'social threat' to their existing 'social position'. This escalates a 'feeling of identity threat', and rejuvenates strong animosity. The perceived social threats often intensify resentment to cause caste violence as a defensive reaction.

This goes along the lines of evidence indicating how the resistance of low caste to the rigidity of caste norms and unfair treatments is perceived by the high caste groups as disregard for their social position, evoking wrath, creating an attitude of revenge-taking and retaliation, and making them use different social mechanisms to suppress any assertion by low caste; violent behaviours being the prominent one (Pal 2012, 2019b, 2023). Further, many cases of caste violence are being committed in a 'collective' manner (Pal 2014, 2018, 2020b), which suggest efforts to maintain a strong sense of group position. A few economic studies have revealed that change in threat perception by high castes is caused or created by changes in the relative socio-economic positions of the caste groups and is linked to crime rates. The econometric analysis of local-level (district) data on crimes showed that a narrowing down of the gap in economic position between low caste and high caste groups was associated with an increase in crimes, particularly violent crimes (Sharma 2015). Similarly, Kabiraj (2023) using a spatial regression technique on the data on caste-based crime and socio-economic conditions found that when the socio-economic gap between the caste groups decreased, high castes' violence against the low castes increased. Kremer & Schermbrucker (2006) argue that certain goals and interests of individuals or groups at two different social positions create the ideal conditions for a conflict purposefully. The central human motivation is to achieve the goal of maintaining a distinct identity. In this sense, incidents of caste violence are mostly intended or purposeful acts. Caste violence can result from the existence of incompatible goals between high caste and low caste groups, the latter striving for a positive social identity through equal rights, and the former attempting to have a stronger sense of 'positive' and 'distinct' social identity in line with caste norms; being indulged in violent acts to subdue any opposition to their caste privileges and status. As Sankaran, Sekerdej & von Hecker (2017) argue, caste identity is more salient amongst high caste individuals, because 'the inherent property of caste and greater perceived status over many years heightens group identification with one's caste.' They perceive a violation of caste norms as potentially threatening to the group identity, motivating them to alleviate this threat and protect their in-group identity, purportedly through violence. The argument goes along the lines of Blumer's four feelings.

The ideas of Blumer and Tajfel explaining caste violence can further be augmented by the intergroup threat theory (Stephan, Ybarra, & Rios 2009) and the social representation theory (Moscovici 2001). The former posits that when people perceive that 'outgroups' actions are in a position to cause harm to their social identity and status, they experience intergroup threat. There can be many antecedents to the threats including relative power and influential members. Further, this threat can be *realistic*

(concerns about loss of privilege, power, resources, etc.); and *symbolic* (concerns about the integrity and validity of the in-group's meaning system including its norms, values and social representation). However, both are constructed and represented in the minds, to result in 'identity threat'. The social representation theory (Moscovici 2001) states that perceived threats arise from representational processes wherein one transforms abstract ideas about outgroup members into objective or common-sense realities, contributing to the precipitation of reactive responses, such as acts of violence.

From a psychological standpoint, caste violence is not only simply social behaviour but also characterised by aggressive reactions. The internalised superior position among the dominant groups is very often exhibited through 'micro-aggressions', referring to the verbal and non-verbal invasive messages aimed at subordinate groups, and contempt for them (Pierce 1970; Sue 2010). Different forms of aggressions like 'micro-assaults', 'micro-insults' and 'micro-invalidations', can be communicated to the subordinate groups around identities (Sue 2010). While the first two are messages of direct aggression, the last one indirectly conveys disrespect or contradicting views. However, all these are related to each other and are often delivered through various aggressive signals as messages of hostility.

In the context of caste, as discussed earlier, resentments among high caste are often caused by the state policy measures in favour of low caste. The slightest assertive move of the low caste members or resistance to their caste positions can be perceived by the high caste to be a function of these 'favoured' legal and social interventions for the low caste groups. Under some preconditions, the feelings of both shame and anger ignite micro-aggressions and incite acts of caste violence. As found, the attitudes of revenge-taking, retaliation, and intimidation are important mechanisms that are very often used to suppress assertiveness among low caste, seemingly with an intent to 'teach a lesson' (Pal 2015, 2019b, 2023). It so happens that sometimes the entire low caste community suffers from the perceived transgressions of individuals for any opposition. So, when caste identity is profoundly entrenched in the social psyche at conscious or subconscious levels, violent behaviours can be considered as simple micro-aggressions on caste lines. However, in the context of caste, the way the micro-aggressions are conceptualized and usually understood, might not be specific to the dominant group. For the low caste, it might be more implicit to the perceived threat to their social identity, driving collective actions against constant unfair treatment and humiliation to foster a quest for social change.

From the above discussion, it can be argued that the occurrence of caste-based discrimination and violence that low caste face are both situational and intentional. Given that the law does not permit caste practices, more people from low caste have become conscious about their rights and are in a position to assert their rights and oppose any unequal practices. However, the resistance of high castes to such perceived changes has remained strong. These create constant conflicting situations, making caste-based violence one of the most important regular manifestations of caste in contemporary society.

Conclusion

The growing literature on caste affirms that caste is not a thing of the past; it is very much alive in the present-day modern society. Despite social and political transformations, protective legislative and social measures for low caste groups, and a strong criminal justice system to ensure justice, caste continues to be one of the most oppressive social systems in India. It persists in different forms and affects social life in multifarious ways. Caste manifestations in forms of discrimination, humiliation, and violence exist across the spectrum though their nature varies. In the last few decades, scholars from different disciplines have looked into the issue of caste as a social system, everyday experiences of caste, and its effects from different perspectives. Despite the recognition that caste is a psychological phenomenon and social psychological theories on intergroup processes provide explanations for intergroup relations and behaviours, the psychology of caste is under-researched. Indian psychological studies on caste have not focused on caste questions the way it should have been to add to the knowledge domain of intergroup processes.

This article is an attempt to bring in a few interrelated socio-psychological frameworks to explicate the psychological processes involved in the survival of caste and its oppressive manifestations in the forms of caste-based discrimination and violence in contemporary society. It is strongly held that caste persists more as an important socio-psychological phenomenon in present-day society. The transformations in caste relations, increased social consciousness among low caste groups, and growing challenges to the traditional social order cumulatively position caste groups with a sense of 'identity threat'. For the high caste groups, it emanates from the low castes' resilience against caste norms and social oppressions, and their assertions for social equality. They tend to reproduce the effects of caste in the process of upholding a 'group position' and a positive and distinct social identity. The caste-based discriminatory practices and violence serve as defensive mechanisms to keep low caste away from social relations. For the low caste groups, experiences of devaluation of social identity and oppressive behaviours increase their resistance in the process of searching for a positive identity. These create social conditions that sustain the salience of caste in today's society.

Unequal battles between caste groups revolve around the power differentials. The low caste groups find little space to fight for justice, and justice is not simply available to many. The major concerns have been to address the issue of the suppression of voices and denial of social justice to them despite the presence of protective social measures and state machinery to address the evils of the caste system. This article calls for future research on the 'psychology of caste' to explore different shades of caste from a psychological lens. In line with Ambedkar's thought that caste would not disappear or be eradicated with socio-economic changes in society but would require radical transformations in people's minds, the article calls for interventions using both legal and social tools.

Strategic interventions at the societal level need to focus on changes in caste beliefs, attitudes and biases, and fostering psychological empowerment among the low caste groups through institutional support to deal with challenges stemming from caste, rather than leaving it to the law and state machinery alone. Psychological interventions can be initiated in the form of social campaigns for raising awareness of the pervasiveness and impact of caste, fostering interpersonal contact, and initiating dialogue between caste groups, and promoting community leadership support, to blur the ‘caste boundaries’ and break the ‘caste wall in mind’.

Funding

This article is part of the research “Violence against Ethnic Minorities in Urban India: An Exploration from Socio-Psychological Perspectives”, undertaken by the author under the Senior Fellowship Grant of the Indian Council of Social Science Research, New Delhi.

References

- Allport, G.W. (1954). *The nature of prejudice*. Wesley Publishing Company.
- . (1985). The historical background of social psychology. In G. Lindzey & E. Aronson (Eds.), *The handbook of social psychology*. McGraw Hill.
- Ambedkar, B.R. (1936). *Annihilation of caste*. Bharat Bhushan Printing Press.
- . (1948). *The Untouchables, who were they and why they became Untouchables?* Amrit Book.
- . (1979). *Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar Writing and Speeches, Vol. 1*. Education Department, Government of Maharashtra.
- . (1987). *Dr. B.R. Babasaheb Ambedkar Writings and Speeches. Vol. 3*. Education Department. Government of Maharashtra.
- . (1989). *Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar Writing and Speeches, Vol. 5*. Education Department, Government of Maharashtra.
- Anant, S.S. (1970). Caste prejudice and its perception by Harijans. *The Journal of Social Psychology*, 82(2), 165–172.
- Beteille, A. (2012). The peculiar tenacity of caste. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 47(13), 41–48.
- Bhoi, D. & Gorringer, H. (2023). Introduction. In D. Bhoi & H. Gorringer (Eds.), *Caste in everyday life: Experience and affect in Indian society* (pp. 1–26). Palgrave Macmillan.
- Blumer, H. (1958). Race prejudice is a sense of group position. *The Pacific Sociological Review*, 1(1), 3–7.
- Coffey, D., Hathi, P., Khurana, N., & Thorat, A. (2018). Explicit prejudice: Evidence from a new survey. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 53(1), 46–54.
- Dalal, A.K., & Misra, G. (2010). The core and context of Indian psychology. *Psychology & Developing Societies*, 22(1), 121–155.
- Das, J.P., & Khurana, A.K.S. (1988). Caste and cognitive processes. In S. Irvine & J. Berry (Eds.), *Human abilities in cultural context* (pp. 487–508). Cambridge University Press.
- Das, V. (1982). *Structure and cognition: Aspects of Hindu caste and rituals*. Manohar Publication.
- Dewey, J. (1922). *Human nature and conduct: An Introduction to social psychology*. Prometheus.

- Dhanda, M. (2020). Made to think and forced to feel: The power of counter-ritual. In Aakash S. Rathore (Ed.), *B.R. Ambedkar: The quest for justice, Vol. 2* (pp. 71–90). Oxford University Press.
- Fuchs, M. (2020). Ambedkar's theory of the social: The universal condition of recognition. In Aakash S. Rathore (Ed.), *B.R. Ambedkar: The quest for justice, Vol. 2* (pp. 1–25). Oxford University Press.
- Gorur, K., & Forscher, P.S. (2023, February, 13). Advancing the Psychological Approach to Social Inclusion: Unravelling Caste as a Unique Construct. *Busara Centre for Behavioral Economics*. <https://doi.org/10.31234/osf.io/g39t2>.
- Government of India (1989). *The Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, No. 33*, 11 September, Ministry of Social Welfare and Empowerment, New Delhi: Government of India.
- Guru, G., & Sarukai, S. (2019). *Experience, caste and everyday social*. Oxford University Press.
- Hoff, K., & Pandey, P. (2006). Discrimination, social identity and durable inequalities. *The American Economic Review*, *96*(2), 206–211.
- Jaspal, R. (2011). Caste, social stigma and identity processes. *Psychology & Developing Societies*, *23*(1), 27–62.
- Jodhka, S.S. (2015). *Caste in contemporary India*. Routledge.
- . (2016). Ascriptive hierarchies: Caste and its reproduction in contemporary India. *Current Sociology*, *64*(2): 228–243.
- Jodhka, S.S., & Manor, J. (2018). Introduction. In S.S. Jodhka & J. Manor (Eds.), *Contested hierarchies, persisting influence: Caste and power in 21st century India* (pp. 1–36). Orient Blackswan.
- Jogdand, Y. (2023). Ground down and locked in a paperweight: Toward a critical psychology of caste-based humiliation. *Critical Philosophy of Race*, *11*(1), 33–67.
- Jogdand, Y., Khan, S.S., & Mishra, A.K. (2016). Understanding the persistence of caste: A commentary on Cotterill, Sidanius, Bhardwaj & Kumar (2014). *Journal of Social and Political Psychology*, *4*, 554–570.
- Kabiraj, P. (2023). Inequality and caste-based crime in India. *Journal of Asian and African Studies*, *58*(7), November, 8. <https://doi.org/10.25384/SAGE.c.6921046.v1>.
- Kakar, S. (1992). *The inner world*. Oxford University Press.
- . (1996). *The colours of violence: Cultural identities, religion and conflict*. University of Chicago Press.
- Kremer, J., & Schermbrucker, I. (2006). Difference and the psychology of conflict. *Psychologists*, *19*(3), 160–163.
- Kumbhar, S. (2016). Everyday Dalit experiences of living and the Dalits. *Economic and Political Weekly*, *51*(35), 13–15.
- Leach, C.W., & Livingstone, A.G. (2015). Contesting the meaning of intergroup disadvantage: Towards a psychology of resistance. *Journal of Social Issues*, *71*(3), 614–632.
- Mahalingam, R. (2003). Essentialism, culture, and power: Representations of social class. *Journal of Social Issues*, *59*(4), 733–749.
- Majeed, A., & Ghose, E. (1989). Affective syndrome crisis in scheduled caste. *Social Change*, *19*, 90–94.
- Manor, J. (2020). Inter-caste accommodations and minimal civility in rural India. In S. Waghmore & H. Gorringer (Eds.), *Civility in crisis: Democracy, equality and the majoritarian challenge in India* (pp. 129–148). Routledge.
- Mishra, A.K., & Padalia, D. (2021). Re-envisioning psychology: A critical history of psychology in India. In G. Misra, N. Sanyal, & S. De (Eds.), *Psychology in modern India* (pp. 163–201). Springer.

- Mitra, S.K. (1972). Psychological research in India. In S.K. Mitra (Ed.), *A survey of research in psychology* (pp. 17–43). Popular Prakashan.
- Moscovici, S. (2001). *Social representations: Essays in social psychology*. University Press.
- Mosse, D. (2018). Caste and development: Contemporary perspectives on a structure of discrimination and advantage. *World Development*, 110, 422–436.
- Murugan, P., & Lakshmi, C.S. (Eds.) (2018). *Black coffee in a coconut shell: Caste as lived experience*. Sage publication.
- Nandy, A. (1974). The non-paradigmatic crisis of Indian psychology: Reflections on a recipient culture of science. *Indian Journal of Psychology*, 49(1), 1–20.
- NCRB (2001-2021). *Crimes in India*, National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB), Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India.
- Oommen. (2002). Race, religion, and caste: Anthropological and sociological perspectives. *Comparative Sociology*, 1(2), 115–126.
- Pal, G.C. (2012). Mapping Caste-Based Atrocities in Uttar Pradesh. *Project Report, No. 49*. Indian Institute of Dalit studies.
- . (2014). Access to justice: social ostracism obstructs efforts by Dalits for equal rights. *Journal of Social Inclusion Studies*, 1(1), 122–134.
- . (2015). Social exclusion and mental health: The unexplored aftermath of caste-based discrimination and violence. *Psychology & Developing Societies*, 27(2), 189–213.
- . (2018). Caste-gender intersectionality and atrocities in Haryana: Emerging patterns and state responses. *Journal of Social Inclusion Studies*, 4(1), 30–50.
- . (2019a). Caste, outcaste, recasting justice: Trajectories of social development. In J. Pandey, R. Kumar & K. Thapa (Eds.), *Social diversity and social development: Psychological perspectives* (pp.83-105). Springer.
- . (2019b). Caste crimes and law in Uttar Pradesh, *Economic and Political Weekly*, 54(22), 60–66.
- . (2019c). Violation civil rights, atrocities and deprivation, In R.P. Mamgain (Ed.), *Growth, disparities and inclusive development in Uttar Pradesh* (pp. 191–214). Springer.
- . (2020a). Caste and delivery of social justice: Revisiting Ambedkar. In Aakash S. Rathore (Ed.), *B.R. Ambedkar: The quest for justice, Vol. 2* (pp. 49–70). Oxford University Press.
- . (2020b). Caste and consequences. *Caste: A Global Journal on Social Exclusion*, 1(1), 95-110.
- . (2021). Atrocities Committed against Scheduled Castes in Haryana: Causes, and Remedial Measures. *Project Report*. Indian Institute of Dalit Studies.
- . (2023). Understanding caste violence in contemporary India: Psychosocial underpinnings. In D. Bhoi, & H. Gorringe (Eds.), *Caste in everyday life: Experience and affect in Indian society* (pp. 29–53). Palgrave Macmillan.
- Pal, G.C., & Swain, R.D. (2009). Caste-based discrimination: Socio-psychological perspectives. In the proceedings of the international conference on *Comparative Contexts of Discrimination: Social Exclusion and Equal Opportunity Policies in Asia*, 6-8 May. Indian Institute of Dalit Studies.
- Paranjpe, A.C. (1970). *Caste, prejudice and the individual*. Lalvani Publishing.
- Pareek, U. (1981). *A survey of research in psychology, 1971–76, Part 2*. Popular Publication.
- Pathania, G.J., Jadhav, S., Thorat, A., Mosse, D., & Jain, S. (2023). Caste identities and structures of threats: Stigma, prejudice, and social representation in Indian universities. *Caste: A Global Journal on Social Exclusion*, 4(1), 3–23.

- Pettigrew, T.F. (2018). The emergence of contextual social psychology. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 44(7), 963–971.
- Pierce, C.M. (1970). Offensive mechanisms. In F.B. Barbour (Ed.), *The Black '70'* (pp. 265–282). Porter Sargent.
- Quillian, L. (2006). New approaches to understanding racial prejudice and discrimination. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 32, 299–328.
- Rafanell, I., & Gorringer, H. (2010). Consenting to domination: Theorising power, agency and embodiment with reference to caste. *Sociological Review*, 58(4), 604–622.
- Rath, R., & Sircar, N.C. (1960). Inter-caste relationship as reflected in the study of attitudes and opinions of six Hindu caste groups. *The Journal of Social Psychology*, 51(1), 3–25.
- Rodrigues, V. (2017). Ambedkar as a political philosopher. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 52(15), 101–107.
- Sahgal, N., Evans, J., Salazar, A.M., Starr, K.J., & Corichi, M. (2021, June 29). Attitudes about caste. *Pew Research Center*. <https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2021/06/29/attitudes-about-caste/>. Accessed on November 29, 2023.
- Sankaran, S., Sekerdej, M., & von Hecker, U. (2017). The role of Indian caste identity and caste inconsistent norms on status representation. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 8, 487. doi: 10.3389/fpsyg.2017.00487.
- Sen, A. (2006). *Identity and violence: The illusion of destiny*. Penguin Books.
- Sharma, S. (2015). Caste-based crimes and economic status: Evidence from India. *Journal of Comparative Economics*, 43(1), 204–226.
- Sinha, D. (1994). Some cognitive consequences of derivational environment and their policy and action implications. *Trends in Social Science Research*, 1, 43–57.
- Sinha, D., Tripathi, R.C., & Misra, G. (Eds.) (1982). *Deprivation: Its social roots and psychological consequences*. Concept Publishing.
- Sophan, A., & Nair, A. (2023). Decolonising caste in the Indian context: The psyche of the oppressor. *Psychology & Developing Societies*, 35(1), 110–130.
- Stephan, W., Ybarra, O., & Rios, K. (2009). Intergroup threat theory. In T. Nelson (Ed.), *Handbook of prejudice, stereotyping, and discrimination* (pp. 43–59). Psychological Press.
- Sue, D.W. (2010). *Micro-aggressions in everyday life: Race, gender and sexual orientation*. Wiley.
- Tajfel, H. (1981). *Human groups and social categories*. Cambridge University Press.
- . (1982). Social psychology of intergroup relations. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 33, 1–39.
- Tajfel, H., & Turner, J. (1986). The social identity theory of intergroup behaviors. In W.G. Austin & S. Worchel (Eds.), *Psychology of intergroup relation* (pp. 7–24). Hall Publishers.
- Teltumbe, A. (2010). *The persistence of caste: The Khairlanji murders and India's hidden caste apartheid*. Zed Books.
- Vaid, D. (2014). Caste in contemporary India: Flexibility and persistence. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 40(1), 391–410.
- Waghmore, S. (2017). From hierarchy to Hindu politeness. In S.S. Jodhka & J. Manor (Eds.), *Waning hierarchies, persistent inequalities: Caste and power in 21st century India* (pp. 111–139). Orient Blackswan.
- Wills, T. (1981). Downward comparison principles in social psychology. *Psychological Bulletin*, 90(2), 245–271.