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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Laying the Ground for a Critical Psychology of Caste

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Abstract

The psychological underpinnings and processes of caste have remained obscure. This special issue of *Caste: A Global Journal on Social Exclusion* focusing on *Caste and Psychology* is an initial contribution that lays the ground for developing a critical psychology of caste. In this introductory article, I situate the special issue in the historical and contemporary context. I show that the historical roots of psychological approach to caste go deep. The revolutionary thinking and activism of Mahatma Jotirao Phule and Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar provided a useful foundation for a critical psychology of caste to flourish. Unfortunately, this foundation remained under-appreciated in the subsequent academic and social engagement on caste. Next, I review the contemporary research on the psychological dimension of caste and highlight emerging themes that illustrate contemporary approaches. I argue that there is need of a collective endeavor in the form of a new field of study, namely, 'critical psychology of caste', to integrate divergent perspectives and contributions addressing the psychological dimension of caste. The special issue is a small step in that direction.

Keywords

Caste, Race, Psychological Science, Dalit, Racism, Casteism, Decolonization, Ambedkar

Introduction

The caste system is one of the most complex and oppressive social orders existing on earth today. Expectedly, the scholarship on caste is vast and nuanced (for reviews, see Bapuji et al. 2024; Gupta 2005; Jodhka 2015; Mosse 2018). Despite the deeper insights offered by the extensive literature on caste, its psychological underpinnings and processes have remained obscure. Comparing caste with class in Great Britain and race in the United States, we find a theoretical and empirical vacuum concerning

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psychology. While there are scientific bodies of work addressing the psychology of class (Argyle 1994; Kraus & Stephens 2012; Manstead 2018) and the psychology of race (Richeson & Sommers 2016; Salter & Adams 2013), we are yet to turn our analytic gaze towards the psychology of caste. This special issue of *Caste: A Global Journal on Social Exclusion* focusing on *Caste and Psychology* is an initial contribution that lays the ground for developing a psychology of caste. The special issue takes a critical approach to address the relationship between caste and psychology and emphasizes the value of asking the right questions. Why must we take psychology seriously? Why must we ask the right questions in addressing the psychology of caste?

Psychology as a Form of Power

Psychology as a scientific discipline came into existence in the mid-19th century. Writing what came to be later known as the first textbook of psychology, pragmatist philosopher and psychologist William James (1890) defined psychology as "the science of mental life, both of its phenomena and of their conditions" (James 1890: 26). While James agreed that mental phenomena such as cognitions, desires, feelings, decisions, memory, and the like are the core focus of psychology, he challenged the positions of spiritualist and associationist approaches that abstracted mental phenomena from their context. James argued that mental phenomena do not exist in a vacuum, but there are social conditions (including the human brain and physiology) under which they arise, function, and direct human behavior. The scope of psychology was thus construed as broad and included the antecedent conditions of mental phenomena and their resultant consequences. James (1890) emphasized that the psychologist's most interesting task is to engage in what he called "the quest of the conditions" (p.3). Over a century has passed since James' seminal textbook. Psychology in the meantime has become a very influential, dynamic, and multifaceted science taught, researched, and practiced worldwide.

Notwithstanding many achievements, psychology has not adequately addressed the myriad social conditions and populations across the world. Psychology has postured itself to be representative of the whole of humanity. Still, most psychological theory and research emanates from a highly unrepresentative and psychologically peculiar sample of humanity located in the Euro-American context characterized as "WEIRD" (Western, Educated, Industrialized, Rich, and Democratic Henrich et al. 2010). As a result, there has been epistemic exclusion of experiences, theories, methods, and indigenous epistemologies of the Global South in Psychology. The most concerning aspect of psychology however relates to the way it has dealt with conditions of structural oppression and systemic inequity.

Recently, the American Psychological Association (APA), a powerful scientific and professional organization established in 1892 that dominates psychological teaching, research, and practice in every corner of the world, formally apologized for its role in supporting racial hierarchy and oppression of people of color (APA 2021). An act of apology is underpinned by a sense of moral failure and a feeling of

guilt. What moral failure led to APA's apology? Moral failure refers to psychologists promoting, perpetuating, and failing to challenge racism, racial discrimination, and human hierarchy. Psychology has a history of psychologists actively taking racist positions and using science to defend racism and the eugenic movement (Kamin 2012). Guthrie's (2004) book, *Even the Rat Was White*, provides an overview of historical developments in psychology that constructed Whiteness as a human norm while forming a priori assumption that African people are inferior. Psychologists offered solutions to human suffering, almost exclusively in terms of individual adjustment, leaving the social order conveniently unaffected (Fanon 1967; Richards 2012). There is still widespread denial, distancing, and hypocrisy in addressing racism in Psychology (Richards 2012). Durrheim (2024) draws attention to how White supremacy is maintained in psychology by "conversational silencing" in which the realities of racism and the operation of power are ignored under the guise of doing good science. Overall, psychology has worked as a technique for legitimizing racism and ignoring power inequalities and structural determinants of human oppression. In India, psychology has perpetuated the caste order and denigrated the Dalits and lower castes (Jogdand 2023). In this sense, psychology should be construed as a form of power that is used to control, influence, and coerce Dalit and Black/African people. However, power is a double-edged sword and can also be used to challenge oppression (Turner 2005).

Some psychologists took a reflexive stand and criticized the racist practices and perspectives within the discipline. They made efforts to harness the power of psychology to mobilize social change. The doll studies by psychologists and civil rights activists Mamie and Kenneth Clark showed how racism and segregation affected Black children, leading to the landmark judgement of Brown vs Board of Education that ended racial segregation in US education (Adams et al. 2008). The psychological impact of societal inequality and oppression in the context of racism and colonialism was theorised (Fanon 1967; Martín-Baró 1994; Sartre 1948). Moscovici (1976) criticized the tendency among psychologists to naturalize the social order, delegitimize social change, and discourage resistance. Specifically, social psychologists have been at the forefront of examining societal inequality and oppression. They have addressed the issues of class, gender, racism, and/or colonialism and developed an influential body of theory and research examining group processes and intergroup relations in multiple contexts (Brown & Pehrson 2019). Social psychologists have contributed to a scientific understanding of prejudice, stereotypes, stigma, social identity, leadership, and emotions underpinning social stasis and change (Dixon et al. 2012; Haslam et al. 2013; Reicher 2012; Subasic et al. 2012). Over the last few decades, various critical, feminist, discursive, intersectional, and decolonial approaches have emerged that challenge mainstream Euro-American psychology's dominance while proposing new theoretical and methodological innovations (Adams et al. 2015; Reicher 2011).

Most contributions in this special issue take a cue from these developments in psychology and adopt critical vigilance in asking the right questions. Before we discuss

further details of the special issue, it is important to situate it in the historical context. In the next section, we will look at historical discourse on the psychology of caste.

Historical Roots of Critical Psychology of Caste

It is said that psychology has a long past but a short history. The history of psychology as a scientific discipline started from 1879 when Wilhelm Wundt established a psychological laboratory at University of Leipzig. However, the long past of psychology refers to the fact that discourses on mind, consciousness, cognition, emotion, thought and language have been around us for thousands of years (Hergenhahn & Henley 1997). In the same vein, while psychology as a discipline was invoked to study caste in the early 20th century, the discourse on the psychological dimension of caste goes back for thousands of years. The concern for the social mind enslaved by the Brahminical construction of the varna-caste-gender system has been an important aspect of ideological struggle for social equality in Indian history (Ambedkar 1987; Patil 1982). Buddha's liberatory message for humanity proclaimed the centrality of cultivating the social mind to end human suffering (Ambedkar 2011). Buddhist philosophers Dignaga and Dharmakirti developed radical cognitive theories prioritizing faculties of reason and direct experience. These theories uprooted the epistemological foundations of the caste order by negating eternal ontological status accorded to birth-based caste identity (Verma 2020). The classical Buddhist anti-caste text *Vajrasuchi* of Ashvaghosha interrogated '*what is Brahmin-ness*?' and exposed the hollowness of Brahminical selfhood while negating legitimation of human inequality (Asvaghosha 1831). Buddhist philosophers also challenged the beliefs and attitudes emanating from the varna-caste order. A famous verse[1] in Dharmakirti's 7th century text *Pramāṇavārttika* refers to pride in high caste, the belief in the authority of the Vedas, desiring merit from bathing, and practising self-denial for the eradication of sins as inferential marks of stupidity (Sen 2020). Later, the Bhakti movement particularly Kabir, Guru Nanak, Ravidas, and Tukaram called out the Brahminical arrogance and interrogated the perceived reality constructed by the caste system while evoking the ideal of a casteless, classless society (Omvedt 2011).

Analysis of the Oppressor's Mind and Mental Slavery of the Oppressed

> The depressed and downtrodden masses in India were freed from the physical (bodily) slavery of the Bhats as a result of the advent of the British raj here. But we are sorry to state that the benevolent British Government have not addressed themselves to the important task of providing education to the said masses. That is why the Shudras continue to be ignorant, and hence, their 'mental slavery' regarding the spurious religious tracts of the Bhats continues unabated. (Phule 1873/2008: 8)

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[1] वेद प्रमाणं कस्य चित कर्तृवादः स्नाने धर्मेच्छा जातिवादव लेपः| संतपरंभः पापहनाय चेति विनाशप्रज्ञानां पञ्च लिङ्गानि जाद्ये||

Jotirao Phule, a nineteenth century radical thinker and activist, developed the first-ever systematic psychological approach to understand and dismantle caste-based exploitation and tyranny of Brahmins. As the above quote from his revolutionary book '*Slavery*' illustrates, Phule's conceptualization of slavery and freedom included a critical psychological approach. Phule showed the connection between knowledge and power that underpinned the mental slavery in the caste system (Bagade 2023). He advocated the value of education in freeing the lower castes and women from the mental slavery of the caste system. He called education a "third eye" (Tritiya Ratna) - a metaphor for critical consciousness (cf. Freire 1996) among those exploited and oppressed for centuries. Importantly, Phule pioneered a dual psychological approach that included a focus on the oppressors as well as the oppressed. His work simultaneously exposed the cunning mind of the caste oppressors and the subjugated mind of the oppressed *shudra-atishudra* (lower castes and untouchables) and women. Tarabai Shinde, the first Indian feminist philosopher, pioneered the analysis of Brahminical patriarchy and subjugation of women. Her work exposed male hypocrisy and women's mental anguish in Indian society. Jotirao Phule and Tarabai Shinde together provided a scientific basis to understand the mental slavery of people oppressed by caste and Brahminical patriarchy (Bagade 2019). On this foundation, Dr. B.R. Ambedkar further enriched and developed this critical psychological approach in the twentieth century.

'Psychology of Caste' and Ambedkar's Psychological Thinking

To my knowledge, the first formal invocation of the term 'psychology of caste' is found in historian and sociologist S.V. Ketkar's (Ketkar 1909: 28) study of caste. Ketkar considered the psychological reasons for the existence of caste. He analyzed two critical aspects of the caste system, endogamy and hierarchy, to illustrate the psychological basis of strong attachment and feelings of superiority towards one's caste (ingroup) and repulsive attitudes towards other castes (outgroup). After Ketkar's invocation of 'psychology of caste' in 1909, it is in the scholarship and activism of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar (revolutionary thinker, leader of the oppressed and a maker of modern India; hereafter Ambedkar), that we find the first full expression of 'psychology of caste' as a scientific and political engagement. Ambedkar engaged with the American functional school of psychology by William James and John Dewey (for details on American functionalism, see Buxton 1985; for Ambedkar's engagement, see Stroud 2023) and group mind tradition in social psychology (Ambedkar 1989). Extending Phule's critical psychological approach, Ambedkar saw social dominance of the Savarna Hindus and the mental slavery of the untouchables as inter-related. He therefore critically analyzed Hindu *shastras* (sacred texts) as the sources shaping social dominance-oriented consciousness among Hindu upper castes and simultaneously worked to unravel the cognitive and affective dimensions of dependency and inferiority among untouchables. Bagade (2019) makes a nuanced reading of Ambedkar's theorization of caste slavery and highlights his psychological insights on development of caste consciousness. He shows that Ambedkar rejected Mahar Watan, a land grant and hereditary office that tied the Mahars (an untouchable

caste in Maharashtra) to menial jobs in the village economy, not only due to the inherent economic exploitation but also due to the damage to the self-respect that kept Mahars psychologically weakened (Bagade 2019: 45).

Ambedkar argued that dismantling the social and economic bases of caste and untouchability will not be enough; social and economic changes must be accompanied by efforts to change the consciousness of people: "Caste is a notion; it is a state of mind. The destruction of caste does not, therefore, mean the destruction of a physical barrier. It means a notional change" (Ambedkar 1936/2004: 60). Ambedkar examined the myriad beliefs and attitudes developed among people as a result of the peculiar nature of the caste system. He pointed out that graded inequality—an arrangement that ranks caste groups by unequally assigning economic, educational, and civic rights in a graded manner—has most pernicious social psychological consequences, mainly destroying the possibility of intra-caste and inter-caste solidarity and subsequent damages to societal wellbeing. Graded inequality creates an affective climate in which various castes harbor feelings that form "[an] ascending scale of hatred and descending scale of contempt" (Ambedkar 1987: 48). In addition, Ambedkar approached emotions as group-based performative entities critical to building solidarities and mobilizing collective action (Jogdand 2023). Ambedkar's mobilization discourse is replete with his innovative usage of cognitive and affective categories. For instance, Ambedkar mobilized his followers to contest the "Hintva", the amputated selfhood imposed by the caste system, by invoking and orienting a collective feeling of humiliation among them (Jogdand 2015; Reicher & Jogdand 2016). Ambedkar's invocation and reinterpretation of Buddhism provided necessary social psychological resources to heal from the intergenerational psychological damage suffered by untouchables (Zelliot 2001) and reconstruct the world on the foundation of *Maitri* (loving-kindness) and *Karuna* (compassion) (Beltz & Jondhale 2004).

Closing Thoughts

The roots of critical psychology of caste go deep. The anti-caste thinking and activism of Phule and Ambedkar provided a useful foundation for a critical psychology of caste to flourish. Unfortunately, this foundation remained under-appreciated in the subsequent academic and social engagement on caste. Specifically, psychologists remained distanced from caste and ignored the anti-caste psychological thinking of Phule and Ambedkar (Jogdand 2023). As we shall see next, the interest and effort to address the psychological dimension of caste continued in various ways but there was limited growth of the 'psychology of caste' as an autonomous field of study.

Themes in Psychological Study of Caste: Contemporary Approaches

In the last seventy-five years, various scholarly efforts contributed to understanding the psychological dimension of caste in the dynamic socio-political environment. A systematic review is needed to take stock of important theoretical and empirical trends

and explore future directions. In the limited space of this article and at the risk of oversimplification, it may be useful to point out a few themes in the existing literature. Below, I highlight themes that illustrate contemporary approaches to psychological study of caste issues. In developing these themes, I was tempted to make a distinction between approaches from psychology and that from other disciplines. However, such a distinction felt spurious in terms of understanding the phenomenon. An interdisciplinary approach is necessary to address the complex nature of caste/casteism.

Dalit Selfhood

Dalit literature from 1960s onward started unravelling various psychological aspects of both oppressor and oppressed in the caste system and provided critical insights into development of selfhood in the caste society. An important contribution of Dalit literature to the psychology of caste was that it unraveled the ambivalent and cognitively dissonant nature of the Brahminical mind while also showcasing the social/psychological struggle of Dalit men and women against stigma, humiliation and loss of meaning (see Bama 2012; Kamble 2008; Naimishray 1995). Particularly, revolutionary Dalit writer Baburao Bagul's writing showcased the resistance and resilience of dignified Dalit self in the dehumanizing and humiliating casteist world (see Ḍāṅgaḷe 1992; Satyanarayana 2019). Sukhadeo Thorat (1979) crafted one of the most insightful analysis of the development of Dalit selfhood. Using autobiographical insights, he analyzed the psychological damage suffered by Dalits and outlined the psychological process of rejecting a stigmatized caste identity and simultaneous formation of a new assertive, dignified and rational identity. The ethnographic work by Hardtmann (2009) has illustrated what Guru (2009b) calls as 'rejection of rejection' by Dalits through various coping strategies (e.g. Satyanarayanan & Lee 2023) as well as autonomous mobilizations for social change.

Contrast these contributions with the psychological research in India that emphasized the deficient nature of Dalit selfhood. Rath and Sircar (1960) reported that lower-caste groups prefer terms that exhibit a sense of caste inferiority and self-abasement. Similarly, Anant's (1967) analysis of personality patterns along the caste hierarchy emphasized that untouchables have a 'deficient personality' (p. 393). Subsequently, Majeed and Ghosh (1989) suggested that Dalits feel inferior as they suffer from 'affective syndrome crisis'—a deep-seated, unresolved identity crisis. The failure of Indian psychologists to understand Dalit selfhood has roots in the deficiency model in Western/Eurocentric psychology that scientifically positioned white middle-class people as the norm in terms of intelligence, cognition, personality, self-concept and the like against which the psychology and culture of Black people was evaluated and interpreted as inherently inferior (Robinson 2013). As a result of borrowing assumptions from the deficiency model, this psychological analysis ignored Dalit agency and ultimately fed into the notion of caste-based inferiority.

Psychoanalysis

Psychoanalysis has a long history in India. Girindra Shekhar Bose, Chairman of the Calcutta University Department of Psychology in the 1920s, was closely associated with Sigmund Freud and became a pioneer of psychoanalysis in India. Despite having a good start, psychoanalysis in India could not make a sustained growth and remained distanced from mainstream psychological scholarship (Akhtar & Tummala-Narra 2005; Mishra 2021). However, some attempts to approach caste through psychoanalysis are noteworthy.

Radical Marxist thinker and activist Sharad Patil (2003) tried to integrate Sigmund Freud's concept of the unconscious mind with Marxism and the Buddhist philosophy of Vasubandhu, Dignaga and Dharmakirti. Patil proposed that the Indian social consciousness is split into 'caste conscious' (जात – जाणिव) and 'caste unconscious' (जात – नेणिव). Patil argued, in an unequivocal Freudian sense, that caste-related conscious behavior and conscious thinking is but a tip of the iceberg; all caste-related behavior and thought processes are motivated by the unconscious mind created by the caste system. While Patil invoked the concept of the unconscious mind, Dundes (1997) tried to explain caste and untouchability using Freudian psychosexual stages of development through the analyses of two Hindu folktales. For Dundes (1997), caste hierarchy, untouchability, and toilet training in Indian society are intimately connected with each other. He argued that certain toilet training practices creates what he calls as 'pollution complex' among upper castes. In other words, his rather potentially Dumontian argument is that, "fear of faeces…lies at the very heart of the Indic caste system" (Dundes 1997: 64). Sudhir Kakar (1978) addressed the development of caste consciousness in upper caste Hindu family.

Highlighting the dominance of upper caste Hindu themes in the Indian psychoanalysis, Davar (1999) argued that Indian psychoanalysis is essentially a Hindu psychoanalysis that works as a caste and patriarchal imposition on Hindu women and women of other castes and religions. Methodologically, I think an important limitation in psychoanalytic studies on caste has been to approach caste as some kind of intra-psychic issue to the exclusion of its intergroup and systemic properties. Dwivedi (2024; this issue. See below for more details) reviews the mainstream psychoanalytic engagement with caste and suggests an alternative approach. It remains to be seen whether psychoanalysis can revive itself and develop capacity to provide a scientifically and politically viable avenue to address the question of caste.

Habitus

Sociologists have used several terms to theorize the internalization of social structures in the individual mind. The taste, dispositions, embodied feelings, but most prominently Bourdieu's idea of "habitus" has been proposed to capture the psychological dimension of caste. Bourdieu has defined habitus in terms of 'dispositions': 'social in origin, acquired in infancy, embodied, durable, transposable, hierarchical and reproductive of the social context within which they originated. Dispositions frame subsequent

activity and homogenize individuals exposed to the same local social circumstances.' (Bourdieu 1994). Taking a cue from Bourdieu, Gorringe and Rafanell (2007) proposed 'caste habitus' as a pivot between individual and society, between subjective and objective, between psychological and social while studying the embodiment, protest and change in caste experiences:

> "one's social position within a particular caste informs one's 'caste' habitus. This habitus results in the internalization of specific embodied characteristics, which constitute hierarchical boundaries and, consequently, structure relationships with other castes." (Gorringe & Rafanell 2007: 98)

Caste habitus does shed some light on reproduction of caste; however, as Gorringe and Rafanell point out, it does not adequately explain protest and resistance within caste system (p. 101) (see also Bourdieu 2017). Increasingly, researchers have been using the concept of habitus to conceptualize the psychological impact of caste identity in the Indian educational context (Khanal 2024; Malish & Ilavarasan 2016; Renukuntla & Mocherla 2023).

Lived Experience and Social Interactions

Some scholars have challenged the abstract theorization or idealization of caste and emphasized the value of a phenomenological approach to understand the social reality of caste and untouchability. This intervention is replete with psychological insights on Dalit experience and untouchability. Guru and Sarukkai's work on the nature of experience, selfhood, and theory provide deeper insights into approaching the psychological dimension of caste (Guru & Sarukkai 2012). Guru and Sarukkai define the lived experience as lack of freedom conditioned by the hierarchical caste structure that pushes Dalits outside of boundaries and treats them as repositories of dirt. In an illuminating dialogue, Guru and Sarukkai debate the nature of untouchability. While Sarukkai explored the philosophical foundations of untouchability by analysing the phenomenology of "touch", Guru considered the implicit presence of untouchability in constraining everyday social interactions. Drawing on both Indian and Western traditions, Sarrukai argued the importance of untouchability within the Brahmin tradition and explained how untouchability is an essential requirement of Brahminhood supplemented and outsourced to Dalits. While Sarrukai located the source of untouchability in the Brahmin self, Guru emphasized the implicit presence of untouchability in social interactions and proposed adoption of an archaeological method:

> "Due to the compulsion of the modern conditions, untouchability both as practice and as consciousness, finds it difficult to remain on the surface of social interaction as was the case in the feudal past. Modernity forces it to slide further down to the bottom of the hierarchical mind." (Guru & Sarukkai 2012: 203)

Guru and Sarukkai argue that the category of experience should be taken seriously to theorize social reality. They attempt to highlight psychological underpinnings of caste and untouchability through embodied experiences, and develop an analysis that navigates the boundaries of mental/material, mind/body, individual/social. The phenomenological approach does not limit itself to the individual but foregrounds the lived experience of oppressed collectives such as Dalits.

Guru's (2009a) ground-breaking work on theorizing humiliation by foregrounding Dalit experience addressed the normative and psychological bases of social interaction in the caste context. Importantly, caste-based humiliation was conceptualized as a psychological rather than a physical injury that involves disrespecting and demeaning Dalits and lower castes, damaging their self-respect, attacking their human dignity, and causing them moral hurt and pain. This influential work has not only made interventions into the fields of political and moral theory, but also provided a direction for developing a social psychological conceptualisation of humiliation (Jogdand, Khan & Reicher 2020).

Guru and Sarukkai (2019) further examine the nature of the 'everyday social' focusing on embodiment of the social through the perceptual capacities of sight, touch, sound, taste, and smell. They map the margins, intersections, and complexities of the 'everyday social' in Indian society by juxtaposing it with the mind, self, experience, and the action of the individual and the collective. While discussing the social ontology of social self, Guru and Sarukkai (2019: 119) draw upon the developments in psychology and evaluate the categories of collective mind and collective self. They discuss the possibilities of the group mind, the 'we-self', and how it might relate to the individual, while also locating the cognitive, affective, and behavioral contours of the social self of caste. Guru and Sarukkai's analysis transcends the boundaries of conventional sociology, metaphysics, and phenomenology while developing psychological foundations for a liberatory politics of the oppressed in the caste system. A key contribution of Guru and Sarukkai's work has been to highlight the importance of theorization and methodological innovation required to understand lived experience and social interaction in the caste society. The psychological grounding of this work has influenced the research on uncovering patterns of stigma, discrimination, and exclusion in the caste context.

Collective Victimization: Patterns of Experience and Response

Violence against Dalit and Adivasi communities remains an immutable feature of Indian society (Kabiraj 2023; Sharma 2015; Teltumbde 2011). Various extensive scale surveys have confirmed the continued practice of untouchability in India (Shah et al. 2006; Thorat & Joshi 2020). Social exclusion and discrimination have been noted as persistent issues affecting Dalits, Adivasis, and Muslims in India (Thorat & Neuman 2012). Dalits are stigmatized due to their association with "dirty work" that includes tasks such as cleaning and manual scavenging (Jodhka 2016) and entrenched beliefs about their relative "meritlessness" compared to upper castes in intellectual domains (Nambissan 2007; Subramanian 2019; Thomas 2020). Addressing the negative impact

of caste-based inequality, violence, and oppression on Dalits, Adivasis and women in various societal, economic and organizational settings is a significant concern among many scholars. Many studies directly or indirectly include a focus on addressing the psychological impact of caste identity by invoking constructs such as stigma, social identity, exclusion, and discrimination. This is one of the thriving areas of research and has helped uncover various patterns of experience of and response to stigma, discrimination and exclusion across multiple domains. I discuss few representative attempts below.

Jaspal's (2011) study discussed the identity processes underpinning caste-based stigma and social exclusion. Replicating the stereotype threat effect (i.e., fear or anxiety regarding confirming negative stereotype of ingroup; Steele & Aronson 1995) in the caste context, Hoff and Pandey (2006) showed that caste identity constitutes a stigma for Dalit school children; mere public revelation of caste identity (compared to the condition when caste identity is not revealed) in an exam situation lowered cognitive task performance of Dalit school children. In the context of higher education, Deshpande (2016) showed that despite competent academic performance, Dalit students experience the stigma of being beneficiaries of affirmative action (caste-based quota policy). In the context of the urban labour market, Thorat and colleagues (2012) have shown that caste identity matters and shapes the patterns of discrimination and exclusion faced by Dalits and Muslims. Pal (2015) has identified patterns of exclusion and violence affecting mental health of Dalits. Some studies highlighted the experiences of invisibility, neglect and precarity experienced by Dalit workers in the cleaning profession (e.g., Rabelo & Mahalingam 2019). Jogdand (2015; 2023) has examined the impact of caste-based humiliation using a social psychological approach.

Researchers often make eclectic choices for using psychological theories and methods in their studies, suggesting that there is no clear pattern of conceptualization and operationalization of psychological constructs in the caste context. It is however worth noting that scholars are increasingly invoking novel social psychological constructs such as 'microaggression' (Rathod 2017, 2022) to shed light on psychological processes underpinning caste-based stigma, exclusion, and discrimination in the higher education context. Notably, Bhoi and Gorringe's (2023) edited volume, *Caste in Everyday Life*, takes the psychological approach seriously to understand everyday workings of caste and brings together contributions that interrogate the experience of and response to caste-based stigma, discrimination and exclusion in multiple settings and among various communities. Corroborating the pattern discussed earlier in the context of Dalit selfhood, many studies—including the ones in Bhoi and Gorringe's volume—provide empirical support to the position that Dalits (especially Dalit women) do not passively accept their devaluation and victimization but engage in 'identity struggles' to negotiate the conditions of stigma and precarity (e.g., Mendonca et al. 2024), contest the meanings of discrimination (e.g., Deshmukh et al. 2024) and develop intersectional solidarity with other oppressed groups to challenge the ongoing victimization (see Nair & Vollhardt 2020).

Health, Wellbeing, and Clinic

Caste identity is a significant stressor affecting health and wellbeing of Dalits (Jadhav et al. 2016; Jogdand 2017). Recent scholarship has identified caste-based health disparities (Acharya 2022) in the Indian population. Dalits and Adivasi (Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe) experience poor health and wellbeing (Ramaiah 2015; Thapa et al. 2021) and have poor access to healthcare (Baru et al. 2010). Dalits and Adivasis also experience relatively poor mental health compared to the higher caste Hindus (Gupta & Coffey 2020). Dalit students in Indian higher education establishments face increasing risk of self-harm and suicide (Pathania et al. 2023; Sukumar 2022). These trends suggest the need for interventions that help address individual suffering but also underpinning socio-structural factors. Although there has been increasing interest in addressing the health impact of caste, class and gender across multiple domains (Baru et al. 2010; Chowdhury et al. 2022; Johri & Anand 2022; Khubchandani et al. 2018; Komanapalli & Rao 2021; Kowal & Afshar 2015; Mahapatro et al. 2021; Patel et al. 2018; Shaikh et al. 2018; The Lancet 2014; Uddin et al. 2020), there are issues within the disciplines of psychology and psychiatry that dampen the efforts for developing meaningful solutions to the impending health crisis in India.

Sushrut Jadhav, a clinical psychiatrist and medical anthropologist and one of the foremost voices in the psy-fields who has raised the question of caste, attributes this failure to the deep-seated caste bias in theoretical discourses and practices in clinical psychology, psychiatry and mental healthcare settings in India. Jadhav has shown that clinical practices in India have not taken the ecological context of mental health seriously (Jadhav et al. 2015) and, as a consequence, have not adequately developed a culturally valid orientation and diagnostic assessment criteria to address the suffering experienced by Dalits and lower castes (Bayetti et al. 2017; Jadhav 2004; Jain & Jadhav 2008). Relevantly, Sawariya (2021) has identified various issues within the counselling psychology training and practice that excludes caste from its consideration. Sawariya shows that clinical settings are often unaffordable and inaccessible to Dalits and the therapeutic alliance (i.e., an affective relationship between counsellor and client throughout the counselling process) in the clinic is dominated by the caste structure. Clearly, the priority is not just to address the concerns of the health and wellbeing and improving the access to healthcare but also to address caste blindness of theory, method and practices in the fields of clinical and counselling psychology and psychiatry.

Beliefs and Attitudes

An important aspect of research on beliefs and attitudes is that these studies shift the analytic focus on the oppressors in the caste context. As noted earlier, researchers have given most attention to examining the experience and impact of caste among those oppressed by the caste system. However, it is equally important to examine the cognition and motivation of the upper castes who oppress others. As a result, despite

the critical importance of the caste-related beliefs and attitudes persistent in the caste system, there has been relatively limited research addressing these issues.

Scholars have focused on various beliefs and attitudes that underpin, mediate, and (re) produce caste in everyday life. Ramaswami Mahalingam, cultural psychologist and one of the pioneering researchers on the cultural psychology of caste, has developed insights into essentialist beliefs and attitudes regarding caste identity. Essentialism refers to the psychological belief that there are essential and immutable differences between social groups. Using a novel experimental paradigm of brain transfer across caste (Brahmin/Dalit), gender (male/female) and class (rich/poor), Mahalingam (2003) showed that essentialist beliefs of caste differences are pervasive across Indian society but these beliefs are generally informed by power and social location, such that Brahmins are more likely than Dalits to endorse essentialist beliefs of caste differences as those beliefs validate the higher status of the Brahmins. The essentialist caste beliefs are entrenched in Indian society and shape the way Indian children are socialized. Dunham and colleagues (2014) found that by the age of ten most Indian children become aware of caste identity and develop an implicit preference for high-caste groups. The caste system shapes Indian children's beliefs about intellectual ability, motivation, and achievement in life (Srinivasan et al. 2016). By the age of five to nine years, Indian children develop caste-related biases and mistrust/ignore Dalits, who are perceived to be dirty (Rottman et al. 2020). Baby Ziliya and Manjaly (2020) experimentally proved that upper castes still dehumanize Dalits as emphasized in the Hindu sacred literature. Cotterill and colleagues (2014) examined the Hindu beliefs of Karma underlying the legitimation and persistence of the caste system (for a critique, see Jogdand et al. 2016). Blanchar and Eidelman (2013) showed that the belief in longevity of the caste system makes it seem more legitimate and defensible.

An important aspect of studying the psychological aspects of beliefs and attitudes is to focus on prejudice and stereotypes in the society. Thorat and colleagues (2016) show prejudice as a factor underlying the persistent denial of reservations to Dalits. Using a nationally representative dataset, Amit Thorat and colleagues (2020) confirmed the prevalence of regressive caste and gender attitudes among Indians. While the concepts of prejudice and stereotypes are popular in caste-related discourse, the scientific studies examining caste-based prejudice and stereotypes are surprisingly rare. After some attention to the topic of caste-based prejudice and stereotypes for few decades after Indian independence, Indian psychologists (even those who built their international career by studying this topic) distanced themselves from it (see, this issue, Sharma & Jogdand 2024). This should have been a thriving area of research given the availability of complementary theories and methodological advancement.

Closing Thoughts

Where are we going with all these strands of research addressing the psychological dimension of caste? Three observations could be made here.

First, what is researched as part of the psychological study of caste is exceedingly eclectic and solitary. There are some insightful studies that develop theory; some make

useful empirical contributions. However, such studies shine alone and are not further developed into programmatic strands of research. As a result, a theoretical confusion and empirical vacuum prevails regarding psychology of caste.

Second, it is not too difficult to bring divergent theoretical notions and empirical findings together into a harmony and set up an agenda for future research. However, this is only possible when psychological study of caste is done as a collective action rather than an individual intellectual project. Given the enormous complexity of the caste system, a community of scholars with sustained commitment is needed to make a meaningful academic and policy impact.

Third, as the breadth of contributions outlined in earlier sections signifies, it is possible to imagine a 'critical psychology of caste' as an interdisciplinary and autonomous field of study that investigates the dialectics between caste society and the individual mind. The problems for critical psychology of caste are genuine, and they could be addressed not just by importing theories and methods from adjoining fields but also by developing new theories and methods from Dalit perspective.

Current Issue

This special issue is the first collective and systematic attempt to undertake a psychological study of caste issues. Most contributors of the special issue are young scholars. Barring a few, most of them were writing their first academic article. They have broken several barriers within the discipline to ask the right questions and develop meaningful answers. What is common among all contributions is the awareness of the power relationship constituted by psychology as a form of knowledge. In this sense, all contributions take a critical stance towards psychological constructs while utilizing their potential to unravel the complex issues in the caste system. They invoke multiple psychological theories and/or approaches ranging from psychanalysis to social identity approach in social psychology and use both qualitative and quantitative methods. The contributions develop new theoretical insights and contribute new empirical findings enriching existing knowledge base.

Sharma and Jogdand develop a social psychological approach to caste prejudice. They show the limitations of existing theory and research on caste prejudice that limits its scope to personality and individual differences, rendering the analysis reductive and depoliticized. Inspired by the social identity approach in social psychology (Reicher, Spears & Haslam 2010), they develop a group-level psychological conceptualization of caste prejudice and show its utility using a correlational study examining the contemporary expression of casteism, namely the denial of caste-based reservations and endorsement of blatant caste discrimination. A key empirical finding in their study is that glorification of caste identity rather than mere psychological attachment to caste, was found to be strongly linked to caste prejudice. Through innovative theoretical approach and empirical contribution, Sharma and Jogdand prepare the ground for a systematic programme of study in the causes, correlates, consequences, and reduction of caste prejudice.

Divya Dwivedi re-introduces psychoanalysis to study caste and shows its utility to address somewhat oppositional dimensions of 'the psychomachia of caste in contemporary life' among Dalits and 'the denial or *Verneinung* of caste by the upper castes'. She interrogates psychoanalysis in India both as a theory of clinic and of the civilization and warns that psychoanalysis could become a retrogressive and universalizing theory of society and politics unless a contextually specific sociogenesis of psychopathologies could be developed. Relatedly, she shows how psychoanalysis in India became a tool for further evasion and *Verneinung* of caste. Moving beyond the traditional usage of Freudian conceptual categories, she proposes a sociogenetic psychoanalysis of caste or what could be called in Fanonian lexicon as sociodiagnostics (Fanon 1967) aimed at radical social transformation.

G.C. Pal reviews existing research on caste and highlights how this work overlooks the psychological complexities underpinning caste based oppression. He reflects on Dr. Ambedkar's psychological exposition of the caste system and shows its relevance to understand the persistence of the caste system. He then explicates 'identity threat' as a psychological process involved in the persistence of caste discrimination and violence in contemporary India using various social psychological frameworks.

Bianca Cherechès juxtaposes Dalit psychological suffering with the existing psychological theorization of trauma and recovery. Through a critical reading of Meena Kandasamy's novel *The Gypsy Goddess*, recounting the 1968 Kilvenmani caste atrocity, she highlights multiple and insidious ways the somatic trauma of caste oppression affects the mental wellbeing of Dalits. She interrogates the universal validity of the trauma paradigm dominant in the fields of psychiatry and clinical psychology especially the relevance of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) while exposing its limitation to explain the Dalit psychological suffering and resistance. Bianca Cherechès argues for expanding the theoretical scope of trauma and recovery as well as mental healthcare practices to include collective victimhood experienced by historically oppressed groups such as Dalits.

Mukherjee, Agarwal, Tandon and Meena undertake a reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke 2006 2019) of narratives of Dalit victimization and Dalit resistance in educational spaces. Building on the current social psychological theory and research into collective victimhood (Vollhardt 2020), they show how Dalit individuals make sense of their victimization and cope with and resist casteism. Mukherjee, Agarwal, Tandon and Meena highlight experiencing microaggression, deficit intergroup contact, caste stereotypes and upper caste disgust as some of the ways through which caste order victimizes Dalits. However, they underscore that such victimization is rarely accepted by Dalits. They highlight several aspects of Dalit resistance and resilience that include acts such as seeking higher education, reclaiming classroom space, endorsing affirmative action, confronting oppressors, and building solidarity and self-respect within the community.

Fatima, Zafar and Thangal provide a methodological guide to undertake psychological research on caste issues in light of the conformity bias (Moscovici 1976) prevalent in the existing research (for review, see Jogdand et al. 2016). They discuss

barriers both within and beyond discipline that obstruct asking the right questions and undertaking a rigorous enquiry into issues of caste and casteism. Fatima, Zafar and Thangal argue for taking a value position while conducting psychological research on caste and caution that theoretical naivety or a lack of critical stance can result in blaming the victims of oppressive systems. They suggest a culturally and contextually sensitive approach while navigating conceptualization and operationalization in empirical studies examining the nature and implications of caste/casteism.

Vikas Kumar Choudhary considers aspects of memory and collective remembering embedded in caste politics in India. He highlights that construction and access to memories is shaped by the power relations embedded in the caste system. Using ethnographic notes from the sites of important Dalit monuments in Uttar Pradesh, he argues that the collective memory of Indian society is based on caste ideology and places Dalits as subservient to upper caste politics. In response, the Dalit movement attempts to consolidate collective memory by creating anti-caste counter-memories to challenge the Hindutva meta-narratives and appropriation of Dalit icons.

Jidugu Kavya Harshitha focuses on the complex links between caste, language and colorism in India. She analyses the Dalit experiences of caste discrimination and colorism using linguistic registers and the concept of indexicality. She demonstrates how linguistic expressions reinforce caste hierarchies by assigning unequal social value to darkness and fairness among Dalit and 'savarna' upper castes. She uncovers a pattern of attributions where caste identity shapes the meaning of skin tone. Jidugu Kavya Harshitha shows that 'savarna' upper castes with fair skin are seen as a beauty ideal but those with dark skin tones are also perceived as socially acceptable due to linguistic references to royalty and goddesses. In contrast, Dalits with darker skin tones are dehumanized and perceived as impure and those with lighter skin tones are seen as arrogant, undeserving, and deceitful.

Shweta Ahire presents a counter-intuitive finding of Dalits themselves rejecting caste- based reservations in the private sector. She explores the motivation underpinning this rejection using a mixed method approach in a sample of predominantly young, middle-class, well-educated or employed Dalit-Buddhists in Mumbai, India. Shweta Ahire highlights the perils of stigmatized caste identity that Dalits have to navigate in their everyday life and shows that the rejection of caste-based reservation is rooted in the internalized caste stigma that leads one to distance oneself from the ingroup. She emphasizes need for further research into internalized oppression among Dalits.

Angel Sophan engages in conversation with the individuals/groups who define themselves as upper castes and invites them to consider how food reflects the psychology of caste oppression in India. She explores the history of food practices and shows how control of food choices are part of discrimination and social exclusion of Dalits and Adivasi communities even today. Using the 'psyche of the oppressor' framework (Sophan & Nair 2023), she invites the upper caste reader to critically consider the Brahminical imposition of vegetarianism in Indian food culture and resultant stigmatization of individual and communities as impure.

In addition, the current issue contains two selected papers from the Sixth International Conference on the Unfinished Legacy of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar – "The American Question: Ambedkar, Columbia University, and the "Spirit of Rebellion" by Scott R. Stroud and "Buddhist Roots of Ambedkar's Judicial Philosophy" by Christopher Queen.

In the forum section of the current issue, we have a special article from Justice P. S. Narasimha, Supreme Court of India, entitled "Justice for the Marginalized in a Constitutional Democracy" and an article on "*Poothapattu*: Sobs of a Broken People, Fragmented Ethos, and the Lost Land" by Anilkumar Payyappilly Vijayan, followed by Gaurav Pathania's bilingual (Hindi and English) poem, "My Pen, My Words".

Finally, in the book review section, Maria Zafar reviews Rupert Brown's biography of Henri Tajfel - one of the most influential social psychologists and author of the social identity theory.

Concluding Thoughts

The special issue brings psychology in communion with caste. It defines new problems for enquiry and re-analyses the old problems in the new light. The necessity of psychological study of caste is stressed throughout the special issue. Yet we must also reflect on the limitations of psychological explanation. Having experienced the Nazi Holocaust as a Polish Jew, Henri Tajfel wanted to explain how the Holocaust was psychologically possible. He arrived at the conclusion that the 'explanations' of social conflict and social injustice cannot be mainly or primarily psychological. The 'psychological' is but a part of a complex puzzle. However, he also believed that a psychological inquiry is necessary and could lead to new solutions. While psychological explanation may be limited, "at the same time, a *modest* contribution can be made to … the unravelling of a tangled web of issues." (Tajfel 1981: 7; emphasis original). A critical psychology of caste can, therefore, certainly play its part in the unravelling (and annihilation) of the tangled cobweb of the caste system.

Acknowledgement

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The Nature of Caste Prejudice: A New Look at Prejudice, Social Identity, and Casteism in India

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Abstract

Most research on caste prejudice is rooted in personality and individual difference approaches. As a result, there has been limited understanding of caste prejudice as an aspect of group psychology shaped by peoples' sense of group positions. Drawing on the social identity approach in social psychology (Reicher et al. 2010), this article proposes a group-level psychological conceptualisation of caste prejudice and examines its relevance for understanding contemporary expressions of casteism. Using a cross-sectional correlational survey design and a purposive sample comprising different caste categories (*N*=278), we examined associations between socio-demographic factors, personality and individual difference factors, caste prejudice, subjective identification with caste, opposition to reservations, and endorsement of discriminatory practices. The data was analysed using Pearson Product-Moment Correlation, ANOVA, and Multiple Linear Regression. We found that members of historically advantaged caste groups are more likely to endorse caste prejudice. Caste prejudice, in turn, significantly predicted opposition to reservations and endorsement of discriminatory practices. Importantly, those seeking to glorify their caste identity were found to be more likely to endorse caste prejudice. The psychological attachment to caste identity was not found to be associated with caste prejudice. All results were found to be significant even after statistically controlling for socio-demographic and personality-individual difference factors, suggesting the unique contribution of social identity-based analysis. We discuss the implications of our findings for theory, research, and efforts for social change.

Keywords

caste prejudice, social identity approach, casteism, affirmative action in India, intergroup relations in India

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Introduction

Many discussions on the persisting social exclusion and discrimination in society inevitably turn to prejudice in the minds of the majority groups. Prejudice is generally understood as a *negative evaluation* of others based on their membership in social groups. Prejudice, as a scientific concept, gained prominence in the aftermath of World War II, reflecting a profound shift in political and moral positions (for a historical overview, see Duckitt 1992). In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, many scholars thought of prejudice as an aspect of the "deficiencies" of the minority group members. The post-war understanding of prejudice shifted attention towards the "faulty" ways that majority groups perceive minority groups. Another important conceptual shift occurred in this period. Prejudice was viewed as a personality-based phenomenon rooted in the individual differences in ethnocentric intergroup attitudes among people (e.g., Adorno et al. 1950). Criticising this personality and individual-difference approach for its psychological reductionism, some scholars argued for understanding prejudice as a group phenomenon to be considered as an aspect of prevalent group dynamic, intergroup conflict, and social system (e.g., Muzafer 1967; Pettigrew 1958; Tajfel & Turner 1979).

In this transition, the publication of Gordon Allport's (1954) seminal compendious book *The Nature of Prejudice* occupies a special place. Allport defined prejudice as "an antipathy based upon a faulty and inflexible generalisation" (Allport 1954: 10), highlighting the cognitive, motivational, and affective components of the concept. Allport's approach was unapologetically value-oriented and sought to challenge social injustice. He examined the White prejudice towards African Americans and ethnic hatred, particularly anti-Semitism, and briefly discussed the prejudice in the Indian caste system (Allport 1954: 10, 320). Allport's key achievement in this work, as Reicher (2007) has pointed out, was to "refocus …from studying the attributes of the oppressed to studying the perceptions of the oppressor" (p. 832). Allport's book reframed the way prejudice and discrimination are understood and set up an agenda for future research.

In the early 1950s, India, as a young nation, was recovering from the large-scale violence witnessed in the partition. A useful foundation was laid in this period by Gardner Murphy's (1953) book, *In the Minds of Men: The Study of Human Behaviour and Social Tensions in India*. The book reported findings of a large-scale 'tensions project,' led by American Psychologist Gardner Murphy with teams of Indian academics, commissioned by the Indian Government to UNESCO in 1949 to study the nature of communal tensions and paths to social harmony. Psychologists in India took to research on prejudice to understand intergroup conflict in Indian society, reflecting their concern for nation-building. While the main focus of Indian psychologists in this period remained on Hindu-Muslim conflicts, caste conflict also received some attention. Indian psychologists started studying the implications of caste prejudice as early as the 1960s.

Notably, Paranjpe's (1970) book - *Caste, Prejudice and the Individual* - investigated intercaste differences in belief, opinions, and attitudes relating to the caste system. The book reported findings from a survey study conducted among college students (*N*= 503) from Brahmin, Maratha, and Dalit communities in Poona, India. Paranjpe was motivated by reading Allport's work and adopted some of the advanced theoretical and methodological tools to study caste prejudice. The analysis in the book emphasised how caste prejudice and discrimination are deeply rooted in social inequality. However, while the book discussed the prevalent sociological and anthropological literature on caste at length, it fell short of adopting a group-level psychological approach and treated prejudice as a matter of individual psychological processes. Importantly, Paranjpe did not take a value-oriented position towards exploitation and injustice in the caste system but maintained that social scientific study must be 'objective' (cf. Allport 1954). Therefore, caste prejudice was approached in this research as an aspect of Hindu social order rather than a pervasive social problem needing intervention. Despite raising the critical issue of caste prejudice, the focus of the analysis remained on how Dalits are different and cause prejudice rather than how the oppressor caste groups create, maintain, and perceive these differences.

Other Indian psychologists in this era also approached prejudice in a similarly individualistic manner and distanced themselves from studying the oppressive and exploitative nature of caste hierarchy (Anant 1970; Pandey & Singh 2005). Consider, for example, the way Rath and Sircar (1960: 16) explain the prejudice of upper castes towards the Untouchables:

> The upper caste people do not mind the students of the Harijan groups to live with them in the same hostels, but they do not like all kinds of Harijans to enter into the temples and hotels. This prejudice of the upper castes may be more due to uncleanly habits of the Harijans, but as the dirty habits gradually disappear when they are educated in schools and colleges the upper caste people do not mind their children living with them in the hostels.

Rath and Sircar explain the prejudice of upper castes as a consequence of the "uncleanly habits" among "Harijans" rather than due to the way upper castes come to perceive "Harijans" as unclean and dirty. They naively assume that the prejudice will disappear once the "Harijans" forsake their "dirty habits." Here, these researchers overlooked the fact that caste prejudice is deeply rooted in social disgust arising from the beliefs and practices of untouchability (Ambedkar 1989). The exclusion and control of Dalits, i.e., erstwhile untouchables, lower castes, and women, has been instrumental in materialising systemic inequalities and legitimating a status quo in Indian society (see Omvedt 2011; Thorat & Joshi 2020).

The key question that needs to be asked from an Allportian perspective is why some people in the Hindu social order are perceived as dirty and how such perception

is problematic. The Allportian perspective would have motivated these researchers to challenge the perpetrator and not blame the dehumanised and discriminated victims. Consequently, the Allportian perspective would have suggested exploring "contact" (Pettigrew & Tropp 2006) as a means of reducing prejudice in the minds of upper castes. However, such an engagement with prejudice research was lacking. Psychologists in India seem to have distanced themselves from the issues of caste prejudice after the mid-1970s. To our knowledge, there has been little systematic psychological research addressing the problem of caste prejudice in Indian society after the early decades of Indian independence. As a result, the social psychological examination of caste prejudice has not kept up with the progress in social psychology internationally.

There is limited scope here to discuss the major developments in prejudice research in social psychology. Despite critical debates over the problems and potential of prejudice as a scientific concept, the political and action-oriented nature of prejudice is well recognised (see Reicher 2007). The earlier conceptual emphasis on 'prejudice-as-antipathy' is replaced with more nuanced consideration of ideologies, attitudes and beliefs that sustain group-based inequality and oppression (Barlow & Sibley 2018). An influential body of research indicates that prejudice needs to be understood as a political rather than narrowly psychological category; prejudice mobilises individuals into social action that may reproduce social inequalities through discriminatory behaviour or may build norms that legitimise the inequalities between groups, thus explaining the reproduction of the social hierarchy and asymmetries (see, Dixon et al. 2012). Social identity theory in social psychology (Reicher et al. 2010) has provided a non-reductionist and politically relevant approach to studying the group process and intergroup conflict. In sum, there is a good basis available to theorise and study patterns of caste prejudice in India and elsewhere.

This article is an attempt to reinvigorate the study of caste prejudice. Our main aim here is to go beyond the individualist and apolitical stance and develop a group-level psychological conceptualisation of caste prejudice that is sensitive to the ideological as well as political nature of caste. We test our approach using a quantitative study and examine associations of prejudice with caste identity and contemporary expressions of casteism.

Conceptualising Caste Prejudice as a Group Process

As discussed earlier, much of the prejudice literature has focused on individual-level factors such as early socialisation, personality trait, or their interaction with socio-political context that may consequently shape prejudice against outgroups (Altemeyer 1998; Duckitt 2001; Duckitt & Sibley 2017; Pratto et al. 1994). For instance, two individual-level differences in psychological motivations are widely used as underlying and near-universal explanations for prejudice (Ho et al. 2015; Osborne et al. 2017; Reynolds et al. 2001; Sibley et al. 2006). First, the need to build a hierarchical society (Social Dominance Orientation-SDO), and second, the need to maintain social stability and cohesion (Right Wing Authoritarianism-RWA). However, even

these personality-level individual differences are aligned to and triggered by broader intergroup processes rather than just individual worldviews (Dru 2007). For example, Jogdand, Khan, and Mishra (2016) have highlighted the limitations of SDO and RWA in explaining the full spectrum of group processes in the caste context. Another major issue with this research is that it does not fully acknowledge how prejudice makes a member of a group a social actor on behalf of the group. We, therefore, need to turn towards approaches that provide insights into group-level psychological processes.

An insightful piece of research by Thorat and colleagues (2016) contributed to the conceptualisation of caste prejudice. Building on insights from Blumer (1958) and Ambedkar (1989), Thorat and colleagues made a distinction between individual and group-level conceptualisation of caste prejudice. They highlighted the limitations of individualistic conceptualisation to explain the material and status-seeking behaviour among the upper castes, especially through opposition to caste-based reservations provided to scheduled castes and tribes. They proposed that caste prejudice is best understood as a "group feeling" embedded in the present-day social asymmetries and future aspirations associated with the ingroup. Their examination of the opposition to reservation highlights the instrumental functions of such opposition for the advantaged upper castes. We take this line of conceptualisation forward by incorporating the cognitive-motivational processes rooted in social identities and self-categorisations in the caste context.

A Social Identity Approach to Caste Prejudice

Social Identity Approach (SIA; Reicher et al. 2010) comprises two sister theories: social identity theory and self-categorisation theory. SIA emerged in the 1970s from the attempts to explain the findings of minimal group studies. Originally set out to examine the effect of arbitrary and novel social categorization on intergroup behaviour, the minimal group studies led to surprising and provoking findings (Spears & Otten 2017). While it was assumed that the realistic competition for limited resources among groups lead people to favour their ingroup and discriminate against an outgroup, these studies showed that categorizing people into groups is enough to alter their behaviour, influencing them to favour their ingroup over the comparative outgroup. Henri Tajfel, one of the most influential social psychologists and author of social identity theory, argued that if we want to understand human behaviour in the minimal group studies, we must take into account the role of group membership in providing meaning, value and purpose to individuals. He proposed the concept of social identity to explain the psychological importance of group membership to individual's self-concept. Tajfel defined social identity as the "knowledge that [we] belong to certain social groups together with some emotional and value significance to [us] of this group membership" (Tajfel 1981: 251). The concept of social identity encapsulated the interactions between society and the individual mind, mediated by a set of cognitive-affective-motivational processes.

SIA provided an alternative to individual or personality-level factors to explain complex social dynamics. SIA considers the issues of social structure more important in shaping intergroup relations than personality and interpersonal factors (Tajfel & Turner 1979; Reicher et al. 2010). SIA makes a distinction between personal and social identity. It is proposed that we define ourselves not only through our individual and idiosyncratic sense of self but also through the groups that we are members of. The groups we belong to matter to us as they are the sources of meaning, esteem, purpose and support. We are, therefore, psychologically motivated to maintain and enhance a positive and distinctive sense of social identity. At the same time, the meaning of being a group member is not solely based on a sociological or external classification; instead, it needs to have some psychological meaning for the individual. People's social status, sense of security and certainty, and self-esteem remain contingent on the group's fate (Tajfel & Turner 1979; Reicher et al. 2010).

The dynamic conceptualisation of self in SIA helps us understand many important group-level phenomena without succumbing to reductionism (see Khan et al. 2017; Reicher & Jogdand 2016). SIA research succinctly shows that ethnocentrism, violence, oppression, and discrimination against other groups are not a given. They are rooted in the psychological relationship one has with the ingroup and the perceived position of the ingroup vis-à-vis relevant outgroups (Dixon et al. 2012; Reynolds et al. 2016; Turner et al. 1987). Thus, prejudice is not considered a reified and pathological characteristic of an individual or a group but a dynamic and psychologically meaningful process shaped by the social context. A critical move of SIA on prejudice is that it treats prejudice not as the internalisation of external ideology but as a function of the interaction of people's psychological relationship with their ingroup's position and treatment in a perceived social system. Prejudice, therefore, does not remain a matter of measuring the accuracy of perception against a perceived reality but a matter of politics and mobilisation rooted in group identities (Reicher 2007; Drury 2012).

Dimensions of Subjective Identification with Caste: Attachment and Glorification

In a society, an individual belongs to multiple social groups, but not all groups are psychologically meaningful to the individual. Social identity research has emphasised the importance of subjective identification with valued social groups to an individual's cognition, emotion and behaviour. Social groups are important in addressing basic psychological needs (Greenaway et al. 2016). A strong psychological relationship with an ingroup may not necessarily lead to blind conformity or breed prejudice against an outgroup. A strong psychological identification with ingroup may in fact be critical in nature and can foster dissent (Penic et al. 2016). For example, movements like #HeforShe or whites allying with BlackLivesMatter show pro-social and progressive potential of identification among historically privileged groups (see Highfield & Miltner 2023).

Notwithstanding these positive aspects of group identification, several studies have also found that those who identify strongly with their ingroup may endorse more

prejudice and ignore moral transgressions by ingroup members (Doosje et al. 1998; Doosje et al. 2006; Roccas et al. 2008; Sahdra & Ross 2007). Furthermore, when confronted with information that reflects negatively on the ingroup, those identifying highly with the group are also more likely to be motivated to defend the ingroup (Leidner et al. 2010; Penic et al. 2016).

This apparent contradiction is resolved by considering the multiple ways people identify with their ingroup. Roccas and colleagues (Roccas et al. 2006 2008) proposed a bi-dimensional model of subjective identification with ingroup: glorification and attachment. The glorification component captures the belief that the ingroup is superior to other groups on a variety of dimensions, as well as a tendency of absolute loyalty and obedience to the ingroup. The attachment component, on the other hand, captures emotional attachment to the ingroup and the importance of the ingroup to an individual's self-concept. Across multiple contexts, researchers have noted that ingroup glorification rather than ingroup attachment makes a strong predictor of aggression and hostility towards outgroups. It was noted that individuals who seek to derive a sense of superiority from their group membership may legitimise violence towards an outgroup (Bilali & Vollhardt 2019; Leidner et al. 2010). It is, therefore, plausible to expect that those seeking to glorify their group may be more likely to practice or endorse prejudice against the outgroups. Following this reasoning, we can expect that glorification of one's caste rather than mere attachment to it should be a strong predictor of caste prejudice.

To summarise, we propose a deeper focus on the psychology of caste identity and caste power. We contend that the psychological relationship with caste identity may be critical in shaping the individual, interpersonal or societal manifestations of caste prejudice over the personality and individual difference factors (see Osborne et al. 2017; Roccas et al. 2006). The psychological need to glorify ingroup caste identity may be a source of prejudice rather than a mere psychological connection to caste ingroup. For people whose caste group constitutes an important part of their self-perception, an aggrandisement of the caste identity may lead to a more positive sense of self. Thus, the strength of subjective glorification of one's caste group may shape the target of the prejudice and that determines members of which groups would be more likely to inhabit prejudice (Bonnot et al. 2016; Dixon et al. 2012; Roccas et al. 2006). Thus, this study seeks to underline that the psychology of caste prejudice is not just located at the level of personality and individual differences but also at the level of caste identities and the social system. In the following sections, we highlight the role of prejudice in sustaining social hierarchy and shaping casteist attitudes.

Whose Interest Does Caste Prejudice Serve?

Plethora of sociological, historical, and anthropological literature indicates that it is the dominant caste groups whose relative privilege, resources and power are maintained and legitimated by their position within the caste hierarchy (Subramanian 2019; Teltumbde 2010; Thorat et al. 2020; Thorat et al. 2016). The caste system functions

as a graded hierarchy that assigns value to people depending on their birth in caste groups. As an exploitative and consensual system of status and power relations, the caste system evolved to protect the interests of the upper castes, mainly Brahmins (see Ambedkar 1989; Teltumbde 2010). The sacred literature of Hindus elevated Brahmins to godly status and legitimated the subjugation, segregation, and humiliation of the 'Untouchables' (Ambedkar 1989). Despite the substantive changes in the political-economic relations in the last two centuries, caste remained resilient and reproduced the inequalities and patterns of social dominance (see Gupta 2005; Jogdand et al. 2016). The sacred literature shaped (and arguably still shapes) the hierarchical beliefs, attitudes, and subjectivities in Indian society. Notably, Cotterill et al. (2014) identified the role of the Hindu theory of Karma as a 'legitimising myth' that drives attitudes of social dominance and prejudice in Indian society; they found generalised prejudice associated with tendencies to support hierarchical social arrangement and opposition to egalitarian policies and practices (also see, Jogdand et al. 2016). Therefore, it is plausible to expect upper castes to be more likely to hold and express a higher degree of prejudice.

Contemporary Expressions of Casteism

Caste relations have not remained frozen in time. Along with notable stability of status and power relations (Dumont 1980; Moffatt 2015), caste relations also involved protest and social change (Gupta 2005; Hardtmann 2009). The socio-political changes in society and, consequently, the caste system, specifically those accompanying colonial rule, destabilised the traditional prejudicial underpinnings of violence and discrimination. With the weakening of religious order (Gupta 2000), capitalistic market relations supplanting the self-replicating caste system in rural society, and increased opportunities for competition among Dalits and non-Dalits (Jodhka 2015), the old notions of mythological or essential superiority cannot fully explain how caste inequality has continued in modern Indian society. Notwithstanding the politicisation of caste identities and the rising agency of oppressed caste groups, caste violence is a persistent social reality (Teltumbde 2010). The cases of caste atrocities have increased in recent years (Sadanandan 2018). The continuity of caste in a changing society requires that we consider both subtle and blatant expressions of caste prejudice:

Discriminatory practices. Multiple studies have mapped the continuing caste discrimination in employment opportunities (Mosse 2018; Siddique 2011; Thorat & Joshi 2020), access to education (Bailwal & Paul 2021; Subramanian 2015), marriages (Ahuja & Ostermann 2016), etc. However, overt casteist and discriminatory practices are not the only way that injustice and inequality in caste context are maintained and reproduced. A growing interest in understanding the changes in caste relations offers new modes of prejudice legitimising caste discrimination and inequality. For instance, Natrajan (2012) argues that caste groups have claimed the language of 'culture', allowing casteism to continue as a preference. In other words, prejudice is increasingly directed not at the 'other by blood' but 'other by culture'. Caste prejudice has taken

increasingly nuanced forms to build contestation to social justice measures such as caste-based reservations (e.g., see Katju 2020).

Opposition to Reservations. A notable feature of the attempts to maintain a status quo is the vehement opposition to institutional policies aimed at social justice, such as the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989 (SC/ST (PoA) Act) and reservation policies for Scheduled Castes and Tribes (see Thorat et al. 2016). Subramanian (2015) offers a powerful case study of caste-based discrimination in the premier educational campuses of the Indian Institute of Technology (IITs) in India. This research highlights how discourses of caste and merit have interacted to produce new and more 'acceptable' forms of caste subjectivities in premier engineering colleges (cf. Deshpande 2013). Reservations are vehemently opposed in the IIT campuses on account of threats to "merit". The notion of "merit", a symbolic capital in the urban labour market, becomes associated with being an upper caste from a general category, whereas Dalits and lower castes as beneficiaries of caste-based reservations are sneered at and considered meritless. Thorat, Tagade and Naik (2016) have highlighted the instrumental value of opposition to caste-based reservations for the historically advantaged caste groups. They examined the role of prejudice in the opposition to caste-based reservations and found that the opposition to caste reservations, notwithstanding the variety and pervasiveness of arguments, is, in fact, driven by the fear of losing privileges among dominant castes.

Hypotheses

Based on the above discussion, we shall now formally summarise the hypotheses of the study. We expect more endorsement of caste prejudice among the historically advantaged castes (General, OBC) compared to historically disadvantaged social groups (SC, ST) (Hypothesis 1). We expect the glorification of one's caste identity to predict caste prejudice, compared to the attachment to caste identity (Hypothesis 2). Caste prejudice, in turn, should be positively associated with the endorsement of discriminatory practices and opposition to caste-based reservations (Hypothesis 3). It is proposed that these relationships will be significant even after accounting for socio-demographic factors and personality and individual difference-level predictors of prejudice (J. Duckitt 2001; J. Duckitt & Sibley 2017).

Method

Sample: We recruited adult participants through convenience sampling across universities and institutions of higher education. Data was collected from 287 participants through an online survey (90 General, 103 OBC, 94 SC/ST; 180 Male and 98 Female; Mean age=21.83, SD=3.6). The data from 9 participants were removed due to issues (repeated entries, age below 18 years, etc). Thus, the analysis was based on the data from 278 participants in total. The majority of the participants identified themselves as Hindus and were comfortable in English (*N*=226).

Procedure: The survey was in English language and set up online using Google Forms. Participants were approached through course instructors and personal contacts. Participants received the link for the survey through emails. The survey began with an information sheet containing necessary information about the study and the signing of the consent form. After completion of the survey, the participants were presented with a debriefing sheet that clarified the nature of the study and contact information of researchers and help services.

Ethical Approval and Data Availability: The Institute Ethics Committee (IEC) of the Indian Institute of Technology, Delhi, approved the study protocol (Ref. No. P-075/2020). The dataset and analysis syntax will be shared upon a reasonable request.

Measures:[1]

1. **Subjective identification with caste:** This scale was adapted to the caste context from the bi-dimensional identification scale devised by Roccas and others (Roccas et al. 2006, 2008). The 16-item scale seeks to measure the nature and extent to which the participant identifies with their caste group. The scale had two major components, as discussed earlier, with 8-items each: Glorification and Attachment. The glorification component measures the extent to which self is derived from the purported superiority of the caste ingroup. The attachment component measures the extent to which the self is committed to the caste ingroup and the members of the ingroup. Items were rated on a scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). Some of the sample items for glorification of caste identity are: "Other caste groups can learn a lot from us.", "My caste is better than other caste groups in all respects.". Some of the sample items for attachment with caste identity are: "When I talk about the group members, I usually say "we" rather than "they." "Being a member of my caste is an important part of my identity." The scale reflected a satisfactory degree of internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha =.95).

2. **The subtle and blatant Prejudice:** We used the 9-item 'Blatant and Subtle Prejudice' scale by Pettigrew and Meertens (1995). The blatant prejudice subscale measures more traditional forms of negative attitudes against low castes, and the subtle prejudice subscale constitutes a need for 'hard work' emotional ambivalence and highlighting cultural differences between 'high and low castes'. These components, as discussed above, are relevant in the caste context. The participants responded to items on a 6-point Likert scale from strongly disagree to strongly agree. Sample items from the scale are: "The high castes and low castes can never be really comfortable with each other, even if they are close friends" (Blatant), " It is just a matter of some people not trying hard enough. If low castes would only try harder, they could be as well off as high castes." (Subtle). The internal consistency of the measure was acceptable (Cronbach's alpha=.67)

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[1]We also measured some other variables which are not part of the present analysis and may be reported in another publication.

3. **Endorsement of discriminatory practices:** This scale was constructed *de novo* by the authors. The participants expressed their perceived endorsement of six different caste-related practices on a 4-point Likert scale between "Completely unacceptable" and "Completely acceptable". The questions sought to measure the degree to which the participant may perceive a discriminatory act as reasonable or legitimate. Here are few sample items. To what extent do you think it is acceptable to: "Not allow people from other castes to enter the kitchen" or "Refuse to hire someone based on his/her caste"? The internal consistency of the measure was satisfactory (Cronbach's alpha=.89).

4. **Opposition to reservations:** The scale was adapted from the 3-item opposition to reservations scale by Cotterill and colleagues (2014). However, the reliability of the scale was very poor (Cronbach's alpha=.29) hence, we used a single-item scale. Participants indicated their responses using a 7-point Likert scale with the following item: "Reservations are bad for the overall progress of our society, and they have created a vested interest in backwardness among caste groups."

5. **Social Dominance Orientation:** Social Dominance Orientation (Cronbach's alpha=.76) was measured with the 8-item Scale (Ho et al. 2015; Pratto et al. 1994). Some of the sample items are: "Some groups of people are simply inferior to other groups" and "It is unjust to try to make groups equal".

6. **Right-Wing Authoritarianism (RWA):** This was measured with a 9-item version (Cronbach's alpha=.73) of Duckitt et al. (2010) 18-item RWA scale. Some of the sample items are: "What our country needs most is discipline, with everyone following our leaders in unity", and "Obedience and respect for authority are the most important virtues children should learn".

7. **Socio-demographic variables**: We also collected the demographic details of the participants in terms of age, sex, region, education, socio-economic status (SES) and caste category.[2]

Analytic Strategy: Data were analysed using JASP version 0.16.4 (Love et al. 2019). All measures were first computed for their internal consistency, mean, standard deviation, normality of distribution, etc. Statistical analysis required a single figure for a measure; hence, the average of all items in a scale was taken as the score for a participant. We conducted the bivariate correlational analysis to explore associations among all the measured variables using Pearson Product-Moment correlation. For hypothesis 1, we conducted an Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) to examine the mean differences in endorsement of caste prejudice among different caste categories. To assess the predictive validity of our hypothesised relationships in hypotheses 2 and 3, we conducted linear regression analyses. To test hypothesis 2, we ran a multiple regression analysis to examine whether and to what extent two different forms of

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[2]We refer to General category to indicate the historically advantaged caste groups (see Deshpande 2013).

subjective identification with caste groups may predict caste prejudice. For hypothesis 3, we put caste prejudice as the predictor variable and sought to examine its predictive influence on the endorsement of discriminatory practices and opposition to caste-based reservations.

Results

Data Preparation and Screening

The missing values in the dataset were found to be random and at desirable levels of 5 per cent (Tabachnick et al. 2013). We used pairwise deletion of the missing data to utilise the data fully. Our variables had a reasonable kurtosis and skewness between +1 and -1 (Tabachnick et al. 2013). Some variables had a statistically significant Shapiro-Wilkes score, suggesting that the distribution may not form a normal curve. However, with our sample size, the graphical distribution (Q-Q plot and histograms) and skewness and kurtosis, the threat to normality may be minimal (Field 2013; Tabachnick et al. 2013). We followed bootstrapping with 5000 resamples for all regression analyses to ensure the validity of analyses irrespective of any assumption about the normality of distribution (Kline 1998; Tabachnick et al. 2013). Visual inspection of histograms, scatterplots, and P-P plots revealed no violations of linearity, normality, or homoscedasticity. There were no variables with an extremely high degree of correlation (<0.90), suggesting minimal threat of multicollinearity. Furthermore, the possibility of multicollinearity was discarded with VIF and tolerance within thresholds (Field 2013).

Descriptive Findings and Univariate Analysis

The descriptive findings and univariate analysis are stated in Table 1. We find that caste prejudice has a moderate and positive association with both components of subjective identification but more strongly with the glorification of caste identity. On the other hand, caste prejudice is positively associated with endorsement of discriminatory practices and opposition to reservations. We also find that there is a substantial positive correlation between glorification of and attachment to caste identity, yet they differ in their bivariate correlations with prejudice, endorsement of discriminatory practices and opposition to reservations.

   We explored the statistical relationships between the demographic variables and other variables. There may be an argument that as we grow older and invested in caste identities, caste prejudice may also increase. A linear regression analysis found that age has a statistically insignificant relationship with caste prejudice ($p=.66$). Similarly, the residents of small towns were more likely to endorse caste prejudice in an ANOVA analysis ($F_{(2, 270)} =3.53$, $p=0.03$), than those residing in rural or metropolitan areas ($t=-02.44$, $SE=0.11$, $p=0.04$). We also found gender differences in an ANOVA analysis ($F_{(3, 269)}=4.85$, $p=0.008$), with men reporting higher levels of caste prejudice ($t=-02.89$, $SE=0.09$, $p=0.08$). Differences in education ($p<.05$) and SES ($p<.05$) were found to be statistically insignificantly associated with caste prejudice.

Regarding the forms of subjective identification, an ANOVA analysis indicated that those from rural areas are more inclined to identify with their caste identity ($F_{(2, 269)}$ =4.29, p=0.01) than metropolitan cities (t=-2.91, SE=0.28, p=0.01). Similarly, only those with postgraduate degrees and above are significantly less likely to have identified with their caste identity ($F_{(4, 265)}$ =3.92, p=0.01). Subjective identification with caste identity showed a meaningful and positive association with lower SES (p>0.05), men (p>0.05) or greater age (p>0.05).

An ANOVA showed that there is a statistically significant difference in opposition to reservation ($F_{(3, 274)}$= 11.21, p<.001). A post-hoc comparison with Bonferroni correction showed that participants from General castes opposed reservation significantly more than those from Dalit groups (p<.001) and ST groups (p<.05), and OBC participants opposed reservations more than Dalit participants (p<.001).

Table 1: *Mean, SD and Correlations for all variables in the study*

	Variables (Measures)	Mean	SD	I	2	3	4	5	6	7
1.	Caste Prejudice	2.65	0.73	-						
2.	Glorification of Caste Identity	3.09	1.43	0.41***	-					
3.	Attachment with Caste Identity	3.33	1.62	0.31***	0.85***	-				
4.	Endorsement of Discriminatory Practices	2.05	1.26	0.44***	0.49**	0.43***	-			
5.	Opposition to Reservations	4.28	1.93	0.41***	0.11*	0.02	0.19**	-		
6.	SDO	2.42	1.07	0.44***	0.48***	0.43***	0.52***	0.14**	-	
7.	RWA	4.11	1.01	0.43***	0.46***	0.40***	0.23***	0.23***	0.23***	-

*** p < .001, **p<.01, *p<0.10

Testing Hypothesis I

We predicted that the caste groups occupying higher positions in the social hierarchy would endorse a higher degree of caste prejudice compared to caste groups occupying lower positions. Thus, the General category and OBCs would express a higher degree of caste prejudice compared to SC and STs.

Our data shows (see Table 2 and Figure 1) that OBC participants endorsed higher amounts of caste prejudice (M=2.78, SD=0.62), closely followed by General category participants (M=2.67, SD=0.85). We conducted an Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) to compare the effects of caste category or position on caste prejudice. The findings showed that there was a statistically significant difference in caste prejudice among the three groups ($F_{(2, 270)}$=4.111, p=0.017). We also ran a post-hoc analysis with Bonferroni correction, comparing the differences between the groups. We found that there is a statistically significant difference between ST/SC on the one hand and OBC on the other hand (t=-2.847, p=0.014, 95% CI=-0.557, 0.052). There was no significant

difference between OBC and General category participants ($t=1.83$, $p=0.20$). This supports our hypothesis that the high-status and advantaged caste groups are more likely to endorse prejudicial attitudes. The hypothesised relations remained significant ($p>0.05$) even after controlling for age, education, gender and socio-economic status.

Table 2: *Mean differences and standard deviations among different categories in caste prejudice.*

Category	N	Mean	SD
General	90	2.67	0.85
ST/SC	81	2.47	0.65
OBC	102	2.78	0.62
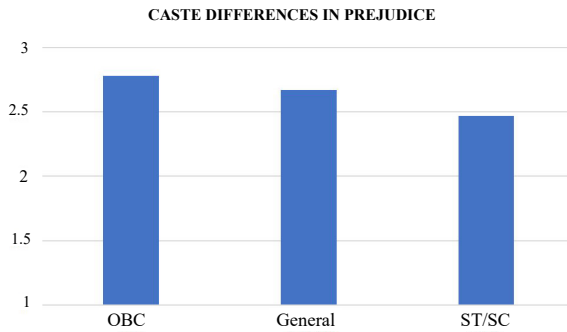
Figure 1: *Graphical representations of mean differences in prejudice among caste groups. The vertical axis refers to the reported caste prejudice, and the horizontal axis refers to the caste categories.*

Testing Hypothesis 2

We conducted a multiple regression analysis to test our hypotheses 2. We hypothesised that subjective identification with one's caste ingroup would be positively associated with caste-based prejudice. We ran an OLS regression analysis that tested if subjective identification would predict caste prejudice (also see scatterplot in Figure 2a). We found that identification with caste ingroup is positively and significantly associated with caste prejudice ($\beta=0.378$, adjusted $R^2=0.14$, $t=6.617$, $p<.001$, CI 95%=0.132, 0.244).

We also predicted that the glorification of caste identity but not attachment to caste identity would be positively associated with caste prejudice. We conducted a multiple regression analysis in which glorification and attachment components of identification were our covariates, and we entered caste-based prejudice as the outcome variable. We found that the glorification component of identification predicted an increase in caste-based prejudice (see scatterplot in figure 2c) ($\beta=0.577$, $sr^2=0.30$, $t=5.374$, $p<.001$, CI 95%=0.185, 0.400). However, the attachment component was a weak and negative predictor of caste prejudice (see scatterplot in Figure 2b) ($\beta=-0.082$, $sr^2=-0.094$, $t=-1.885$, $p=0.09$). Thus, the explanatory effect of identification on caste prejudice

can be singularly attributed to the glorification component of the identification. We found that the hypothesised relations remained significant ($p>0.001$) even after adding age, education, gender and socio-economic status as covariates. We also found the effects of glorification on prejudice to be significant ($p>0.001$) while controlling for personality-level variables, i.e. SDO and RWA.

Table 3: *Standardised Regression Coefficients and Semi Partial Correlation in Multiple Regressions with Caste Prejudice as Outcome and Components of Identification as Predictors.*

	Caste Prejudice	
	ß	*sr²*
Glorification of Caste Identity	0.57***	0.30
Attachment with Caste Identity	-0.08[a]	-0.09
Adjusted R^2	0.188	

***$p<.001$, [a]$p<.10$
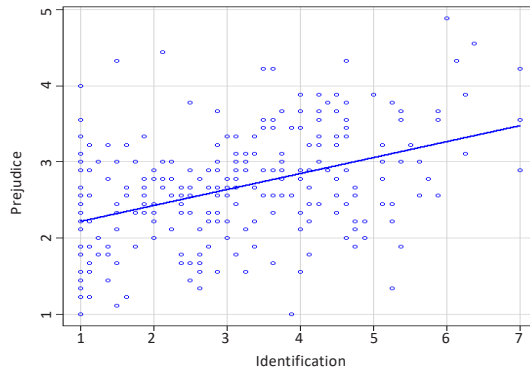
Figure 2a: *Scatterplot depicting the distribution of responses along the regression line. The vertical axis represents the caste prejudice, whereas the horizontal axis represents the subjective identification with the caste identity.*
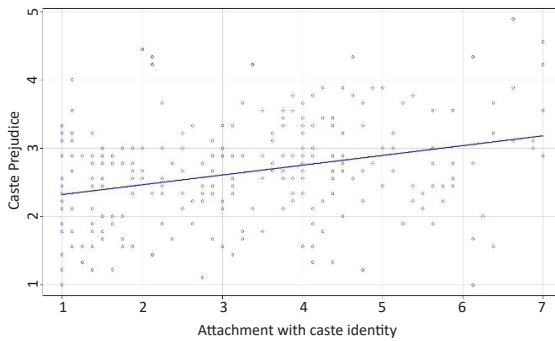
Figure 2b: *Scatterplot depicting the distribution of responses along the regression line. The vertical axis represents the caste prejudice, whereas the horizontal axis represents the attachment with caste identity.*
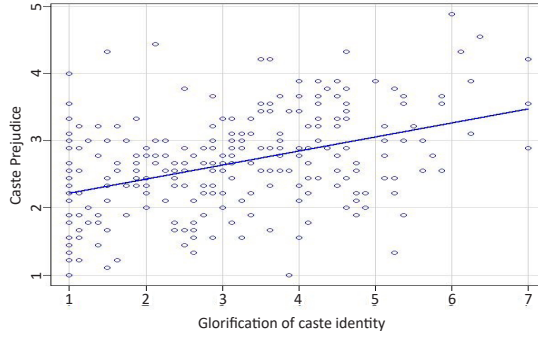
Figure 2c: *Scatterplot depicting the distribution of responses along the regression line. The vertical axis represents the caste prejudice, whereas the horizontal axis represents the glorification of caste identity.*

Testing Hypothesis 3

H3 stated that caste prejudice would be positively associated with the endorsement of discriminatory practices and opposition to reservations. Table 2 shows the statistical indicators of the multiple linear regression analyses conducted to test the hypothesis.

Table 4: *Effect of Caste Prejudice on endorsement of discriminatory practices and opposition to reservations.*

	Endorsement of Discriminatory Practices	**Opposition to Reservations**
Caste-based Prejudice	0.44***	0.41***
Adjusted R^2	0.19	0.17

***p<.001

We found that caste prejudice significantly predicted endorsement of discriminatory practices (β=0.44, t=7.97, p<.001, Adjusted R^2= 0.19, CI 95%= 0.584, 0.967) as well as opposition to caste-based reservations (β=0.42, t=7.16, p<.001, Adjusted R^2= 0.17, CI 95%= 0.832, 1.413). Here, too, we found that the hypothesised relations remained significant (p>0.001) after controlling for age, education, gender, socio-economic status, SDO, and RWA.

Discussion

Caste-based discrimination and inequality continue in various forms. Even as there is a growing recognition of caste prejudice contributing to this continuity (Ahuja & Ostermann 2016; Bailwal & Paul 2021; Coffey et al. 2018; Cotterill et al. 2014; Mosse 2018; Thorat et al. 2020), it has not received a systematic and consistent attention among researchers. Most research on caste prejudice was conducted in the 1960s-1970s

and, therefore, remains limited by outdated reductionist theoretical paradigms. Drawing upon the social identity approach in social psychology, we developed a group level psychological conceptualisation of caste prejudice and used it to understand the contemporary expressions of casteism using a cross-sectional correlational survey design. We found that members of historically advantaged caste groups are more likely to hold and endorse caste prejudice. Caste prejudice, in turn, significantly predicted opposition to reservations and endorsement of discriminatory practices. Importantly, those seeking to glorify their caste identity were found to be more likely to endorse caste prejudice. The psychological attachment to caste identity was not found to be associated with caste prejudice. These results were found to be significant even after statistically controlling for socio-demographic and personality-individual difference factors, suggesting unique contributions of social identity-based analysis. A non-representative sample in our study precludes any generalisation. However, we believe that our theoretical work and findings contribute to the understanding of caste prejudice.

For a reader familiar with social scientific research on caste inequities, some of our findings may seem tautological. We hardly claim any novelty in findings confirming a relatively high degree of prejudice among historically advantaged caste groups and caste prejudice relating to opposition to reservations and endorsement of discrimination. Yet, these findings shed light on the psychological underpinnings of these patterns and provide a piece of converging evidence confirming them. In addition, considering the fact that most research on caste prejudice was focused on the oppressed rather than the oppressors, our findings help shift the analytic gaze towards the 'psychology of the oppressors' following the Allportian perspective. Hence, we would reject any charge of tautology and emphasise the importance of our findings in the context of how caste prejudice and its consequences have been conceptualised and operationalised in the existing literature.

We found that the participants from OBC category endorsed the highest levels of prejudice. This finding is novel and counter-intuitive. However, when the amorphous nature of the OBC category and internal stratification and/or competition is considered, this finding makes sense. It is likely that the prejudiced attitudes are rooted in the motivation to establish social relations of hierarchy within OBC category and between other caste categories (see Palshikar 2006). The emergent agrarian distress and serious stagnation in the rural economy, limiting growth opportunities among OBC castes, may have further added to intensified competition for social mobility and antipathy towards competitive outgroups (Jaffrelot 2019).

This finding is likely to be misinterpreted and hence requires further explanation. We would discourage any essentialist reading that renders the OBC category inherently "prejudiced". Rather, the finding must be interpreted in the context of intergroup dynamics that may shape the conditions under which groups are likely to hold and

express prejudice against outgroups. Therefore, a high degree of prejudice among the participants from the OBC caste groups should not be seen as reflecting any "essence". We would like to reiterate that it is the intergroup relations that cause prejudice in the minds of individuals rather than the other way around.

A novel contribution of our study is the conceptualisation of caste prejudice using a social identity approach. We argued that the personality and individual difference approaches (Duckitt & Sibley 2017; Pratto et al. 2006; Sibley et al. 2006) do not sufficiently explain the psychological processes underlying caste prejudice. We proposed that caste prejudice should be understood as a matter of how ingroup identity and ingroup power are defined and identified. The glorification of caste identity emerged as the stronger predictor of caste prejudice. This fits with the extant social psychological research on the glorification of identity that shows its relevance for many negative intergroup behaviours, such as support for violence towards an outgroup and exoneration of an ingroup from historical transgressions (Bonnot et al. 2016; Leidner et al. 2010; Penic et al. 2016; Roccas et al. 2006, 2008). Our approach extended Thorat and colleague's (2016) conceptualisation of caste prejudice in terms of a "group feeling" that serves a function for the caste groups that benefit from inequality in society. In a sense, our approach also complements the socio-structural explanations (Blumer 1958; Bonilla-Silva 2003) by integrating psychologically meaningful predictors (see McGarty et al. 2009) and accounting for psychological processes within historically advantaged caste groups.

Limitations and Future Directions

A major limitation of our study is its correlational design and reliance on a convenience sample. The correlational nature of the study precludes any claims of causality of hypothesised relationships. Future research should examine these relationships employing experimental and/or longitudinal designs with representative samples. Another major limitation relates to the measurement of caste prejudice and other constructs. Although we adapted a very influential and well-validated measure of prejudice, it cannot be claimed to have captured critical dimensions of caste prejudice. The blatant subscale performed poorly (Cronbach's Alpha=0.28). We relied on a single-item scale to measure opposition to reservations. The subtle subscale (Cronbach's Alpha=0.63) and the full scale (Cronbach's Alpha=0.68) were found to be adequately consistent, and single-item measures are equally reliable and valid (Allen et al. 2022). Yet, there are problems in conceptualising and measuring what exactly are 'blatant' and 'subtle' aspects of caste prejudice in contemporary India. We cannot emphasise enough the need for a better measure of caste prejudice. One of the main agendas for future research on caste prejudice should be developing a conceptually and empirically efficient measure of caste prejudice. The measurement of negative intergroup attitudes, such as opposition to reservations, also needs to be refined.

Our findings align with the assertion that outside developed and post-industrial countries, the traditional and blatant forms of prejudice may very well survive and co-exist along with the new and subtle form of prejudice without the former replacing the latter (Bilewicz 2012; cf. Dixon et al. 2012). Caste prejudice may not always reflect in blatant negative behaviours or feelings of antipathy towards Dalits and lower castes; it may very well be an aspect of positive but paternalistic intergroup attitudes that position Dalits and lower castes as "weaker" and in need of saving. Future research should examine ambivalent forms of caste prejudice and underlying value and attitude structures.

Concluding Thoughts

Prejudice is one of the most important psychological concepts in understanding social exclusion and discrimination in society. Despite a useful foundation in the early decades of Indian independence, there has been limited theoretical and empirical interest in the study of caste prejudice. This article sought to reinvigorate scientific attention to caste prejudice by shifting the analytic focus from the oppressed to the oppressors. Our research highlighted the importance of ingroup identity and ingroup power in shaping the nature of caste prejudice. However, a systematic programme of study is needed to elucidate the causes, correlates and consequences of caste prejudice. Yet, understanding the psychology of caste prejudice is only part of the task. The main priority is finding ways to eliminate caste prejudice.

In social psychology, prejudice is often sought to be resolved by altering the views of dominant group members. An influential body of research suggests the critical role of intergroup "contact" as an effective prejudice reduction mechanism (Van Assche et al. 2023). The problem of caste prejudice, however, cannot be simply reduced to the perceptual distortion or biases among the upper castes that will be changed with more contact with Dalits. Arguably, as the upper caste mobilisations against the SC/ST (Preventions of Atrocities) Act, 1989 and caste-based reservations suggest, being tolerant or sympathetic to Dalits does not hinder the social action that fosters opposition to social justice and support for social dominance. In fact, there is evidence that prejudice reduction strategies dampen the motivation of oppressed groups to challenge inequality (Dixon et al. 2010).

The roots of caste prejudice go deep into the Hindu sacred literature that underpins the logic of untouchability sustaining the caste system. Without the radical systemic changes envisioned by revolutionary anti-caste thinker and leader Dr Ambedkar (2014), caste prejudice is likely to continue in various blatant/subtle forms. While there is some utility in reducing caste prejudice through civic engagement and democratic learning among the upper castes, it should be complemented with the self-mobilisations and leadership among Dalits and other oppressed communities. The reduction of caste prejudice is therefore not simply a matter of psychological change;

it is also a matter of social change. Studying and eliminating caste prejudice should be a priority for intellectuals, activists, and organisations concerned with social justice. We conclude with Allport's (1954) reminder of the weight of this onerous task on future generations:

> "It required years of labour and billions of dollars to gain the secret of the atom. It will take a still greater investment to gain the secrets of man's (sic) irrational nature. It is easier…to smash an atom than a prejudice" (p. xvii).

Acknowledgement

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The Psychomachia of Caste and Psychoanalysis in India

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Abstract

Psychoanalytic theory has been invoked to study gender, race, and colonialism, especially Indian postcoloniality, and its claims to cross-cultural relevance have also been interrogated in Indian scholarship from these perspectives. Given that caste determines nearly all aspects of life of both the upper and lower castes in India, a discussion of caste through psychoanalysis and vice-versa is conspicuous by its absence. This is consistent with the fact that the wider discipline of psychology has not adequately confronted the tremendous scale of suffering generated by caste-based inequality in the Indian subcontinent. Rather than assume the value of psychoanalysis in understanding the lived experiences of and attitudes towards caste, we can initiate a reciprocally interrogative encounter between caste and psychoanalysis with a view to examining the psychomachia of caste in contemporary life. The question of psychoanalysis in India should begin with the acknowledgement of two facts: the psychic dimension of suffering that is inflicted on the lower castes by the social order, and the psychic dimension of the denial or *Verneinung* of caste by the upper castes. We will then see how the psychomachia of caste cannot then be treated in the isolation of the clinic but requires sociogenetic theorization or sociodiagnostics (in Fanon's sense) and social trans-formation. Caste might prove to be the most insightful site for developing a political, that is, emancipatory psychoanalysis which would have to exceed the clinic and intervene in social transformation.

Keywords

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The Psychomachia of Caste and Psychoanalysis in India

The wider discipline of psychology has not adequately confronted the tremendous scale of suffering generated by caste-based inequality in the Indian subcontinent (Jadhav 2012; Jogdand 2023). Even though the psychoanalytical clinic does not enjoy prominence in the mental health landscape in most parts of the world, it is an important alternative to the increasingly criticized dominance of medicalized and psychiatrized mental health approaches (Leader 2011). Equally, psychoanalytical theory occupies a very significant place in certain dominant traditions of humanities and social science research, including in literary, cultural and political theory, in gender and critical race theories (see for instance Bhabha 2013; Nandy 2000). This is reflected in the fact that despite being marginal to the Indian mental health field, psychoanalysis has been prominently invoked to study gender, race, and colonialism, especially Indian postcoloniality, and its claims to cross-cultural relevance have also been interrogated in Indian scholarship from these perspectives (Boni & Mendelsohn 2023). Even those like Ashis Nandy (who calls himself a "political psychologist") have engaged with the Freudian legacies and attempted to psychoanalyze "Indian" society (2000). Given that caste determines nearly all aspects of life of both the upper and lower castes in India, a discussion of caste and specifically of the lower castes' experience of caste-based suffering through psychology in general and through psychoanalysis in particular is conspicuous by its near absence. When it has been discussed by a practitioner and theorist such as Sudhir Kakar, it has been confined mainly to analyses of the upper caste psyche and the psychosocial dynamics of males in the upper caste family (2012). This pattern of selective invocation accompanied by an avoidance of explicit discussions of caste is at least meaningful and should prompt an examination. Rather than assume the value of psychoanalysis in understanding the lived experiences of and attitudes towards caste, we can initiate a reciprocally interrogative encounter between caste and psychoanalysis with a view to examining the psychopathologies of caste in contemporary life. Among the numerous critical updations and modifications of psychoanalysis, and its various branches and 'schools', it may be best for our purposes that we initiate this encounter through reference to Sigmund Freud himself, the best known and most widely read psychoanalyst outside of the closed circuits of specialization.

From Freud onwards, psychoanalysis implies a theory of civilization corresponding to its clinical locus. According to these civilizational criteria the psychic fitness of the individual and the techniques of its restoration are determined by the theory. It is between these two interdependent domains that "health" and "mental health" of people is broached by psychoanalysis. In the case of India, and the subcontinent altogether, the civilization itself sustains the malaise of caste-based oppression, thus raising two questions for psychoanalysis:

- What would be a psychoanalytical theory of the contemporary social order of caste which we may hope to examine the way Freud examined his own contemporary world?

- And, what notion of "health" attaches to a clinic in which psychoanalysis would seek only to restore the fitness of a suffering patient so as to adjust back into a casteist world which may have engendered the suffering in the first place (as Frantz Fanon, the Martinican anti-colonial thinker and psychiatrist had warned in the context of colonial racism)?

Giving the same importance to caste as Fanon gave to race and racism vis-à-vis psychoanalysis, the exploration of Psychoanalysis in India should have a new beginning which starts by acknowledging two facts: psychomachia or the psychic dimension of suffering that is inflicted on the lower castes by the social order, and *Verneinung* or the psychic dimension of the denial, as we will see, of caste by the upper castes. *Verneinung* or denial (and *Verleugnung* or disavowal related to it) is the phenomenon according to Freud where the realities of either the external social world or the forces within the unconscious are not acknowledged (Freud 2006; Laplanche & Pontalis 2022). The withholding of conscious acknowledgment may be an involuntary and unconscious process at the level of the individual psyche, but as a tendency evident in public and institutional life, *Verneinung* must be grasped at the level of socio-political forces. Hence, both the conscious and unconscious motivations for the disavowal of caste in psychology and psychoanalysis in India—which are in themselves always co-articulated—will be revealing. "Passion is better than disavowal," a therapeutic maxim goes (Kerr 2015: 361). A psychoanalytical exploration of a caste-based civilization makes it incumbent on us to critically supplement the relatively a-political character of psychoanalytical diagnosis by attending to politics as the contestation of caste towards its annihilation as B.R. Ambedkar envisaged it.

Psychomachia of Caste

Psychoanalysis reminds us that our understanding of social reality cannot begin from an Archimedean point outside the psyche, but rather should take as its point of departure the lived experience of social meaning and the associated pleasures, sufferings, trauma, doubt, anxiety, and affective identifications and disidentifications with significant others. In the subcontinent and in its diaspora, all these phenomena are determined at the deepest levels by caste which has a primarily birth-based and parentally defined character. The social order of caste generates specific kinds of suffering, both physical and psychic (Jadhav et al. 2016). Crimes of honour killing, lynching and rape as collective caste punishments, stigmatization through verbal abuse invoking caste identities, and many forms of material expropriations are widespread, while the socio-economic indicators for the majority population of India remain abysmally low as indicated by the Indian poverty line (Thorat & Newman 2012). The infliction of suffering is socially sanctioned and often legally excused, including a variety of social and penal incarcerations—economic boycott, social isolation, jail as undertrial,[1] suicide—and painful death where lynching is often preceded by humiliating acts of disrobing, parading, soiling and invasion of the helpless bodies

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[1]See Kisana & Hole (2023) and the reports of Project 39 on death row convicts.

(Irudayam et al. 2014). The suicide notes of Dalit students who are driven by the lived experience of caste in elite educational institutions to kill themselves, are only a part of the unseen archives of caste-based suffering (Punia 2023). Generations of Dalit poets, activists, and scholars have given expression and testimony to it. For example, Kanshi Ram, a 22-year-old mason looking for a job in Israel amidst the current war in Gaza, recently reflected on the significance for him of the journey to a zone of death in search of livelihood: *"People like us are at war with society, and internally with our souls, from the time of our birth"* (Kumar 2024). The war in the soul is psychomachia, and its psychogenesis must be understood as, in fact, *sociogeny* as Fanon called it (1986: 4). A lay person, poor and of lower caste, with a technical qualification of an iron bender and a "working understanding of English" has been able to express a *psychomachia*—war within the soul, for which the Greek word was *psyche*—which professional psychologists have neglected.[2]

Psychiatrist and academic Sushrut Jadhav, who is himself Dalit, has described himself as being a rebel in the Clinic, posing to his discipline questions such as:

> How does caste shape individual psyches and determine collective mentalities? How and why does caste-ism impact upon the inner lives of both the perpetrators and their victims; How can their psychological wounds be healed? How is caste-related victimhood constructed, experienced and contested through a cultural psychological language? […] How is it psychologically constructed and managed, both individually and collectively? What might be the cultural pathologies of the psyches of perpetrators of caste-ism? […] To what extent does caste-ism and racism overlap or differ in their psychological antecedents and consequences? (Jadhav 2012)

All these questions should also be posed to discussions of psychoanalysis in the Indian context thus far. The first question requires an account of how caste as a civilizational principle comprehends people's lives and impacts their mental health. It does so by reducing them to their "immediate identity and nearest possibility" in the words of the Dalit scholar Rohit Vemula who committed suicide because of discrimination on the university campus (Vemula and Henry 2016). Immediate identity is the attribution of caste to a person because of the parents to whom she/he is born. Caste is hypophysical since it holds value (superior/inferior) to be intrinsic to human nature and it institutionally ascribes graded value to a person pre-defined as having an immutable nature (Mohan & Dwivedi 2019). The caste order holds people to be *born-as* upper or lower caste because of the parents they are *born-to*. The production of identity by positing *born-as* in the immediacy of *born-to* is hypophysics (Dwivedi 2023).

At birth itself, an individual is defined in all respects according to caste. An individual is not considered to be a personality evolving and mutating through dynamic

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[2]New initiatives have emerged on the margins of the field to address the mental health challenges of lower castes, including *We Belong* for students, the *Mariwala* health initiative, the diploma in anti-caste mental health practices offered *Narrative Practices in India*, and the work of Maitri Gopalkrishna, a drama therapist and counselling psychologist.

exchange with the surrounding world, but a bundle of unchangeable qualities or merits (*guna*) and corresponding imperatives (*dharma)* and privileges inherited "by birth". Words for birth and caste are etymological twins if not the same: *janma* (birth) and *jāti* (caste). In this way, intelligence, worth, beauty, fruits and punishments of action, success and failure in this life and even the next—in short, *value*—are held to be transmitted in the nature of the *born body*.

Civilizationally, a scalology corresponds to this hypophysical logic of the intrinsic and permanent residence of value in our *nature* (also etymologically derived from *natus*, birth). The "curse of caste" as Bhimrao Ambedkar (1979) called it is that it is not just the intergenerationally frozen identity belonging to a group: "*caste in the singular number is an unreality. Castes exist only in the plural number.* There is no such thing as a caste: there are always castes" (p. 20). This inter-group hierarchy arranged by graded inequality enables the castes of upper or higher value to *denigrate* the castes assigned "lower" values while confirming their own supremacy and thereby justify their power to *dominate* the lower castes for exploiting them through the combination of duty and right. By "caste" we should therefore understand the name of the structuring principle of a scalology in which the value of each caste is fixed on a scale of superiority, purity, touchability, and freedom.

The *denigrate-dominate function* of caste hypophysics and scalology was formulated as social imperative (dharma) which allowed the upper castes to a) maintain sufficient distinction from each other to preserve specific privileges distributed among themselves—land and other resources, governance, monopoly of force, sacrality— and b) simultaneously regularize and regiment their distance from the lower castes: just sufficient proximity to receive their services and labors without having to share with them the privileges or disrupting the genealogical inheritance of the inequalities. All the while, the upper castes kept their religion strictly to themselves, including temples and other domains of sociality, which were all based on descent. Hence the proscription of commensality and exogamy, whose hyopophysical doctrine of the consecration of value in born nature—*janm-jāt*—was prescribed by one of the upper castes (Brahmin, custodians of scriptures), and whose scalological operationalization and social reproduction was enforced by another (Kshatriya, rulers and warriors).[3] Castes are ceremonial societies eternally repeating their respective caste regularities or dharma and thus ceremonially repeating the scalological order—the upper castes doing so with pride, the lower castes forced to do so with the experience of denigration and exploitative domination.

Thus, the *denigrate-dominate function* instituted inferiority by birth as the material as well as psychic regularities of racialized oppression and stigmatization— what Fanon called lived experience (*expérience vécu*) in the fifth chapter of *Black Skin White Masks*—on the scale of populations and centuries (1986). It distributes differential imperatives for the upper and the lower castes. In this pyramidal bauplan,

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[3]The punishments for these crimes against the scalology of caste are excommunication (expulsion from the caste and withdrawal of livelihood or *hukka-pani*) and honor killing (extinguishing of life and reproductive freedom).

the populations of the upper castes have been a numerical minority throughout this period and the lower castes a numerical majority. Its tenacious regularity can be gauged from the fact that even today, of upper castes who are less than ten per cent hold most of the elected positions, and more than ninety per cent of positions in judiciary, financial institutions, academia, media, and culture industry.

In the haunting words of the suicide note left by Vemula (2016), "Never was a man treated as a mind" in India since a mind is capable of interacting with the components of the immediate and mediate world, of thinking and imagining it otherwise, of introducing change in the functions and regularities of the components. The hypophysics of caste is inimical to treating man as a mind because the mind can and will dissociate the value soldered into birth and nature and will revaluate it. The mind can dissociate the racializing pre-definition that caste finds in the child so that other destinies can be discovered and cultivated in her. It will also dissociate groups from their functional isolation in the pre-fixed scalology of caste and invent new functions. The mind can invent new functions for people, spaces and objects outside the caste-prescriptions, and can create new social and political conditions—laws and institutions to materialize these new functions (Mohan & Dwivedi 2019). The polynomia of the mind threatens the ceremonial society and the law-giving perspective of upper caste supremacy. The mind is *polynomial* since it approaches the world as capable of being regulated under multiple laws rather than confined under one eternal law (the *sanatana dharma* where the means is itself the end since observance of caste rules is the means to the ends of reproducing the caste order).

The ceremonial society of caste therefore seeks to decrease individual and collective polynomia as well as the freedom to choose the functions into which one prefers to be isolated. Caste-blindness or *Verneinung* among the upper castes is a function of this conflict, between caste hypophysics and polynomia as is psychomachia among the lower castes. Thinking psychoanalysis in India therefore requires that we critically and politically reinterpret its metasychological concepts through polynomia and functional isolation, recognizing them at work through different functions and effects in the existence of both the oppressors and the oppressed of the caste order.

Verneinung: Evasiveness of Caste and Health Humanities

"Never was a man treated as a mind" is the briefest complete definition of a caste-based society—and of any systemic racism. Vemula's words and his suicide confront us with the stunning and yet mundane fact that the discipline of psychology and the institutions of mental health in India have not concerned themselves with the play of caste in the "mind" whose theory and health are the very reason for their existence.

Jadhav's last question about anti-racist interventions is especially revealing given the long history of critical assessments of the deleterious impact of systemic racism on the psyche and the psychology of perpetration of racism in the colonial context (Feagin 2006; Hook 2012). In this context, race theories and racist practices of slavery, segregation, and the stigmatisation of coloured bodies hypophysically associate them

with bundles of inherited civilizational traits (Omi & Winant 2015). The experience of colonialism in India has driven the research of the past several decades in nearly all disciplines of the humanities and social sciences, often drawing explicitly upon anti-racist thinkers and academics, in particular Fanon, who himself engaged both critically and creatively with psychoanalysis to theorise and clinically treat the psychic life of the victims of racism (Bernasconi 2023; Khalfa & Young 2018; Hook 2008; Boni & Mendelsohn 2024). *The Wretched of the Earth* described the "tinctures of decay" among the Algerians under French occupation suffering from depression, stupor, impotence, anxiety, and suicidal ideation (Fanon & Farrington 1963: 200, 204, 217, 225, 234). Hypophysics and scalology form the architecture of both racism and caste (Dwivedi 2023). The victims of caste did draw inspiration and solidarity from the history of anti-racist literature and scholarship (Immerwahr 2007; Natarajan & Greenough 2009). However, although the academic and public spheres in India have promoted analogies between colonial racism and the "Indian" experience, they have at the same time dismissed and suppressed the analogies between racism and caste (Thorat & Umakant 2013. As the social psychologist Yashpal Jogdand (2023) notes:

> Indian psychologists have […] demanded decolonization of psychological sciences but have not made much effort to address the internal colonialism Dalits experience in Indian society. The psychological thoughts of chiefly mainstream Hindu texts and thinkers such as Patanjali, Gandhi, Aurobindo, and others have been studied and taught in Indian universities (Dalal and Misra 2010). Anti-caste perspectives and radical thinkers such as Ambedkar have been relegated to non-scientific spheres. As a result, psychology in India and elsewhere has remained caste blind. (37)

Caste blindness can be explained by the fact that academics in this discipline—as in all other social sciences and humanities—are predominantly from the upper castes where the lived experiences are different and other psychological priorities prevail. When scholars and practitioners of psychic life look for the "Indian psyche", they see only their own immediate identity. For instance, the prominence given to discussions of widow burning, meditation, and "wellbeing", which are phenomena that do not fall within the horizon of the lower castes, is the index of a collective and institutionalized choice to isolate their discipline to the theorisation and care of upper caste concerns alone.

Indian engagement with psychoanalysis, as found in the writings of Ashis Nandy and Sudhir Kakar, too has evaded the discussion of caste while proposing "Indian" critiques of psychoanalysis based on the cultural difference between "India" and the "West"; the diversity of upper caste gods is asserted (Boni & Mendelsohn 2023) but the hierarchy of caste goes unmentioned in the portraits of "Indian culture" advanced in such critiques. The resistance to psychoanalysis as such by Nandy (1983 & 1995, Nandy & Boni 2023) and Kakar (Kakar & Boni 2023) is precisely symptomatic. They oppose the occidentality of psychoanalysis and the Western ego-ideal of rationality

and secularism to the exceptionality of "Indian culture" (defined, for them, by its upper caste mythology). They also oppose the individualism of psychoanalysis (and of the West) and the oedipal Western nuclear family to the exceptionality of the "Indian" joint family where the upper caste child passes at the breasts of many mothers and wetnurses rather than suffer the Lacanian lack (see Kakar 2012: 146–50). They do not disaggregate "Indian" into the real caste divisions which determine the different lived experiences of the upper and the lower caste family lives. Then, the programmes hitherto undertaken to decolonise "Indian psychology" and address its cultural locus are the products of a universalisation of the upper caste psyche and lifeworld to the whole of "India" and "Indian civilization" (Davar 1999: 181).

Jadhav has suggested that the knowledge generated by the Indian social sciences should be brought into dialogue with the studies of "health" including mental health (2012). We should even consider this a new imperative since the social sciences and theories of psychology and psychiatry are the academic domain that should mediate between the domain of the clinic and that of the world, and this is what we call "Health Humanities". This imperative cannot be pursued until the evasiveness of caste is scrutinized. Postcolonial scholarship insisted that caste was a construct of colonial epistemology reflected in the "ethnographic state" which reified caste "fluidity" through the census and the attendant legislations and policies of electoral representation based on statistical determination of the people (see Dwivedi 2023, Kisana & Hole 2023). The social sciences have been as caste blind as the disciplines of health and mental health.

Why is it that a blindness watches over a society that has been civilizationally comprehended by caste? Why does academic evasiveness accompany a social practice that for the larger part of its history had survived by ascribing, signifying, and apellating everyone's caste identity and not permitting anyone to evade its detection and consequences in everyday life? Ethnographies and statistical analyses of surveyed speech cannot by themselves suffice to explain these real phenomena which condition the everyday experience of caste and the ways in which the different groups in the graded inequality or scalology of caste engage in meaning-making—including denial—with respect to it.

The psychoanalytical concept of *Verneinung* (naysaying) explains denial or negation as an involuntary speech act in the domain of the clinic, occurring due to a shift in the relations between the conscious and the unconscious parts of the psyche and, by extension, of social and public life. The conscious part judges, acts, and evaluates reality, and the unconscious is where our impulses, instincts and the drives which impel them are lodged along with the repressions acting on them on behalf of a world that cannot accommodate or satisfy them. Negation is consequent upon repression. It functions in conscious speech to mention a repressed content but in negative form as that which is there in thought but is not intended or is denied. In the famous late essay of 1925 titled "Verneinung", Freud (2006) proposed that "Negation is a way of taking cognizance of what is repressed; indeed, it is a lifting of repression, though not, of course, an accepting of what is repressed" (p. 667). For instance, a patient tells

the analyst that he saw a woman in his dream "but it is *not mother*". The need to add this negation would not have arisen unless the recollection of the dream woman was already associated with "mother." Conversely, the recollection could not have arisen until a "not" chaperoned this thought. *Verneinung* is a way for the unconscious to allow the repression to be lifted and "mother" to appear to the conscious by adding a "no". In the Indian social sciences, the syntax of negation can be heard as follows:

> *we see poverty / backwardness / malnutrition, but it is not caste.*

> *We see the same effects as produced by institutional racism, but caste is not like racism.*

Repression is a formation of unconscious content (not a force acting on prior content) which results from the interaction of forces acting on a shared locus—human beings in socio-political regularities.

Psychoanalysis: The Unconscious, Repression, and the Ego-Ideal

We can understand the psychoanalytic concept of repression and all the subsequent operations ensuing, such as negation, in terms of the dynamic between the functional isolations which can generate "nearest identities" on the one hand and the mind's polynomia on the other. Pure polynomia without any isolation into function is unrealizable. Instead, there are degrees of polynomia or the capacity and freedom of the mind to be functionally isolated under multiple laws, such as when a scientist is also a writer, an educator is also an activist, and a thinker is also a journalist. The psyche—which is a different concept than the mind—is historico-cultural for the very reason that it is formed through the functional isolation of the mind's polynomia under civilizational conditions. The psyche can neither think nor feel absolutely everything. It does so only according to the functional isolations of these two powers—of thinking and feeling—into psychic regularities at different levels. In psychoanalysis, these regularities can also be considered the organs of the psyche—the ego which is conscious, and the id and ego-ideal (also known as super-ego) which are unconscious.

For Freud (2001), "very powerful mental processes or ideas exist […] which can produce all the effects in mental life that ordinary ideas do […], though they themselves do not become conscious" (p. 3949). These psychical processes can be called the Unconscious. The passage of ideas from the Unconscious to the Conscious entails the transformation of those unconscious ideas in keeping with a censorship since all unconscious ideas, feelings and desire cannot be accommodated or expressed in an inter-personal social world. Social imperatives require the suppression of some pleasures, the postponement of others and their sublimation (into a different kind). This primary function is repression ("Two Principles of Mental Functioning" in Freud 2001: 2550-2558). It works by means of a "resistance" encountered, and can be understood as the differential of the impulses that proceed from the internal

world outward and those compulsions that act on the person from the external social world. The repressed ideas persist in the Unconscious along with unrepressed ones (Freud 2001), and continuously seek expression in the Conscious. When repressed ideas re-assert themselves and are opposed by social imperatives and by morals as the internalized form of the latter, they are confronted with two possibilities of unpleasure: that of being denied satisfaction, or else that of discomfiture vis-à-vis the social law if they are satisfied despite its pressure. A path has to be chosen to achieve pleasure with minimum unpleasure—an economy within the psychic apparatus which subserves the social and political economy which Freud called the pleasure principle or the reality principle. This path involves a further transformation of these ideas: condensation, that is, the concentration of several such ideas into a particular thought; and "displacement" or substitution of an acceptable thought for the repressed, unacceptable one (see *Interpretation of Dreams* in Freud 2001). By means of substitute ideas and images, the process of repression produces dreams, fantasies, jokes, Freudian slips, art works, and other effects in everyday discourses, including *Verneinung* (negation).

The ego or the conscious self is "that part of the id which has been modified by the direct influence of the external world through the medium of the perceptual conscious system" (Freud 2001: 3950). It is the isolation of polynomial mental processes into specific psychic regularities and is thus *itself* a function and effect of repression rather than a universal homogeneous "I" —universal theories of "self" are therefore useless for a psychology of caste. The ego in turn furthers the process of repression in accordance with the "reality principle" which involves the task of thinking (instead of blindly desiring), that is, evaluating and judging what the mind encounters. The ego turns away from the thought of repression itself, so as to completely repress it, thus necessarily forgetting that it is repressing at all, and leading to the splitting of a part of the ego itself which thus becomes unconscious. We can say that the unconscious is not a definite repressed content at all but rather it is the very polynomia of mind due to which the psyche can undergo multiple and changeable functional isolations.

Though continuously criticized and modified, psychoanalysis has served as a powerful theory of civilization because of the important role accorded to social milieu in producing not only psychic effects but in shaping the very formation of psychic organs. In light of the way polynomia and functional isolation, in inverse proportion to each other, describe man's relation to his social milieu, we can redefine psychoanalytic repression as the result of the specific disproportion between:

i)   The actual functional isolations that specify the existing regularities of society, and

ii) The pure polynomia of man (the unconscious can say and think everything) which can never be realized in experience but is necessary for finding freedom from existing regularities in order to imagine new regularities which entail their own functional isolations.

The most important organ resulting from this disproportion specific to each individual in relation to her social milieu is the ego-ideal or I-ideal, more popularly known as the superego. Freud defined it as a level within the ego or "a Differentiating Grade in the Ego" whose function is repression, reality-testing, punishing, controlling and directing (2001: 3821). It is therefore no longer entirely conscious but rather unconsciously judges and polices the ego, the agent that might be swayed by the drives. Pleasure is submitted to the "pleasure principle", which is effectively the "reality principle" or the determination of the ratio of how much and which form of satisfaction can be achieved while prolonging life and securing the expectations of future pleasure. Psychopathologies are the products of the ratios negotiated by each individual with respect to the world and society starting from the immediate society or the family. Each ego-ideal is the index of social laws and family circumstances which are culturally and historically variant. Thus, the theory of id, ego and ego-ideal forming a circuit of proportions and disproportions with the external social reality comprises metapsychology and frames the account of both phylogeny and ontogeny.

Ontogenetically, before the child is confronted with the oedipal triangle, it only knows the pleasure or unpleasure in terms of sensations perceived through its own body, presumably with the regular rhythms of feeding and expelling. Thus, the first cathexis (discharge and application) of the libidinal drives is auto-erotic in relation to itself and without sensing a distinct other. In the so-called "oedipal situation" the child is faced with the withdrawal of the immediate source of satisfaction, usually the mother, whether due to the father's or family's needs, or her worklife or her own needs. These new compulsions issuing from outside its previous rhythms and incomprehensible to it are experienced by the child as a violent intrusion which may be represented by or affixed to the father, whence Freud's and the psychoanalytic tradition's term for it: *the law of the father*. It is not defined by the actual father, and can command the caregiver (mother or father) in a way that the child cannot but wants to do. The auto-erotic cathexis has to be redirected to another object for satisfaction. By her very withdrawal, the source of care now appears as "mother" and the child's desire may take the shape of *having the object* of/like her. The child may thus form an "anaclitic" attachment, leading it to make object-choices similar to the mother. This also entails that the child identifies with the objects that the mother appears to love, where the desire takes the shape of *being like her object-choice* (for instance the father). Alternatively, the resolution of the oedipal complex may take a different trajectory of *having the object-choice* which she has (the father), while *being like* her, that is, identifying with her ("Some Neurotic Mechanisms" in Freud 2001: 3901).

While Freud's gendered identifications were conservative and heteronormative, their metapsychological structure is insightful: one identification has the character of wanting to *have* the object and the other has the character of wanting to "be like" the object and therefore desire what it desires. *Having* and *being* are both generators of identifications in the same psyche with respect to its immediate society. Identity therefore cannot be theorized in terms of a one-to-one correspondence between the self and the social group, especially in a scalological caste order. Group identity too is

a double identification of *having-in-common* and *being-in-common*. Philosophically, psychoanalysis allows us to think beyond generalizations such as in-group and out-group relations, so that we can ask how social groups, especially in the inter-group relations and hierarchies, are organized through identifications of "having (objects) in common" and of "being-like each other" (Dwivedi 2020; Nancy 2023). Caste as a hypophysical scalology installed social imperatives regarding both types of identifications, as we will see through Ambedkar.

The ego-deal formed in the individual as a precipitate of the conflicting identifications is the moral agent of the social world and its law of sexual difference, operating within the individual her/himself and regulating the two types of identifications in one's social life. The social-imperative function performed through the ego-ideal, or what can be called the father function as a shorthand, is communicated and symbolized through language in the form of symbols which communicate the sources of the imperative. It is represented in discourse in every society and every stage of civilization through symbolized imperatives—totems, ancestors, patronym, honour, and even gods.[4] Psychoanalysis traditionally calls this social imperative function by the name "father" although it is quite independent of actual fathers. The name of the father (as symbol for the meaning of a social imperative) is more powerful than actual fathers and mothers. Such symbols are transmitted as archaic inheritances often resistant to change. Interrogating the father function and the father's name in the symbolic sense can offer a site to confront caste and psychoanalysis with each other.

Given the racialized social order of caste, the first question to be put to psychoanalysis is whether the archaic inheritances of the social imperatives specific to a socio-historical context—and their internalization as ego-ideals along with their corresponding shared symbols or "father" functions—is solely unconscious, or does it also get expressed in public discourse as well. Accordingly, we should also point like Fanon towards the "sociogeny" rather than phylogeny or ontogeny of those publicly symbolized father-functions which are mediated by the graded inequality of castes and of actual fathers and mothers in it. Studying the sociogenesis of caste-based identifications, social imperatives, ego-ideals and corresponding "fathers" requires that we historicize and locate the political agencies that regulated differential identifications in modern India.

Conflict of Imperatives: Resistances and Laws

The earliest surviving description of caste recorded by the upper castes—who also designated themselves as "Arya" (noble, higher)—is the *Puruśasukta* hymn of the

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[4]Based on the theory of identifications and ego-ideal, Freud also proposed an elaborate and rightly criticized account of the group bond, group behavior vis-à-vis charismatic leadership, group conflicts, and types of groups such as religious communities, armies and political parties in his 1921 book *Massenpsychologie und Ich-Analyse* (2004). It offered a theory of the internal connections between phylogeny and ontogeny or the emergence of the individual psychology through "archaic inheritance", that is, past formations of the psyche-civilization relation. For an analysis of its anti-political character which psychoanalysis in India should eschew, see Dwivedi 2020.

Rigveda followed by the account of *varna-ashrama-dharma* or the law of varnas (colour coded qualities of four major caste groupings) in the canonical *Manu Smriti* (Olivelle & Davis 2018, Witzel 1997; Chakravarty 2000). Their continued and even augmented invocation today by powerful caste-ist organizations like the RSS indicates the epochal work done to attain such a depth of cultural memory or archaic inheritance among the upper castes. These groups did not share this inheritance with the lower castes for identifications of the type "having (things) in common"— things such as their wells, kins, and temples —nor for and of "being-like each other" in attire, language, and salutations. If we give the name "Brahminism" to the hypophysical scalology of caste (Dwivedi & Mohan 2024), then its application to the psychoanalytic theory of identification reveals an anomaly: the plural number of castes would not allow all castes to have the same father function even as the upper castes, especially Brahmins gave the law. In other words, unlike Freud's theory, caste could not even brook the idea of a common father (or common gods) of all castes for fear of identification. Identifications had to be calibrated and segregated scalologically. Kakar (2012) selectively analysed the "Indian psyche" based on the relation of upper caste males to their father function, but did not attend to the same in the case of the lower caste, especially the outcastes who were considered to be born (of) other, which means *not of the same progrenitor* as in the *Rgvedic* myth (pp. 146–150).

Although the subcontinent has been the crossroad of multiple cultures and civilizations (Subrahmanyam 2015), this influx and co-mixing of customs and ideas could not introduce a significant disruption of the caste order. On the contrary, caste spread into all incoming cultures and religions inhabiting the subcontinent (Ansari 2023). However, in modern times this anomaly had to be addressed since it would contradict the idea of national and religious unity of all "Hindus", which the upper castes needed to project for supremacy in the new political structures developing and being negotiated from the later nineteenth century onwards (Dwivedi et al. 2021).

European, especially British, colonialism marked the first material disruption of the comprehending law of caste by introducing a new legal and moral authority, compromised as it was by its own denigrate-dominate function of colonial extraction and civilizational hypocrisy. Colonial interventions in the laws and cultures of the subcontinent were not experienced uniformly by "natives", but rather they often disrupted the upper caste self-assurance in its supremacy and disrupted the immurement of the majority people to lower caste occupations and lack of modern education. Colonial educational and legal policies allowed the lower castes for the first time to escape traditional occupations, and acquire modern knowledge (O'Hanlon 1985; Dwivedi et al. 2021). These disruptions to the traditional patterns of caste became the condition of possibility for challenges to upper caste supremacy by lower caste political groups to irrupt in the mid-19th century in all parts of India, especially in Bombay presidency (now Maharashtra) with Mahatma Jotirao Phule, the brilliant intellectual and activist. The destinal character of caste hypophysics began to fork into a new possible destiny created by the egalitarian critiques and mobilizations of the lower castes. This moment introduced the new regularities of census and proportionate

representation which could transform previous social divisions from dharma inequality to new civil rights and duties.

An anti-caste future thus appeared on the civilizational horizon nearly 150 years ago, but its realization was very quickly resisted by the upper castes. They experienced a new political exigency when the advent of British imperial rule began to prepare a new democratic framework for self-rule in the subcontinent according to the principles of proportional representation. The conventional definition of "modern" prevalent in the upper caste academic and public spheres refers to the adoption of modern institutions of governance and the forms of constitutional democracy—set up from the early twentieth century onwards—by the upper castes who received the transfer of power from the departing British imperialists in 1947. While these constitutional forms and norms were forged under the visionary leadership of the anti-caste thinker, jurist, and Dalit leader Dr. Ambedkar, it was the upper castes that populated the new institutions and controlled the power to govern under them. Hence, "modern" India witnessed the re-organization of some components of society like elections, laws, the judiciary, universities, and newspapers which were specified under "Western" egalitarian and secular rules of a shared public realm in which everyone could identify with everyone in being an equal *citizen*. However, these enlightened components were co-articulated—like a bullock cart with tube tyres—with the older, more powerful components of financial power, inherited primacy in access to elite education and employment, and the very ability to make and break laws, which continued to be specified by the caste law of unequal identification.

Psychoanalysis and India: Social Imperatives, Civilization and State

The first acts of civilizational repression in the Indian subcontinent must be traced in order to understand contemporary psychomachia and the negation of caste. The colonial disruption of caste scalology revealed the polynomia of the people called "lower" and produced new functional isolations—Mahars could become professional soldiers and defeat the Peshwa army, a *mali* (Phule) could become the first theorist of egalitarian education in India, an untouchable child could become a flamboyant lawyer and chair of the Constituent Assembly. To inhibit these new functions, the old and undisguised language of caste could not carry forward in the arena where the transfer of power was negotiated without having to undergo the process of condensation and displacement in order to repress the reality of caste which had begun to intrude into the public domain through the Ambedkar's discourse.

In his famous speech in 1936 titled *The Annihilation of Caste*, Ambedkar (1979) noted the persistence of a fundamental characteristic of society as its elites were debating the form of the new nation taking birth: "Hindu Society as such does not exist. It is only a collection of castes" (50) and "[T]hat is the reason why Hindus cannot be said to form a society or a nation" (50). The criteria for forming one was to *have something in common* rather than simply *having similar things* while remaining

in exclusive zones except during exploitative transactions, which he called the "anti-social spirit" of so-called Hindu society. Such criteria specifies the true meaning of *community* (having and being in common), which is how Ambedkar also explained fraternity:

> An ideal society should be mobile, full of channels for conveying [*communicating*] a change taking place in one part to other parts. In an ideal society there should be many interests consciously communicated and shared. There should be a variety of modes of contact with other modes of association […] This is fraternity, which is only another name for democracy. (57)

> We can understand this as: *having in common the polynomia of all members of society as the common project of sustaining everyone's freedom.*

The three citations from Ambedkar made thus far form the syllogism of the new law, the new social imperative, and the meaning of modernity. They can also constitute the fundamental opening to psychoanalysis of caste-based suffering on the one hand and caste-based supremacism on the other. In order to trace the dreamwork with which the upper caste discourse had to respond, and then map the distance between the clinic and civilization, we can grasp the syllogism (in italics) as follows:

> A1) Castes exist only in the plural number, as *components of a collection organized by dharma or the law of the denigrate-dominate function*;

> A2) On the subcontinent, "nation" and "Hindu society" does not exist as the collection of caste does not allow having something common among all, and therefore, *the ceremonial repetition of the functional isolation of people under the denigrate-dominate function is anti-social and does not form a society*;

> A3) An ideal society should be mobile, with a variety of modes of contact, so that many interests can be consciously communicated and shared. Therefore *a society can only be formed under new laws (historical appearance of a new ego-ideal) which specify new enabling regularities for increase of polynomial*: new conditions for free choice of education, of occupation, of partners, and free creation of enterprises and identifications (friends and families) rather than reproduction of caste identifications and caste belonging.

Freedom is polynomia (*poly-nomos* or multiple laws) rather than anomia (absence of laws). Pure polynomia with zero functional isolation is therefore impossible and can never be achieved (like the Lacanian *real*). Instead, polynomia is the precondition for mobile and changeable functional isolations as Ambedkar outlined for fraternity, and can be realized in higher or lower degrees in any regularity. From the perspective of the anti-caste syllogism, the new regularities proposed for post-Independence India revealed themselves as measurable in terms of whether they increased or decreased polynomia of the human being. This revelation is shrouded by the postcolonialist

theoretical categories of "tradition" and "modernity" which mis-define modernity as anxiety about tradition and therefore repress the encounter with polynomia. Then, polynomia is the unconscious, and the repression of it by the millennial order of caste is the repression of the repression. Anti-caste thought and mobilization was the beginning of the analysis of the malaise of civilization in India and of the psychopathologies of this ceremonial anti-society. We can see Phule and Ambedkar as the first analysists of India, the precursors of psychoanalysis here as they created the conditions for caste to emerge into public discourse accompanied with its negation. The upper caste supremacists, whether they were revivalists or reformists, offered resistance to analysis which generated the first series of negations.

One clear and impactful instance of resistance was Gandhi's opposition to Ambedkar's Mahad agitation and demand for separate electorates in the mid 1930s. At the very moment of Ambedkar's 1936 speech "Annihilation of Caste" came Gandhi's *Verneinung* (negation) in the form of a reformulation of the old laws, which we can understand as the modern syllogism of caste:

> G1) The scalological collection of castes or *varna-ashrama-dharma* is (the essence) of eternal Hindu religion (*sanatana dharma*) and Indian society, and Hind swaraj will be its restoration;

> G2) Modern ideals of equality, commensality and inter-marriage among castes and religions are the superstitions introduced by (Western) civilization;

> G3) The ancient sages or "forefathers" gave this law to Indian civilization which has lasted for 3000 years because it ceremonially preserves the limits of caste, village, and sexual-dietary-ritual action. Therefore, this law constitutes the ego-ideal which the polynomia of the mind transgresses and which must re-assert its moral-legal authority.

This syllogism has many variants since Gandhi, where the function of the "forefathers" is always the same—giving the law of caste—under the various names of the forefathers: *upper caste supremacism, Brahminism, tradition, Indian culture, indigeneity, native subjectivity, Hinduism, Hindu way of life*, and so on. Corresponding to the choice of the name of the father, the discourse too takes its name: *orthodox*, *revivalist, traditionalist, reformist, nationalist, liberal, postcolonialist, subalternist, Hindutva*.

This game of the father's law and the father's name is well understood through psychoanalysis which shows that the actual father is merely one of the many agents of the ego-ideal or the function of judgement, evaluation and auto-correction on behalf of the law (the prohibitions and prescriptions) imposed by the external world. The caste law imposed by a caste civilization needed a change of "father" figures and names at the first moments of being challenged. The transfer of power from the British rulers back to the old upper caste rulers was therefore accompanied by a transfer of names (which is the analogue of psychic transference or the projection of the existing feelings towards the father to the analyst in the clinic): the invention of a *father of the nation*

and the nomination of M.K. Gandhi in this "father". The ceremonial anti-society of the collection of castes had two possibilities:

1. To re-organize the components under a new comprehending law of democracy which had in fact been birthed in letter—the Constitution—and which already had its new father, B.R. Ambedkar, the *father of the constitution* as he is called; OR

2. To maintain the old law of caste with its old logic of hypophysical paternity in the *Puruśasukta* and *Manu*, but now also present it in a new mask of national and religious unity and similarity.

Gandhi was this old-new father because his uninterrogated language of communal harmony and non-violence was regulated by the law of caste. He himself entered the game of the father's name by baptizing the oppressed outcastes as "*Harijan*" to reiterate that they were not born of proper fathers (but of caste mixing as asserted in *Manu Smriti*) and at the same time to pretend that the god "*Hari*" had fathered them although the scriptures did not assert this. The "father of the nation" was therefore the name that could symbolize the place of both the caste reality and the *Verneinung* and evasion of caste. This "father" could be defended so long as the relevant war was against the "West" and European colonialism, that is, so long as the war against caste led by Ambedkar did not have to be avowed even though it was declared and being fought. Indian psychologists have been of service in this negation through the decolonial agenda to which Jadhav and Jogdand have pointed.

"Ambedkar", "father of the constitution", "annihilation of caste", "social justice", "Bhim", "Babasaheb" – these are not all names of fathers or even all proper names but rather the synonyms of the *other* "father" function which symbolizes the new ego-ideals of egalitarianism, of the democratic law of freedom, and of politics as the common project of holding polynomia in common. This law has enabled another *game of names* which marks the resistance to the law of caste and to its father's names: "Dalit" displaces "*chuhre ke*" (caste slur referring to manual scavenging) and "Harijan", "Dalit-Bahujan" (majority) displaces "Hindu majority", and "Liberty, equality, fraternity, justice" displace *Manu Smriti* and *Hind Swaraj*. Ambedkar (his name, statues, life and works) displaces Prajapati, Manu, and Gandhi. With this displacement, and despite all upper caste resistances, emerges the "now" of modernity as an origin of something other than the ceremonialised past. One possible interpretation of Dhasal's numerous annual poems and others like "Now, Now" which nominated Ambedkar as the force as well as the polynomial symbol of new laws, new beginnings and new directions, is that they are archives of the generative power of the egalitarian social imperative in India. In an autobiographical essay, the social scientist Sukhadeo Thorat (1993) too testifies to Ambedkar as an ego-ideal when he describes his search for a new social identity that he sought as an alternative to the caste ego-ideals which he was determined to reject.

The legacy of the reckoning with the forked destiny of caste civilization has been that today, private discourse remains the ceremonial discourse shaped by caste, as does private life, where people's names more or less directly announce their caste

identities, and caste occupations are used when identifying people often in place of their given names—for lower castes, *mali, paravan,* and *chuhra* as recorded in the famous Dalit autobiography *Joothan* by Omprakash Valmiki; and for the upper castes, *pandit-ji, Sami, Nair.* Matrimonial columns in newspapers explicitly identify the castes which are sought after, and even those lower castes which "need not apply". Every token of these invocations of caste recalls the caste hypophysics of birth and caste abuses are invariantly a reminder of one's paternity and ancestry: "*chuhre ke*" or "(born) of sweeper" and "*pulayadi-mon-ey*" or "son of pulaya". On the other hand, public discourse in and about "India" is structured by the conflict between the law of caste through the denigrate-dominate function with its corresponding language of inherited inequality, and the modern law of equality implemented through the official hierarchy of the parliamentary election, cabinet, courts, police and civil service with its corresponding language of constitutionality. These resistances and conflict generate the psychopathologies of caste which are a function of repression, negation, and denial since Phule began writing and even before that as recent researches on anti-caste Tamil 17th and 18th century thinkers show (Ayyathurai 2024, 111-116). The turmoil expressed by the aforementioned anti-caste writers is largely evaded by psychologists like Kakar (2012). He analyzed what he called the "guilt" and "considerable emotional stress" that an upper caste person, for example, a Bania experiences due to the "conflict between rational criteria of specific tasks and institutional goals rooted in Western social values" and "his own deeply held belief" that he must put his family and caste members' interests first (pp. 149–150). Strikingly, he did not analyze the stress of the lower castes or furnish evidences of upper caste guilt, or demonstrate how considerable the stress is especially when considered alongside the suicides of the lower castes.

Psychomachia and the dawn of Another Psychoanalysis

Since there are few clinics to recognize and address the pathologies of psychomachia where living breathing sufferers can narrate their symptoms, psychoanalysis as the talking cure—which has talked not only to analysands on the couch but to the works of literature, religion, and art—can be brought into an encounter with the other archives of this psychomachia of caste. Poems, autobiographies, literature form such an archive along with responses given to an occasional journalist and suicide notes on the few occasions when they are left behind. Then, a great ethics must prepare for this encounter in which neither psychoanalysis nor caste must be taken at their extant articulations.

For this reason, only a tentative outline of psychomachia can be drawn from the scenes of suicides—the walls separating a dead student from the campuses or homes which cannot address her vulnerability, and the locks drawn from inside by a soul that sees no path leading from the door to a liveable world. As in Vemula's note, symptomatic names can be found in other notes too. Recently a teenager from the Valmiki community killed herself under pressure of a national engineering entrance test, writing to her parents: *sorry, I am loser, worst daughter.* The word "loser" comes

from the language of caste which disguises birth-based privileges as "merit" and calls those "loser" whom the casteist reality of our world has not given the conditions to compete. The word "worst daughter", however, may whisper another language: of the aspiration to educate oneself and become a "good" daughter" annulling the "bad" birth in the caste that the world considers "worst" (Dwivedi 2024). The aspiration to exit the conditions imposed by caste is already overdetermined by the liberal meritocracy (Punia 2023, Pathania et al. 2023) which masks the modern ego-ideal of constitution. It is never clear which law and which father are being avowed. The aspiration is then not a straightforward intentional state but rather it is a strong wish engendered by the modern super-ego of legal equality but repressed when confronted with the actual external reality which is hostile to the wish. And what that external reality is, given the game of masks—are we an egalitarian country or the same "old stuff" as in Dhasal's poem. Are we dreaming that we are in the now? This too is a decision whose burden falls on the already fragile soul: either the beloved law of equality is a lie or the fault lies with the daughter.

Freud's influential essay "Mourning and Melancholia" explored the structure of such fatal decisions in which the ego faces the choice of negating either what it has taken to be real (whether the social reality of parents, entrance exams, job markets, and caste abuses, or the legal ideality of Modern nation, egalitarian constitution, meritocracy, and aptitude tests) or the worthless being that it (ego-ideal) judges itself (ego) to be by comparison:

> The patient represents his ego to us as worthless, incapable of any achievement and morally despicable; he reproaches himself, vilifies himself and expects himself to be *cast out and punished* […] commiserates with his own relatives for being connected with anyone so unworthy […] extends his self-criticism back over the past; he declares he was never any better. This picture of a *delusion* (mainly moral) *inferiority* is completed by […] an overcoming of the instinct which compels every living thing to cling to life. (Freud 2006: 584, emphases added)

Suicide appears as a self-punishment following upon a self-criticism, self-denigration, and self-abasement. In modern India, where excommunication and lynching take both physical and verbal forms, the law of caste judges (denigrates) and punishes (dominates) not only in old ways which continue in both towns and villages, but also in new ways that are modulated in accordance with the mask of egalitarianism. Thus, something like an introjection—turning of the ego's power of destruction/aggression/ consumption towards itself as the object to be finished according to Freud—is maneuvered which intensifies self-denigration and self-harm.

The account of such melancholia and suicidal depression, preponderating among Dalit-Bahujan students in urban institutions calls for a Fanonian emphasis on "sociogenesis" of psychopathologies of racism (p. 4). In hindsight, it is evident that sociogenesis itself becomes visible only in the perspectives of the oppressed groups who, to use Fanon's phrase, *suffer in the their bodies and souls differently from the oppressing groups*.

The clinic fails the oppressed because of a theoretical failure which is itself a political failure: neither psychological theory not clinic include the lower caste perspective. As Fanon wrote in *Wretched of the Earth*:

> We have since 1954 in various scientific works drawn the attention of both French and international psychiatrists to the difficulties that arise when seeking to 'cure' a native properly, that is to say, when seeking to make him thoroughly a part of a *social background* of the colonial type. (1963: 200, emphasis added)

Without a politics that changes the *social background*, the clinic will welcome the oppressed not to cure—which will never properly happen—but to rehabilitate her to the world of oppression which, of course, is organized to profit from her suffering in the "social background" of poverty, self-doubt, humiliation (Jogdand 2018) and denigration. For a long time, elite educational institutions did not admit Dalit students with the excuse that there were not enough qualifying candidates; the architecture of institutionally assisted suicides complements this phenomenon as the student "opts out" herself (Punia 2023). Hence, Jogdand (2023) concludes that, "For those who strive toward bringing dignity and civility to Indian society, only a critical psychology with anti-caste vision will provide scope for resisting and eliminating caste—the root cause of humiliation" (p. 59).

Variant syntaxes of *Verneinung* (negation) can be heard in public and scientific discourse today where the negative is implicit:

> "caste is consensus" (it is not oppression);
>
> "caste is religious belief shared by the upper and the lower alike" (it is not denigration by the former of the latter);
>
> "caste is culture and tradition" (it is not the right object for annihilation);
>
> "caste exists only in the obsession of the anti-caste crusaders" (it is not discrimination);
>
> "forget caste, we are a modern country";
>
> *"rise above caste, don't you have anything else to talk about?"*

It is easy to imagine how this *Verneinung* prevails in the clinics too, where it may contribute to the worsening of a Dalit-Bahujan patient. The "not" of resistance and repression in the clinic finds its equivalent in the world (civilization) in the form of physical acts of negation and denial: pogroms, lynchings, velivadas (Dalit ghetto), forced suicides.

The first step to intensify the anti-caste imperative is to lift and acknowledge the negation of caste in social sciences and health humanities in general and psychology in particular. Since *Verneinung*, as we saw, indicates the return of the repressed unconscious ideations without yet the acknowledgement of the repression itself, the negation of caste by the upper caste spheres of the scalological world of India

is the sign or symptom of a disproportionate articulation between the dominant regularities of caste and the emergent regularities of constitutional democracy which themselves came about through negotiations and compromises between the upper caste supremacists and the anti-caste fighters for freedom. It is the symptom of an unresolved and unstable war of forces which is itself treated as unmentionable—untouchable—in the upper caste sphere, and is hence repressed: the resistance to this repression, that is, the attempt to "lift" and then "accept" it, is also resisted.

The second step would be to show by the example of its own failure in the clinic that a critical psychoanalysis of caste is not possible without an accompanying political struggle to change the social milieu and intervene in external reality. Since ego-ideals are formed under the pressure of social reality, psychology will always be the instrument of the persecution of the lower castes, whether by their own ego-ideals or by casteist ego-ideals of the upper caste psychologists and analysts who dominate the theory and the practice, and bring their own caste imperatives and negations into the clinic.

Psychoanalysis has been criticized, revised, adapted and widely deployed in clinics in Europe where it provides an alternative and/or supplement to pharmaceuticalized mental healthcare. The Lacanian emphasis on language, as seen in the British psychoanalyst Darian Leader's work, indicates the possibilities in psychoanalysis to relate to the sufferer through her own narrative, speech, as well as silence, rather than be reduced to a dosable body. As a theory of civilization and of society and politics, it can furnish resources to conceptualize and grasp those aspects of social life that are structured by evasiveness. However, it can also prove to be a retrogressive and universalizing theory of society and politics unless contextually specific sociogenesis of psychopathologies. This might even make of psychoanalysis a tool for further evasion and Verneinung of caste. *Acknowledgement* of Verneinung would then constitute a new and necessarily social and political process that cannot begin in the clinic but must take place in civilization itself. This process is none other than politics or the fight to acknowledge caste as the systemic racism of inherited inequality which must be addressed as that which is to be annihilated.

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

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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'.

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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 & Gorringe (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 'atrocity' 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'.

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Article

The Rhetoric of Dalit Psychological Suffering in Meena Kandasamy's *The Gypsy Goddess* (2014)

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Abstract

This article attempts to demonstrate that somatic trauma caused by caste-based oppression does not stop in the bone but has the ability to penetrate the inner psyche of Dalits in multiple and unexpected ways. The novel *The Gypsy Goddess* (2014) serves as a comprehensive repository of wronged and misinterpreted historical events, but also lays bare the impact that systemic forms of oppression can have on people's mental health. While mainstream trauma theory has been the model used by many scholars for decades to address trauma, uncritically universalising this generalised concept of 'Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder' (PTSD) (American Psychiatric Association, 1980) risks rendering the specificity of long-term pain suffered by oppressed groups, such as Dalits, invisible and unknowable. Thus, many are the scholars who have called for an expansion of the scope and a revision of the dominant conceptions of trauma and recovery. Therefore, in order to examine the impact of casteism from a psychological dimension, this article discusses trauma as 'a spectrum of conditions' rather than a single response (Herman 1992), considering the cumulative degradation and subtle effects of 'insidious trauma' (Root 1989; 1992), the generational transmissibility of trauma and its pre-traumatic stress (PreTss) reactions (Bond & Craps 2017). Drawing on the omnipresent connection between the individual and the collective in *The Gypsy Goddess*, the 'founding' nature (LaCapra 2014) of Dalit trauma and the combination of ubiquitous exposure to historical loss and endless structural absence of basic human rights are also key aspects.

Keywords

Caste, Dalit, Trauma, Psychology, PTSD Multidirectional Suffering

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Introduction

As William Faulkner once wrote, "The past is never dead. It's not even past" (1996: 85). In fact, the legacies of the past continue to resonate in complex and controversial ways, especially those connected to violent episodes. Somatic trauma, for instance, does not stop at the bones, but has the ability to transition from physical to internal scarring. The pain and agony that have afflicted the body of Dalits for generations have permeated their inner selves to such an extent that one of the most recurrent themes in Dalit literature is the mental anguish and emotional terror that result from experiencing and witnessing suffering.

Meena Kandasamy's debut novel, *The Gypsy Goddess* (2014), recounts the culmination of a conflict in Kilvenmani, a village in the Nagapattinam district of southern Tamil Nadu, between Dalit agricultural labourers and their oppressive upper caste landlords.[1] The narrative revolves around the village landlords' refusal to provide fair wages to the lower caste workers, leading to a retaliatory response from the Dalits, organised under the Communist Party of India. The consequences of this clash are tragic. On the night of December 25, 1968, the landlords dispatched rowdies to attack the rebellious workers. Although most of the men were able to escape and save themselves, the majority of women, children, and elderly individuals remained in the village. They sought refuge in a hut, but the attackers trapped them inside and set the hut ablaze, resulting in the death of 44 people. In the subsequent weeks, most of the culprits were declared innocent, and all evidence of the crime was destroyed. Meanwhile, the victims of the massacre were falsely accused of murder and armed rebellion, and they were imprisoned.

While this is not the first time an author has been inspired by or tried to do the historic event justice, very few have written so vividly about the first-hand experiences of people left voiceless and without agency.[2] Kandasamy felt the need to counteract vague and biased research papers and newspaper articles on the tragedy through a "domestic dramatic-traumatic tale" (2014: 13) through which the victims could somehow speak their truths.[3] Apart from physical and sexual abuse, forms of emotional and psychological violence against marginalised communities have pervaded for

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[1]One of the concerns raised by critics like Kavita Bhanot (2014) is the novel's ambiguous and overall evasive portrayal of the intricate connection between caste and class in the Dalit struggle. While the novel acknowledges this problem, it merely highlights its existence without thoroughly examining its implications. The analysis in this article will primarily concentrate on the caste-related themes presented in the novel.

[2]Seven years after the event, Tamil writer Indira Parthasarathy released the first novel about the massacre, *Kuruthipunal* (River of Blood) building on the moral and existential dilemmas of characters belonging to different social strata, which is why the novel is said to have digressed from the original issue and betrayed the cause. In 2000, writer Solai Sundara Perumal published *Sennel* (The Red Grain), presenting the event as a class uprising. In 2007, the writer Paataali wrote *Keezhai Thee* (The Fire from the East) as an account of how the judiciary failed the marginalised.

[3]Describing herself as a "first-generation woman novelist […] working in a second language from that third-world country", Kandasamy acknowledges the expectations placed upon her.

centuries in India, with little to no legal, social or political support for the victims. In her attempt at representation, Kandasamy strives to expose the impact that systemic forms of oppression have on mental health and the array of psychological problems that stem from physical violence and abuse.

In the subsequent lines, this article aims to illustrate that the somatic trauma resulting from caste-based oppression extends beyond mere physical manifestation, delving into the inner psyche of Dalits through various, often unforeseen, avenues. Using *The Gypsy Goddess* as a repository of historically distorted events, the article aims to showcase how the repercussions of such trauma are intricately woven into the fabric of Dalit experiences and how relying solely on the conventional trauma theory and its symptomatic framework overlooks the distinct and enduring pain endured by marginalised communities like the Dalits.

Trauma Paradigm

'Trauma' was officially acknowledged by the American Psychiatric Association (APA) in the 1980s under the title 'Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder' (PTSD),[4] and included the symptoms of what had previously been called shell shock, combat stress, delayed stress syndrome and traumatic neurosis as a response to both human and natural catastrophes (American Psychiatric Association, 1980). Taking as a basis APA's definition, Cathy Caruth defined PTSD as,

> a response […] to an overwhelming event or events, which take the form of repeated, intrusive hallucinations, dreams, thoughts or behaviours stemming from the event, along with numbing that may have begun during or after the experience, and possibly also increased arousal to (and avoidance of) stimuli recalling the event. (1995: 4–5)

Caruth clarifies that it is not the event itself—which may or may not be catastrophic, and may not traumatise everyone equally—that defines trauma or the distortion of that event; rather, it is its reception and, more specifically, its belated or failed integration into one's psyche that defines trauma (p. 6). Furthermore, the fact that the victim is possessed by the event through insistent 'reenactments' not only serves as testimony,

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Many would anticipate nothing more than a simplistic and unrefined narrative lacking depth or sophistication (2014: 13).

[4] The word 'trauma' comes from the Greek word for 'wound' and it was not until the late nineteenth century that the notion of 'psychological trauma' began to take root, thus connecting the origins of the trauma paradigm with the onset of Western modernity and the 'shocks' of modern life (Luckhurst 2008: 19). In January 1978, 'catastrophic stress disorder' —eventually renamed 'post-traumatic stress disorder'(PTSD)— was added to the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM-III-R). PTSD was first established as a reaction to a catalysing event "outside the range of usual human experience" and a re-experience of that event which could include recurrent and distressful memories, dreams, sudden acting, numbing or hyperalertness, sleep disturbance, survival guilt, memory impairment, and avoidance of activities that arouse the recollection of the event (American Psychiatric Association 1980: 236–238).

but also bears witness to the force of an experience that was never fully registered as it occurred (p. 151). Roger Luckhurst attributes these 'reenactments' to an involuntary repression of the traumatic memories, making them inaccessible to conscious recall, but recurring later in the form of hallucinations, flashbacks, or nightmares (2008: 3). The resistance of these memories to reworking and recategorisation could lead to their fixation, what Pierre Janet has called *idée fixes* (1895).

While the academic discourse in India has largely overlooked the trauma experienced by victims of caste discrimination,[5] the personal and subjective accounts of these individuals are gradually surfacing in poetic and autobiographical narratives, frequently reflecting several symptoms associated with trauma (Ganguly 2009; Heering 2013; Nayar 2011). *The Gypsy Goddess* portrays a variety of responses to the traumatic event, including distressing nightmares (2014: 203), cases of schizophrenia (p. 201), moments where characters vividly relive the burning sensation "all over again" (p. 220), and hallucinations. One of the victims, Letchumi, was left with a peculiar 'strangeness' in her head that would not fade away, however much she tried to fight it: "She had become so dizzy that police battalions and hired rowdies and armed landlords kept running away […] and the dead chased them through her, ear to ear, in unceasing weaves" (p. 199). On a particular day, Letchumi could not bear the mental agony any longer and confided in a neighbour, expressing that she felt "a hundred fights inside her body and nobody retired to take rest and their madness made her fly" (p. 199). The impact extended beyond her mental state, leading her to harm herself occasionally (p. 199). She firmly believed that the spectres possessing her mind were her deceased mother and friends, fighting to break free: "Her complaints varied, but the relentless throbbing never stopped […] Again and again, she collapsed in the chaos" (p. 199).

Expressions of psychological impact such as these represent the continuation of the traumatic process, which can give rise to other affective and cognitive sequelae such as hypervigilance, anhedonia and alexithymia—the reduced capacity for pleasure and happiness (Krystal 1978)—anxiety, panic and numbing—or 'affective anaesthesia' (Minkowski 1946). Thus, as Caruth concluded, it is not just the moment of the event but "the passing out of it that is traumatic; that survival itself […] can be a crisis" (1995: 9). One of the victims affected by the severe consequences in *The Gypsy Goddess* was left without speech due to the profound impact: "Death had driven a dagger through him, muting him […] his voice trapped in his head and his words stuck in stranger corners" (2014: 206), exposing once more how trauma can penetrate both the mind and body. Kandasamy ponders how those who live in dire conditions and are subjected to inhuman treatment can be expected to find any semblance of "satisfaction, contentment, pleasure or the pursuit of happiness" (p. 78).

However, studies on people who have experienced frequent traumatic events have shown that their psychophysical problems are much more complex than those described in the diagnostic criteria for PTSD. The diagnostic concept of Disorders of

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[5]Some exceptions to this are Cháirez-Garza (2018), Guru (2009), Jodhka (2015), and Jogdand (2023).

Extreme Stress Not Otherwise Specified (DESNOS), for instance, describes the more subtle and characterologically imprinted effects of long-term, chronic trauma (van der Kolk et al., 1996). This category recognises that survivors of prolonged abuse may undergo somatic, dissociative and affective sequelae, such as personality changes and vulnerability to repeated harm. Through dissociation, voluntary thought suppression, minimisation and, sometimes, outright denial, victims of prolonged violence may even learn to alter an unbearable reality by developing paralysis of initiative, apathy and helplessness (Herman 1992: 381). As Kandasamy puts it simply,

> The living in Kilvenmani lack life. Everyone is something else: there are the ones who do not eat, the ones who do not talk, the ones who do not bathe, the ones who do not step outside their homes, the ones who do not step inside their homes. It is strange the way in which the village has exchanged its sorrow for insanity. (2014: 211)

The impact of continuous depreciation and the lack of core identities can lead one to assimilate impotence, to internalise a 'learned helplessness' (Seligman 1975). Regardless of what they say or do, Dalits are at risk of being abused, discriminated against or singled out because of their caste. This has undoubtedly led to a perpetual state of anxiety, fear, disrupted sense of oneself, and dissociation, to name but a few effects. Most of the victims in the novel suffer from a blockage that prevents them from reacting to, and even acknowledging, what has happened to them, and it is the very unassimilated nature of the event that comes back to haunt them. One of them is "caught between his fear and her lack of any idea of what happened. The terror talks to her body in strange ways. She shivers when she is alone" (Kandasamy 2014: 201).

On the other hand, there are also victims who do not experience traumatic pathologies in the way proposed by mainstream scholars such as Caruth (1995). An example of this is the fact that traumatic amnesia does not seem to occur in the case of Dalits. Not only do they have their suffering imprinted on their bodies as a constant and inescapable reminder, but manifesting and talking about their suffering seems to be a necessary process. However, instead of being used as evidence of the massacre, the rupture and incoherence of the statements in court lead the commission to question the victims and ultimately dismiss their testimonies for lack of consistency. As one of the victims complains, "They found everything we said to be faulty, unreliable, contradictory, smacking of falsehood, lacking in credibility and an afterthought, so they refused to accept any of it" (p. 254). Kandasamy denounces that "A story told in many voices is seen as unreliable" (p. 234). She adds:

> Perhaps [they] wanted a single story: uniform, end to end to end. The 'Once upon a time, there lived an old lady in a tiny village' story. Sadly, we are not able to tell such a story… […] We were bound to lose. Because we do not know how to tell our story. Because we do not rehearse. Because some of us are tongue-tied. Because all of us are afraid and the fear in our hearts slurs the truth in our voice. (pp. 234–35)

Thus, many scholars have pointed out the limitations of this paradigm when trying to account for the injustices and inequalities suffered by oppressed groups whose misrecognition and misinterpretation have been overlooked and normalised. It is increasingly imperative to review the supposed universal validity of Western definitions of trauma and recovery and broaden the focus to accommodate and recognise other responses.

Multidirectional Suffering

Lucy Bond and Stef Craps are two of the scholars who have signalled significant blind spots in Caruth and APA's categorisation of PTSD. They consider the definition as biased and unmindful of psychodynamic perspectives, and restricting the kinds of experiences that can be recognised as traumatic, thus legitimising the suffering of certain subjects—generally Western—over others—peripheral individuals and communities (Bond & Craps 2017: 37–38). They find two aspects particularly problematic: one is its exclusive focus on sudden and unexpected catastrophic events which ignores the chronic psychic suffering caused by structural violence such as racism, classism and other forms of structural oppression. As they explain, "The cumulative impact of the often subtle everyday discriminations and humiliations inflicted on the victims of such forms of oppression can be as profound as that of spectacular and instantaneous acts of violence" (pp. 108–109). What they are asking for is an understanding of the long-term consequences of traumatic experiences stemming from institutionalised oppression that can remain unresolved for decades, and even generations, in the socially othered. The other limitation they point out, attributable to its rootedness in Western conceptions of personhood, is the tendency to consider trauma as an individual phenomenon. This not only complicates approaches to collectivist societies, but also dodges supra-individual conditions that enable traumatic abuse, such as political oppression, social exclusion, and economic deprivation (pp. 108–109).

Feminist psychotherapist Laura Brown also disagrees with APA's definition of trauma, particularly regarding the nature of traumatic events as "outside the range of usual human experience" (American Psychiatric Association 1980: 236–238). Brown argues that the human experience referred to in diagnostic manuals often means male human experience and, consequently, the range of human experience becomes the range of what is normal and usual in the lives of white, young, healthy, educated, middle-class, Christian men. In such a setting, trauma is "that which disrupts these particular human lives" (Brown 1991: 121). But the reality is that many traumatic experiences are "well within the range of human experience" (p. 121), as traumatic 'potentials' to which victims accommodate.

Kandasamy exposes the undeniable impact of caste-based trauma on women, particularly due to their vulnerability as potential victims of rape and gender violence, contributing to the establishment of a specific space for their experiences. Yet rather than solely emphasising their victimhood, *The Gypsy Goddess* brings to light the pivotal role played by Dalit women in their village's pursuit of dignity and liberation.

These women fearlessly confront their oppressors and willingly jeopardise their lives to safeguard their humanity and strive for a better future. This is evident not only through the novel's title, which pays homage to the revered female figure, but also in its portrayal of the Dalit woman within the larger community:

> When women take to protest, there is no looking back. […] Sometimes their demands are related to women alone […]. Most of the time, they fight for everybody. […] The jails are full of fighting Madonnas. They are not afraid. They are not afraid of arrests. They are not afraid of hurt. […] The landlords punish these shrill-voiced women by stripping them almost naked and tying them to trees and whipping them in front of the whole village. The police punish them by making them kneel and walk a few miles on their knees until they have no choice but to crawl. These blows do not break them. They are bold beyond the bruised skin and the bleeding knee. (2014: 75–76)

A related strand of criticism spearheaded by Michael Rothberg's influential work on 'multidirectional memory' (2009) has called for a comparative approach to memory that explores historical violence through a cross-cultural framework. Rothberg offers an alternative to the 'competitive memory' model according to which the capacity to remember historical tragedies is limited, and any attention to one tragedy inevitably diminishes our capacity to remember another. He suggests that we consider memory as multidirectional, that is, "as subject to ongoing negotiation, cross-referencing, and borrowing" (p. 3). In line with this alternative conceptualisation, Judith Herman proposed capturing the normative and everyday aspects of trauma as 'complex PTSD' (1992). As she comments, complex PTSD understands responses to trauma as 'a spectrum of conditions' rather than as a single disorder, ranging "from a brief stress reaction that gets better by itself and never qualifies for a diagnosis, to classic or simple post-traumatic stress disorder, to the complex syndrome of prolonged, repeated trauma" (p. 119).

Subjection to continuous and systematic coercive control certainly produces profound alterations in the identity of the victim. Psychotherapist Maria Root coined the term 'insidious trauma' (1989, 1992) for the cumulative degradation and effects of oppression that are not always blatant or overtly violent, but nonetheless threaten the victims' basic well-being. She also acknowledged the power of post-traumatic symptoms to filter through generations when belonging to that group means a constant lifetime risk of exposure to certain trauma; those for whom insidious trauma is 'a way of life' (1989, 1992).

Many scholars agree with trauma's potential to pass down through generations, especially among socially oppressed groups, making a case for the intergenerational nature of trauma. Bond and Craps, for instance, argue that children of survivors inherit memories of catastrophic events that they themselves did not experience, which they call 'transgenerational legacies' (2017: 85).[6]

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[6]Recent research in epigenetics has suggested that trauma may travel across generations in a much more literal way. They argue that trauma can leave a chemical mark on a person's genes

In *The Gypsy Goddess*, Kandasamy primarily focuses on specific instances of violence rooted in caste discrimination, leading up to or culminating in the massacre. However, the author emphasises the importance of going beyond this trauma and recognising the pervasive oppression endured by Dalits (2014: 19). She shifts perspectives and combines first-, second-, and third-person narrations to add to the polyphonic nature of the novel but, more significantly, to demonstrate the pervasiveness of trauma on a daily basis. We read about the rape of a fourteen-year-old girl at the hands of the landlords (p. 34), the kidnapping and murder of a labourer at the hands of caste-Hindus for religious reasons (p. 35), the mass arrest and rampaging of labourers and the whipping and stripping of their wives for daring to protest (pp. 72, 76, 77), among many other cases. Thus, characters either endure a multi-layered, continuous traumatic life filled with overwhelming and violent events or have inherited their ancestors' fear, alertness and submissiveness. Either way, it is a 'trauma-continuum' (Nayar 2018: 332) with an 'endless impact' on their lives.

Given this generational burden of traumatic memory, Bond and Craps have proposed the concept of 'trauma of the future' or pre-traumatic stress (PreTss) reactions. They argue that past-related PTSD symptoms are found to be mirrored by similar future-related PTSD symptoms, what Paul Saint-Amour has called the "traumatizing power of anticipation" (2015a: 17).[7] This can include intrusive images and nightmares about future negative events, avoidance behaviour and increased arousal to stimuli associated with traumatic events (Bond & Craps 2017: 126).

The Gypsy Goddess illustrates the power of casteist oppression to create anticipated suffering on Dalits, revealing how fear of a potentially impending disaster can be as traumatic as a real one. The "ripple effect of terror" (2014: 111) made the victims foresee their fate and silently wait for death (p. 217). As one of them declares, "The future had been tied to the past, so we hear our history over and over again. We always ended up hearing this history wherever we started" (p. 218).

Collective Victimhood

The individual suffering embodied in *The Gypsy Goddess*, as in most Dalit texts, is closely related to the individual's social position, thus linking the individual plight of a Dalit to the scars on the Dalit social body. Trauma, as Bond and Craps put it, not only blurs the boundaries between mind and body, memory and forgetting, speech and silence, but cuts across the internal and the external, the private and the public, the individual and the collective (2017: 5).

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that is passed on to the next generation. Although this trace does not cause any direct genetic mutation, supporters of this theory argue that it can alter the mechanism whereby the gene is converted into functioning proteins (Carey 2018). According to Benedict Carey, if these studies are validated, it would imply that we inherit a certain imprint of our parents' and grandparents' experiences, particularly their hardships, which subsequently affects our own daily well-being and potentially that of our children as well (2018). Nevertheless, the scientific community has not reached a consensus on such claims.

[7]Sigmund Freud also considered anxiety as a shield against traumatisation, instead of a source of it (as cited in Saint-Amour 2015b).

There is no doubt that the collective consciousness does not work in the same way as an individual psyche. Kai Erikson (1976) distinguishes between the psychological nature of individual trauma and the social nature of the collective one. On the one hand, he understands individual trauma as "a blow to the psyche that breaks through one's defences so suddenly and with such brutal force that one cannot react to it effectively" (pp. 153–54), while collective trauma is "a blow to the basic tissues of social life that damages the bonds attaching people together and impairs the prevailing sense of community" (p. 154). The main difference, therefore, is that collective trauma works its way insidiously into the consciousness of the group members, thus lacking "the quality of suddenness" (p. 154) normally associated with trauma.

Although they are different, there is still a powerful connection between the individual experience of trauma and the collective one (p. 101).[8] Jeffrey C. Alexander (2012) suggests that the constant exposure to violence and oppressive discourse marks a group's memories and consciousness forever and changes its cultural identity in fundamental and irrevocable ways, leading to the formation of a collective type of trauma (p. 3). In line with this, Cathy Caruth concedes that just as there is a damaged body, one can speak of a damaged social organism (1995: 188). She also highlights the centripetal and centrifugal tendencies of trauma (p. 186) arguing that communal trauma may give victims the feeling that they have been set apart and made special, creating a spiritual kinship, a source of communality or a sense of new identity. Martha Wolfenstein called this the 'post-disaster utopia' (1957), as if survivors, digging beneath the masses of debris, discover a communal body and use its remaining resources to recover and consolidate.

Hence, despite the potential disorientation and harm inflicted upon a collective by a crisis or catastrophe, there exists a transformative capacity to convert it into a cultural 'big bang' or a 'founding trauma' (LaCapra 2014: xii). This phenomenon is evident within the Dalit community, where individual trauma paradoxically strengthens their sense of collective identity and solidarity, enabling them to attribute their suffering to a common adversary. In *The Gypsy Goddess*, the Dalit 'body' extends beyond the individual's biological body; the surviving or traumatised body becomes embedded within the social body to such an extent that the suffering transcends the individual and assumes a systemic nature that impacts the community's social fabric. Another factor contributing to the collective memory of Dalits in the novel is the deliberate absence of main characters, whether good or bad,[9] even when specific incidents of oppression are elaborated upon. This strategy serves the purpose of attributing oppressors with a broader, more universal embodiment and invoking wider solidarities (Kumar 2010: 233) but also to blur any clear-cut distinction between the particular and the general, adding to the universal dichotomy of 'them' versus 'us' on issues such casteism.

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[8]Freud also affirmed this concordance between the individual and the mass in *Moses and Monotheism* (2010). He assumed that "The masses, too, retain an impression of the past in unconscious memory traces" (151).

[9]Gopalkrishna Naidu, a caste-Hindu and the leader of the Paddy Producers' Association, stands out from the rest as he is ultimately assigned the blame for the massacre. This occurs after he drafts a petition to the government, pleading for action against the 'communist agitators'.

In the same way that a collective experience of suffering can result in a feeling of collective victimhood (Bar-Tal et al. 2009), which can be self-perpetuating and operate as cognitive schema, the shared suffering of Dalits can create a sense of 'Dalit victimhood' and an ontological corporeal and spiritual crisis. However, Dalit victimhood is being reinterpreted and deconstructed in the novel through a process of 'becoming', a social repositioning of identity that involves recognising, deconstructing and reinterpreting the sense of imposed victimhood. 'Becoming' occurs, in the words of William Connolly, "when a culturally marked constituency, suffering under its current social constitution, strives to reconfigure itself by moving the cultural constellation of identity/difference then in place" (1996: 255–256). It is a paradoxical politics whereby "new cultural identities are formed out of old energies, injuries and differences" (p. 261).

The novel is not only a blunt denunciation of casteist brutality, but a 'vehicle of emancipation' and an instrument of revolt and transformation that encourages turning anguish into anger. The author writes with an awareness of anger, which she talks about in a constructive way, as an important piece of Dalit struggle and survival, connecting it with the identity of the characters in the book. Anger not only informs the novel but is used as an empowering tool for both the writer and the characters. Anger prevents the village from "disorienting itself", it "keeps the people together, injects them with life, provides them a reason to live, pushes them into action" (2014: 202), but it also helps them to "conceal unknown fears" (p. 115) of what the future holds for them and their families.

Loss, Absence and Recovery

Despite the creation of a collective identity of fellow sufferers who can aspire to join forces and speak with a common voice, collective and cultural trauma can be problematic.[10] While some theorists assume that trauma affects communities in a similar way to individuals, others have questioned the indiscriminate extension to larger entities and have suggested considering collective and cultural trauma as social rather than psychological constructs. One of these scholars is Dominick LaCapra, who highlights the importance of distinguishing between historical loss and structural absence (2014).

LaCapra considers loss as the product of discrete memory-bound historical events resulting from the removal or destruction of a person, place, or thing, which he calls 'historical trauma'. Structural absence or 'structural trauma', on the other hand, is not

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[10]Cultural trauma and collective trauma both involve the impact of traumatic events on social groups or communities. Cultural trauma focuses on the enduring psychological and social effects of trauma on a specific culture or society, disrupting their values and collective identity. It may be expressed through collective memory, narratives, symbols, and rituals. In contrast, collective trauma refers to the psychological and emotional impact on a collective entity, such as a community or nation, leading to shared distress, loss, and disorientation. It can have long-term effects on social cohesion, trust, and individual well-being within the affected group (Alexander 2004).

an event but the absence of foundations—be they referential, ideological, theological, or some other structural component that has never existed. As LaCapra puts it simply, "one cannot lose what one never had. Absence is the missing of an absolute" (2014: 50). Although the two concepts interact in complex ways, history and memory remain different modes of inscription (p. xx).[11]

For LaCapra, failure to narrow down the traumatic source and exposure to this easy conflation can lead to an unhealthy elevation of victimhood, to obscure the status of historical victims, and to 'unreflexive' processes of overidentification with the suffering of others—what he calls 'vicarious victimhood' (p. 116). Furthermore, since traumatic experiences engender a potentially endless crisis of survival, the entanglement of discrete instances of historical loss with the foundational problem of structural absence may also thwart the process of recovery. However, the blurring of absence and loss bears witness to the impact of trauma and the post-traumatic mental state, with disorientation, agitation, or even confusion as clear markers (p. 46). It precisely attests to the way in which one remains possessed or haunted by the past and finds it difficult to distinguish between the two.

Dalit texts tackle endless exposure to suffering, which contains an underlying feeling of loss: loss of home, land, family members and culture. However, the fact that this suffering has lasted over time through several generations and has sprung from different sources makes it difficult to reduce it to particular events.[12] The crisis of humanity that they have endured—and continue to do so—is generally attributable to being the 'other'. Along the same lines, although there is a specific historical fact of rupture that has caused the loss of homes and family members, the victims in *The Gypsy Goddess* suffer a structural absence of human rights, dignity and equal opportunities.

There is, thus, a tension between the idea that Dalits actually become Dalits through the experience of oppression—in other words, that casteism and its oppression forged their identity—and the need to recover a sense of cultural selfhood that somehow 'predates', ontologically, historically and ethically, this identity of suffering. If we base human rights on the principle of human dignity, this narrative highlights situations where certain individuals, due to their caste background, are clearly disenfranchised. The suffering experienced by Dalits is deeply rooted in history, evident in the countless instances of oppression, discrimination, and violence they have endured over time. Additionally, the enduring effects of historical trauma on subsequent generations represent transhistorical suffering. This recognises that the

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[11]According to LaCapra, the conversion of absence into loss can manifest as a 'misplaced nostalgia' that prompts a quest for a utopian politics of some original unity, wholeness, security, or identity that others have ruined or polluted (2014: 58). This can lead to anxiety, melancholic paralysis, or manic agitation and may raise hope that this state may be eliminated or overcome. Conversely, when loss is mistaken for absence, endless melancholy, impossible mourning, and interminable aporia can emerge.

[12]Untouchability has an intricate origin that is difficult to pinpoint in a straightforward manner or attribute to a single event or cause. Therefore, it would be inappropriate and reductive to completely dismiss historical trauma in the Dalits' case and ascribe their suffering to simple cumulative absence.

consequences of past injustices can persist across generations, impacting the social, psychological, and economic well-being of Dalits in the present. Therefore, it may be appropriate to view Dalit trauma as a combination of both historical and transhistorical suffering, considering the interplay and contribution of these factors to the current state of Dalits.

One of the reasons behind LaCapra's insistence on discerning loss from absence is the importance of not dwelling on trauma and working towards recovery. He proposes two seemingly opposite responses to trauma: acting-out and working-through. As discussed before, after an overwhelming and shattering event that escapes normal registration in the victim's memory, the event may somehow register in the traumatic memory and be relived in the present in an uncontrolled, unconscious and, at times, compulsively repetitive manner, breaking temporal distinctions and inhibiting action—a phenomenon denominated by LaCapra as the symptomatic 'acting-out' of trauma (2014: 88–89).

The phenomenon of acting-out is repeatedly illustrated in *The Gypsy Goddess*, especially in Chapter 10, titled "Mischief by Fire", in which the fire that charred the lives of forty-four Dalits is agonisingly described. The lack of punctuation turns the entire chapter into a single sentence, mirroring the shattered, convoluted, and distorted memory of the survivors:

> and in desperation a mother throws her one-year-old son out of the burning hut but the boy is caught by the leering mobsters and chopped into pieces and thrown back in and in that precise yet fleeting moment of loss and rage everyone realizes that they would die if their death meant saving a loved one and that they would die if their death meant staying together and that they would die anyway because it would not be as disastrous as living long enough to share this sight and so alone and together they prepare to resign themselves to the fact that they have mounted their collective funeral pyre (Kandasamy 2014: 164)

LaCapra posits that trauma victims should embark on an effort to "articulate and rearticulate affect and representation in a manner that may never transcend, but may to some viable extent counteract […] that disabling disassociation" caused by trauma (2014: 42). It involves a process of gaining critical distance on traumatic experiences and recontextualising them, a working over trauma that LaCapra calls 'working-through' (p. 90). But while this is the desirable outcome, he advises against completely discrediting the process of acting-out, stating that it is not only inevitable in some cases, but even necessary. He argues that most trauma victims display an unavoidable "tendency to repeat which, if not confronted, tends to take place in a blind and unchecked manner to return as the repressed or to recur as the dissociated" (p. 143). Likewise, working-through does not mean a complete avoidance of suffering or a direct harmonisation between past and present; rather, it implies "coming to terms

with trauma, including its details, and critically engaging the tendency to act out the past" (p. 144).[13]

Locked in compulsive repetition and possessed by the past, the victims in *The Gypsy Goddess* seem trapped within the traumatic event. But the repetition itself may also be a homeopathic process that allows, to some extent, some critical distance and resumption of life if the victim can relinquish his/her attachment to the past. A male eyewitness named Ramalingam, who had to testify before a commissioner, worked-out through his traumatic memories page after page in run-on sentences (2014: 167–182). He narrates: "that day dangles in front of my eyes all the time, I know it scene by scene, it is more clear to me than this moment, it is more real to me than the two of us here, talking" (p. 174). But, as painful as it might be, putting his memories into words helps him not only to claim a wrong, but also to put the pieces together.

Jacques Derrida developed the idea that there is no point of time of pure origin, but only an always-already absent present that he called 'hauntology' (1987), like spectres that cannot be ontologised and, consequently, will continue to problematise or haunt historical discourses. In such scenarios, Derrida proposes an interminable mourning— or mid-mourning—that implies working over and through traumatic experiences through a constant reenactment of the traumatic event, potentially leading to its understanding and inclusion in one's conscious psyche (p. 335). This approach may be considered when addressing trauma in communities whose oppression is problematic to trace and pigeonhole, such as Dalits. It could serve as a productive form of partial mourning in the negotiation of unsettled experiences and as an acknowledgement that trauma may never be fully resolved.

Against the assumption that "the impossible, aporetic or melancholic response is the only appropriately ethical condition" for a post-traumatic 'afterwardsness', Roger Luckhurst has proposed 'resilience' as a "positive adaptation within the context of significant adversity" (2008: 210). Along the same lines, the concept of 'post-traumatic growth' encompasses the positive change that the individual might experience as a consequence of facing a traumatic event (Calhoun & Tedeschi 1999: 11). Due to changes in self-perception, interpersonal relationships and life philosophy, traumatic experiences can take the form of a greater appreciation for life, closer relationships with others, the visualisation of new opportunities, a sense of increased personal strength, or spiritual change. *The Gypsy Goddess* celebrates resilience through quotes like the following: "Life, weighed down by death, weary of destruction, goes on" (2014: 195). But what is more interesting is the idea that those who have been wounded or hurt physically are lucky insofar as their pain grounds them and "prevents them from hurtling down into the worlds, from disappearing into the abyss" (p. 202).

However, while resilience and post-traumatic growth serve as a reminder of the plurality of responses to trauma, they should be approached with a sceptical eye to

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[13]LaCapra based his formulation of 'acting-out' and 'working-through' on Freud's psychoanalytical concepts of 'melancholia' and 'mourning'. Contrary to LaCapra's approach, however, Freud (1917) recognised melancholia (*Melancholie*) and mourning (*Trauer*) as mutually exclusive reactions to loss.

the extent that they can generate a 'negative sublimity' or fidelity to trauma (LaCapra 2014: 22). Victims of traumatising events may resist the process of working through due to the perception that by doing so, one is betraying those who were overwhelmed and consumed by that traumatic past. The unbearable thought of having survived the dead "when the mourning village fed its dead ancestors, placated their tormented souls and told them to rest in peace" (Kandasamy 2014: 206) tempts one of the survivors to contemplate the idea of taking his own life. Dalits' burden is such at times that it is beyond them to "try and make meaning out of the randomness of death" (p. 196) to which they are still too often exposed.

Conclusion

As this article has attempted to demonstrate, somatic trauma caused by caste-based oppression does not stop in the bone, but has the ability to penetrate the inner psyche of Dalits in multiple and unexpected ways. *The Gypsy Goddess* serves as a comprehensive repository of wronged and misinterpreted historical events, but also of the impact that systemic forms of oppression can have on people's mental health.

Mainstream trauma theory has been the model used by many scholars for decades to address trauma, identifying symptoms as intrusive reenactments, hallucinations, flashbacks, nightmares (Caruth 1995; American Psychiatric Association 1980), or affective and cognitive disturbances such as anhedonia and alexithymia (Krystal 1978) or numbing (Minkowski 1946). This paradigm has also come to recognise the more subtle effects of prolonged abuse, including somatic, dissociative and affective sequelae (van der Kolk et al. 1996). Although to different degrees, this symptomatology of trauma is revealed in *The Gypsy Goddess*, proving that Dalits can indeed be called trauma victims.

However, uncritically universalising this generalised concept of PTSD risks rendering the specificity of long-term pain suffered by oppressed groups invisible and unknowable. Not all victims experience traumatic pathologies in the way proposed by mainstream scholars. For instance, traumatic amnesia does not seem to occur in the case of Dalits. The victims in *The Gypsy Goddess* not only have their suffering imprinted on their bodies as a constant and inescapable reminder, but talking about their suffering seems to be a necessary and cathartic process.

Many are the scholars who call for an expansion of the scope and a revision of the dominant conceptions of trauma and recovery. Some of the most significant points made are that trauma does not arise only from sudden and unexpected catastrophic events nor is it just an individual phenomenon (Bond & Craps 2017), that there is 'a spectrum of conditions' rather than a single response to trauma (Herman 1992), that the cumulative degradation and subtle effects of oppression are 'insidious trauma' (Root 1989, 1992), and that trauma has a generational transmissibility, meaning that there is a 'trauma of the future' or pre-traumatic stress (PreTss) reactions (Bond & Craps 2017).

The connection between the individual experience of trauma and the collective one (Alexander 2012) is omnipresent in *The Gypsy Goddess*. As the distinction between private and public breaks down, descriptions of localised individual corporeal suffering are extrapolated to broader contexts of collective pain. As such, the pain is shifted towards the community, thus universalising the singular and implying that any Dalit would have had the same experience. And, while a crisis or catastrophe might damage the community, it may also transform into a 'founding trauma' (LaCapra 2014), or a trauma that paradoxically becomes the valued or intensely cathected basis of an individual or a group's identity. Repeated subjection to disempowerment and denial of autonomy has undoubtedly caused socially mistreated and alienated Dalits to develop and internalise a destructive psychological system of self-hatred and communal insecurity. But, in addition to the dramatic loss of identity or the tearing of the social fabric, their collective trauma has paradoxically also led to a process of identity consolidation, as Kandasamy demonstrates.

But collective or cultural trauma can be problematic as it can blur the difference between historical loss and structural absence (LaCapra 2014) which, among other consequences, can frustrate the process of recovery from trauma. In this case, while *The Gypsy Goddess* seems to focus on a ubiquitous exposure to loss, it also sheds light on an endless structural absence of basic human rights. *The Gypsy Goddess* portrays an in-between category of acting-out and working-through, a mid-mourning (Derrida 1987). By remembering and talking about the pervasiveness and harassment of their traumatic experiences, Dalits not only compulsively and uncontrollably relive them, but also process them to some extent. Therefore, in the case of communities whose oppression is difficult to track and pin down, partial mourning and acknowledgement that the trauma may never be fully resolved are valid and necessary approaches.

Kandasamy reminds readers that her community is defined not only by their traumas, but also by the irrepressible desire to survive, thrive, and have their stories told. Still, as the cultural foundations of the community are called into question and the 'we' is reconstructed from sheer victimhood to resistance and assertion, Kandasamy makes it painfully clear that no amount of research, awareness and empathy can replace lived experience. The consequences of caste-based oppression need to be addressed and more conversations need to be had about the particular psychological needs of Dalits, along with urgent pathways to bridge the inequalities in access to mental healthcare for such communities.

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Exploring Narratives of Victimization, Resistance, and Resilience Among Dalits Using Thematic Analysis

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Abstract

Despite an increase in representation in politics and other fields, Dalits face structural violence in Indian society. There is limited psychological research on how Dalits make sense of their victimization and cope with and resist casteism. This study investigates the experiences of Dalit individuals in India, focusing on their experiences of caste-based victimization, resilience, and resistance in urban spaces. The study uses a qualitative approach to study the narratives of these individuals, highlighting the juxtaposition of victimhood narratives against resilience narratives. The data of 13 Dalit participants, collected using a semi-structured interview schedule, was analyzed using Braun and Clarke's (2006; 2019) reflexive thematic analysis method. Two main themes were identified that indicated the 'ways of victimization' and 'ways of resistance and resilience' in the experience of Dalit participants. Sub-themes identified under the theme 'ways of Dalit victimization' are microaggression, deficit intergroup contact, upper caste disgust and shame among Dalits, and stereotyped assumptions. On the other hand, sub-themes under 'ways of Dalit resistance and resilience' include education, reclaiming classroom space, affirmative action, confronting individuals, having aspirations and generating solidarity, dismissing merit, and an appreciation of ancestry. The analysis also highlighted notions of Brahminical colonization and establishing ingroup indigenization. The findings shed light on the varied forms of collective resistance/resilience, especially focusing on the underpinning psychological processes.

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Dalit narratives, caste victimization, Dalit resistance, collective resilience, reflexive thematic analysis

Introduction

Caste is an inextricably linked system of labor that is impossible to evade and is distinguished by its "graded inequity" (Ambedkar 1936). Power, privilege, and access to riches were all governed by caste (Deshpande 2010). The Indian constitution implemented a substantial measure to address caste inequalities by granting employment and educational reservations to scheduled tribes and scheduled castes, colloquially referred to as Dalits. The majority of upper castes continue to view caste as a rural concern. This, meanwhile, is the opposite of reality. Caste oppression not only persists but also transitions from overt discrimination to a multitude of microaggressions inside urban environments (Jogdand 2023). Caste may function as a kind of invisibilization in metropolitan areas, such as in neighborhoods where Dalit households are unable to afford the basic necessities of life (Mandal 2020).

Empirical investigations in the field of social psychology indicate that structural violence targeted against marginalized social groups is seldom tolerated without eliciting opposition and resistance (Rosales & Langhout 2014). Even in the face of the most terrible circumstances, disadvantaged community people maintain their potential for resistance and resilience (Leach 2020; Jogdand, Khan & Reicher 2020). Similarly, among Dalits and lower castes, caste inferiority is questioned and resisted in the form of rage, pride, and assertion, as opposed to being passively accepted (Jogdand et al. 2016; Jogdand 2023). Moreover, social psychology's emerging study on collective victimhood has enhanced our comprehension of victimization and resistance (Vollhardt 2020). Significantly, Leach (2020) has illuminated the psychological foundations of the "affective politics" of collective victimhood through the use of an appraisal technique that emphasizes the vital significance of meaning-making in individuals' collective victimization experiences. Nevertheless, this body of literature has paid scant attention to caste-based oppression and resistance (see also Jogdand 2023; Jogdand, Khan & Reicher 2020).

This article examines the recollections, exclusion, violence, and lived experiences of caste-based structural inequities among Dalit participants via the lens of narratives detailing victimization, resistance, and resilience. Hence, beyond investigating the manner in which individuals belonging to the Dalit community encounter victimization, this study seeks to comprehend the means by which they navigate the daily occurrence of casteism, the sources of motivation they consult, and the strategies they implement to oppose and fortify themselves.

Collective Victimhood: Consequences of Structural Violence

Structural Violence Encountered by Dalit Community and Students

Structural violence (Galtung 1966) is a form of violence that involves reduced access to resources and occupation of space. It is classified as direct violence, where the perpetrator is known, and carrying insidious violence, where the system or ideology is difficult to hold accountable. It can lead to learned inferiority, vulnerability, and loss of identity. Structural violence (Scheper-Hughes 1996) can manifest as everyday violence, where violations become part of people's reality. Moreover, this operates within the caste system, through hierarchical stratification, and violence against those who try to break the status quo. Furthermore, caste oppression is a vehicle of structural violence, and it significantly impacts socio-psychological dimensions, including cognitive, affective, and behavioral domains (Sawariya 2021). Marginalized caste groups and the Dalit community experience lower mental health, including social isolation, anger, withdrawal, low self-esteem, and poorer well-being (Johri & Anand 2022; Pal 2015). Mental health issues faced by marginalized caste groups are not addressed due to institutional denial of caste-based discrimination and lack of caste-centered therapy (Komanapalli & Rao 2020). Despite this, caste has still not found its place in psychology, with only a few psychologists working towards and on it (Sawariya 2021; Jogdand 2015).

The upper castes' access to education, influence, and privilege is starkly compared to the Dalit community, who must prove themselves in a system they cannot control (Deshpande 2013). In addition, marginalized caste groups and Dalits become "hyper-visible" as soon as they avail reservation, whereas the upper caste becomes the de facto meritocratic, caste-less outgroup (Deshpande 2013; Kumar 2022). Further, the lack of caste in the curriculum creates a lack of engagement with Dalit students' issues (Sawariya 2021). Subsequently, this raises issues of representation in policy spaces and everyday media. For instance, according to Oxfam India (2019), there are no people from scheduled castes or scheduled tribes holding any of the 121 leadership newsroom positions surveyed. The mainstream media also limits itself to portraying caste characters, presenting them as harmful, dark-skinned individuals, often gangsters or oppressed individuals needing saving (Kureel 2021).

Further, the upper caste lifestyle is sold as an escape from their own 'downtrodden' life and the only life worth living (Yengde 2018). This exclusion of the Dalit population and their negative portrayal is a double-edged sword that decreases Dalit individuals' self-esteem and increases upper-caste individual's confidence (Jaspal 2011). The events and activities can be collectively termed "microaggressions"—the experience of a normalized form of indignity through different modes of behavior expressed by the dominant group against the minority group individual (Sue et al. 2007). Microaggression and prejudice also serve to relegate minoritized individuals to the margins of society or an institute (Sue 2010). However, in psychological literature, less is known about how victims of structural violence, especially the caste system,

have resisted and developed resilience when combating structural violence in the form of caste.

Collective Resilience and Resistance

Collective victimization and collective resilience often go hand in hand—that is, they are 'two sides of the same coin.' Narratives of collective resilience could act like resources to fall back on (Selvanathan, Jetten & Umch 2023) in the face of discrimination and marginalization. Despite being scarce, psychological literature has explored how a victimized group's history includes collective resilience (Selvanathan et al. 2023). It has been seen that while being a member of an oppressed group exposes people to collective trauma, it can also promote psychological resilience by providing access to social support within the group (Muldoon et al. 2020).

While collective resilience and resistance have been documented in studies of trauma and victimology, the two terms are often used together or interchangeably, especially in the practice of 'everyday resilience' (Rosales & Langhout 2014). In this study, we would categorize resilience as a protective factor against the effects of the caste system, such as building caste networks. In addition, studies on resilience (Atallah et al. 2019) have pointed out that resilience is not just in the community's potential to bounce back but also in its ability to bounce forward through participating in meaning-making and confronting the logic of the oppressor in creative ways. Whereas resistance would be any action that challenges the will of the oppressor, i.e., challenges the Brahminical and casteist logic and practices. As a word of caution, it is difficult to demarcate the exact lines between resilience and resistance and to account for what precedes what. For example, a group that has been displaced would count on getting educated or using their education to overcome their circumstances as a form of resilience (see Datta 2017 on the Kashmiri Pandit community); however, a group that has been historically denied access and the right to gain education, i.e., the Dalit community, would count education as resistance against the oppressor.

Moreover, groups that encounter violence and injustice and undergo victimization often seek to redress and cope with their victimization (Vollhardt, Okuyan & Ünal 2020) in creative and effortful ways, leading to resistance and the development of collective hope (Braithwaite 2004). Resistance within marginalized caste groups and Dalits exists, and unsurprisingly, it's as old as the caste system itself (Jangam 2021). In the past and present, Dalits and other marginalized communities in the Hindu caste system have protested through the rejection of caste culture and Sanskritization (Mahalingam 2003). Practices such as Theyyam in South India have been protest sites for Dalit individuals (Ahammed 2019). Furthermore, engagement with victimhood by the Dalits has been agentic and active (Vyas & Panda 2019), which can be envisaged through political assertion in the form of demands or votes. Moreover, the Dalit Panthers movement in the 1970s popularized the term "Dalit," which was a protest against the Gandhian coinage of 'Harijan'. Thus, resilience emerges in the use of poetry in the movements by preserving and writing about experiential realities. Autobiographies and poetry have been avenues for individuals to highlight their pain,

anger, grief, and hope for marginalized caste groups. Additionally, presence of caste-sensitive movies and portrayals, as well as the internet used by Dalit creators are used to give rise to anti-caste movements (Kureel 2021). They have used the same media that misrepresents marginalized caste groups to find resistance and representation (Kureel 2021). Overall, highlighting individual, cultural, and societal differences in the ways of resisting and exhibiting resilience within the community itself.

Theoretical Foundation: Appraisal Model of Collective Victimhood

As highlighted in the above section, the Dalit community has engaged in diverse ways to handle caste oppression and also have experienced it in different ways. Moreover, they have appraised a diverse emotional range and thus, appraisal theory of understanding collective victimization has been employed in this research (Leach 2020).

The appraisal theory broadly focuses on the meaning-making process of a victimizing event and how the group copes with it. The theory stresses the role of intra-group heterogeneity and values diverse positions on a particular subject. Further, the approach highlights the agentic capacity of the individual in making sense of the event and their coping mechanisms with it.

Appraisal theory has two levels of the appraisal process: (a) at the primary level, it is about highlighting if the victimizing event is of importance to the group's goals or values, and (b) at the secondary level, people provide meaning to it in terms of assigning responsibility and consequence; the different emotional responses are also noted. Different coping strategies are formed depending on the group's capacity and resources, such as demanding acknowledgment, restitution, and collective actions (see Jeong & Vollhardt 2021).

The appraisal theory fits well with seeing how it can aid in explaining both victimization (stress) and resistance and resilience (coping) among different groups (Vollhardt et al. 2021) and is judged as an adequate lens to understand victimization and resistance in the caste context.

Present Research

To summarize the above discussion, existing research on caste has majorly reinforced stereotypes by focusing on pointed themes like reservation, poverty, etc.—pathologizing our/their everyday lives. Despite the historical trauma, marginalization, and victimization, Dalit Love and resistance persist, which is "a beautiful rendition of pain and joy, healing the past and getting consciously lost in a future of possibilities and faith" (Yengde 2020). Furthermore, it is imperative that we focus on resistance and resilience narratives that challenge sole narratives of victimhood. Given the scarcity of research on the everyday realities of life as a Dalit person, the current study set out to fill that gap while also focusing on aspects of resistance and resilience in their lives—to avoid the dangers of half-truths (Adichie 2009) of powerless victims, focus on disrupting these popular discourses, and, finally, engage in a process which

aids in de-brahmanizing and decolonizing caste (Ingole 2020). This study aims to explore processes of victimization and processes of resilience and resistance among Dalit community members at a collective level experiencing structural violence.

Research Questions

1. What does victimization mean to Dalit community members?

2. How do individuals from the Dalit community understand resistance and resilience?

3. What mechanisms do they employ to demonstrate their resilience and resistance?

Method

We employed qualitative methodology to report our work by keeping caste as the center of the historical context of the experiences of Dalit persons. To excavate the multiple realities of our participants, we employed the method of narrative inquiry, which advocates "pluralism, relativism, and subjectivity" (Leiblich, Tuval-Mashiach, & Zilber 1998: 2). Narratives are a discourse representative of related events in succession (Shkedi 2005). Narratives allowed us to understand the participants' worldviews because of the wide range of functions they provided. The participants' narratives allowed us to dream, hope, remember, love, learn, doubt, hate, criticize, and experience various emotions (Kim 2015). Further, consistent with the assumptions of narrative interviewing, the focus was on the narrator's personal identity, culture, and world view. Hence, narrative interviewing in the form of asking about biographical details was employed in our research.

Table 1: Paradigmatic Assumptions

Area	Assumptions
Ontology	Reality is rooted in one's historical and social context and is multiple, context-sensitive, and complex
Epistemology	Reality can be understood as is narrated by participants
Methodology	Narrative Inquiry–understanding discourses representative of connected events in succession, providing for the worldview of the participants
Method of Analysis	Narrative interviewing and Reflexive thematic analysis

Sampling: Recruitment and Participant Details

All members of marginalized caste groups and Dalits between the ages of 20 and 35 years could participate in this research. Participants were recruited through social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. An open invitation was prepared where we highlighted our purpose, aim, and what kind of questions would be asked and would not be asked, such as our insistence on describing events of

discrimination and trauma that were not to be given undue focus. This was our attempt to offer participants transparency about our research process.

While recruiting, we only asked for the initials and the last two digits of the participants' phone numbers as identifiers. We requested that they provide any contact details they were comfortable providing. In keeping with this, we have not changed or given pseudonyms but have used codes and revealed as less as possible so that they do not become easily identifiable.

We conducted thirteen interviews with participants between the ages of 20 and 35 years, of whom six identified as men, six as women, and one as non-binary. Our participants are all third-generation Dalit community members; third generation here denotes persons whose grandparents were either young or unborn during the independence of India and the beginning of the affirmative action through reservations policy. Further, most of our participants were second-generation literate, and two were first-generation graduates. They were born into a generation that had availed of or knew about affirmative action policies in government jobs and institutions. The participants belonged to West Bengal, Uttar Pradesh, Haryana, and Delhi.

Table 2: Participant Details

S. No.	Participant Code	Biological Sex	Educational Qualification
1.	KI	Female	Masters/post-graduate
2.	AM	Female	Masters/post-graduate
3.	VS	Male	Bachelors/undergraduate
4.	SI	Male	Bachelors
5.	BI	Female	Masters/post-graduate
6.	AC	Male	PhD Scholar
7.	AT	Female	Bachelors Pursuing
8.	GI	Female	Masters/post-graduate
9.	SU	Male	PhD Scholar
10.	RI	Male	Bachelors/undergraduate
11.	SH	Male	Assistant Professor
12.	DI	Male	Bachelors
13.	JI	Female	Bachelors

Procedure

Step 1: Data Collection using Semi-Structured Interviews

One of the authors took on the immense task of educating her upper caste-community co-authors about their traditions, traditional practices, inside knowledge, and resistance practices that might have escaped the dominant caste author's gaze. Through a series of discussions, the following areas of Inquiry were identified: i) self and navigating everyday life; ii) cultural history and community practices; iii) creating their definitions of caste; iv) caste discrimination and their engagement; v) representation in politics and media; and vi) caste mobilization.

Each part of the research was vetted by people from the Dalit community,[1] as in Fig. 1, including a Ph.D. scholar working within this area for the last five years. They suggested that our DBA author be present in all of the interviews—with another UC researcher or alone at times. Out of the 13 interviews, our DBA author was present with a UC researcher, and in three interviews alone, as requested by the participants. Our interviews ranged from 1 to 2.5 hours.

Table 3: Examples of Semi-Structured Questions in the Study

Domain	Questions
Self and navigating everyday life	"How many times are you asked about your caste? ('*Aap kaunsi jaat se ho'? Yeh kitni baar sunne ko milta hai?*) "Where do you get to hear it?" "How do you see yourself and your group?" "What effort did you make to get yourself here?"
Cultural history and community practices	"How would you describe your community?" "What are the rituals and practices central to the group? Are some of them stigmatised?" "Do you do anything that your grandparents or parents used to do? How do you wish to preserve your family's legacy?"
Creating their definitions of caste	"What is caste to you?"
Caste discrimination and their engagement	"Have you or people in your life experienced caste atrocities?" "What have been some ways in which you felt discriminated against in everyday space?" "Have you ever voiced your opinion on it? Do you know of anyone who has done it in the past? How did that make you feel?"
Representation in politics and media	"Do you know of any actors and singers who are from your community? What roles do they get? Are they in the mainstream?" "Do you know of anyone from the Dalit community who is in the media?"
Caste Mobilization	"What steps has the state undertaken as a reparation for caste atrocities?" "Have you participated in any protests?" "Did your ancestors engage in any events to demand their rights?"

Step 2: Data Analysis using Thematic Analysis Framework

To analyze the obtained data, reflexive thematic analysis was employed, a framework proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006). For this work, we used a constructivist approach that focused on privileging the participants' accounts and experiences as openly as possible and also accounting for our reflexivity. However, acknowledging that it was the researchers who deemed an account as resistance or a display of resilience, calling on the researcher's ability to evaluate how they have read resilience and resistance (see Yosso 2005; Rosales & Langhout 2020), to the DBA researcher, "You must be familiar with this..." to highlight their shared common identity of experiences.

Moreover, semantic and latent coding structures were utilized (Byrne 2022); a semantic level of coding was used in most cases, privileged by the participant's

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[1]In our research, we refer to our participants as Dalit. Conversely, when we mention 'upper' castes, we encompass all the predominant castes under this single term.

experiences. However, a latent level of coding was needed for some themes concerning shame and disgust, as participants highlighted the notion that something changed in their or the other's body, language, behaviors, and mannerisms but one that was hard to state explicitly in words. Moreover, for this article, the researchers used an abductive coding framework, i.e., the integration of deductive and inductive frameworks for coding (Thompson 2022). We have employed the Appraisal theory of collective victimhood (Leach 2020) and categorized the various themes into two broad domains: the ways of victimization and the ways of resilience and resistance. Victimization corresponds to the first and second levels of appraisal, whereas resilience and resistance are captured as coping strategies for victimization. This framework of categorization was previously used by Jeong and Vollhardt (2021) in their study of Korean newspaper coverage of the colonization of Korea in modern times. However, while these domains served as two repositories to categorize the themes into, the themes were inductively deduced and categorized into whether a theme aligned closer to victimizing narratives or if it aligned closer to resistance and resilience narratives.

Braun and Clarke (2006) recommend a six-step phase of reflexive thematic analysis. Phase one deals with familiarization with the data collected through multiple avenues. Each interview was transcribed, and the authors read and re-read the transcripts multiple times to find connections and use specific words. Important quotations deemed to be of specific interest to the research objective were highlighted.

The evaluation of each transcript resulted in the creation of the initial codes. Researchers aired their views but never overpowered them; they sought meaning in the data, and multiple interpretations of the same data were entertained and encouraged to generate codes. According to Braun and Clarke (2006), coding reliability is not important for reflexive thematic analysis, but reflexive engagement with the data was given paramount importance.

By returning to the data numerous times and creating various tables and connections, the researchers generated and "churned" the final themes on the broad domains. Some themes and subthemes that were unique to one or two participants were also retained, such as the fact that female participants pointed out that Ambedkar is a feminist thinker, and two participants highlighted Dalit's indigeneity to aid in our understanding of multiplicities in narratives. Moreover, the guiding theoretical framework of appraisal theory and the domains of victimization, resilience, and resistance aided the researchers in selecting excerpts and codes that fit the themes encompassing these two domains. Furthermore, we did not focus on saturating our data (Braun & Clarke 2019) but on getting rich and complex narratives that help us understand the multi-faceted nature of victimhood, resilience, and resistance.

We acknowledge that in dense, experientially rich data, themes might often seem repetitive, and their boundaries blurred, but we have tried to keep close to Patton's (1990) dual criteria of theme building, such that themes provide a coherent and internally consistent account of the quotations from the data unique to that theme itself. The names of the themes and subthemes have also undergone revision, i.e., from stereotyped behavior to "challenging intergroup contact" to "deficient intergroup

contact," highlighting not only that intergroup contact is fraught with complexities but also that in many of these intergroup contacts, the Dalit individual is made to feel lesser and subjected to marginalization and stereotypes.
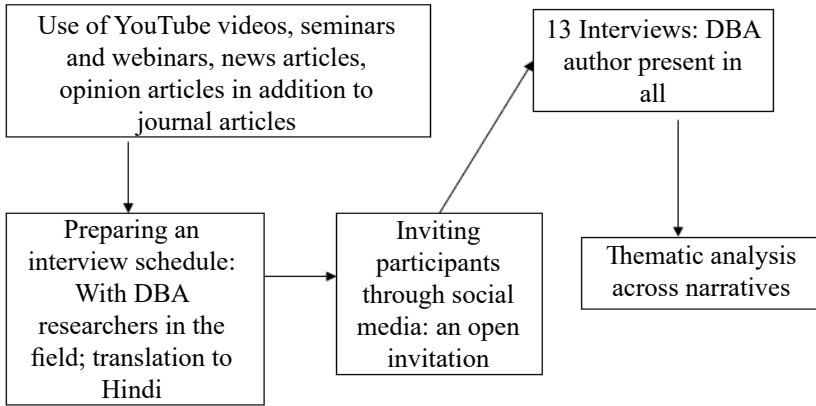
Figure 1: Methodical process

Researchers' Reflexivity

Through interviews with Dalit individuals, we witness narratives transform from discrimination and oppression to healing and trace the footsteps of growth. As one of our participants highlighted, it is often 'two steps ahead, one step back'. Hence, we see each interview as an act of trust conferred on us in which we are made to bear witness not only to their pain and trauma but also to their resistance. We are made to think about our complicity in the UC gatekeeping structures our participants pointed at. Through this endeavor, we also wish to move from guilt to action through engagement with our participants and our future commitments. Through their empathy and affective solidarity (Hemmings 2012), they are a testament to the project of Dalit Love (Yendge 2019).

By accepting the Dalit community's views of the UC community, three of our authors feel it is a beginning of decolonial and de-brahminical (Ingole 2020) healing, as well as where we take the opportunity to accept the sins of our ancestors. We heal by knowing that now we can confront our families, our relatives, and our professors who have for long denied Dalit achievements and caste in textbooks and syllabi (Kain 2022). For the DBA author, however, it represents a journey of acceptance of pain—a hope that coming together of the two ends is possible.

Findings

The themes identified have been conceptualized against the two domains of 'Dalit Victimization' and 'Dalit Resistance and Resilience Strategies,' as in Fig. 2. The victimization strategies correspond to primary and secondary appraisals. In contrast, coping strategies emphasize the later portion of the model (Leach 2020).
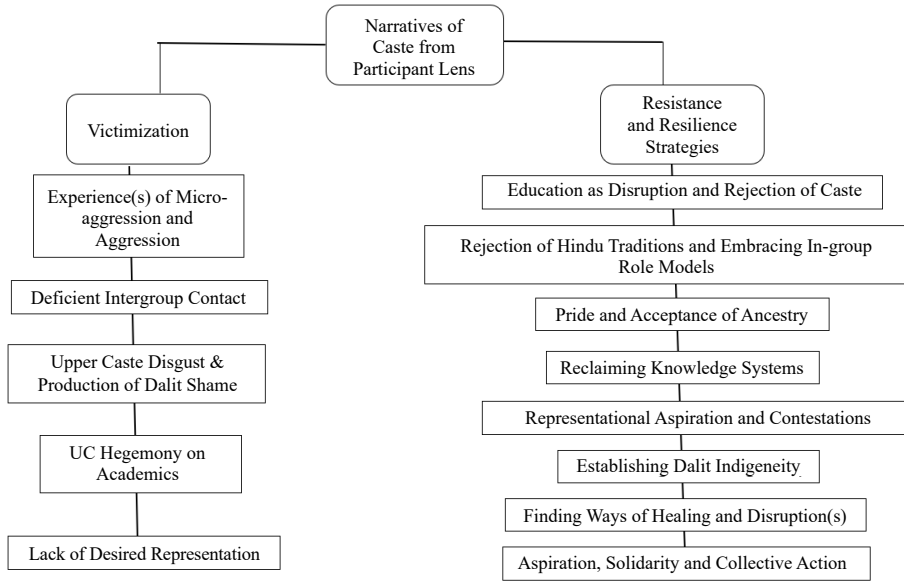
Figure 2: Thematic map of findings

Ways of Dalit Victimization

Ways of Dalit victimization have been conceptualized as everyday engagement with structural violence that leads to issues of esteem and also challenges access to resources. Moreover, victimization has been construed through the ascription of the events as 'unwarranted' and 'unjustified,' leading to feelings of being wronged and thus victimized. The domain of victimization comprises themes around experienced microaggression and aggression, experiences of 'outing,' embodied disgust by upper caste members, felt embodied shame as a result of disgust, and deficient intergroup contact with other castes. Furthermore, feelings of victimization increase with feelings of upper-caste hegemony in academia and a lack of representation in media and movies.

Experience(s) of Micro-aggression and Aggression

Microaggressions have been the source of humiliation among Dalit individuals (Jogdand 2023) and are one-way intergroup contact that occurs among different castes. This has been the case in this study, where participants noted that upper-caste people frequently use "casteist jokes" and "casteist slurs." One participant noted, "I felt really small when people cracked these jokes, and I had to pretend not to hear it or laugh about it" (BI, female), and another participant, after scoring poorly in semester exams, notes how an upper-caste colleague addressed the situation by stating, "…after this, don't say that I am a Dalit, and that is why discrimination is happening to me" (SH, male). Furthermore, it leads to an increased sense of prejudiced assumptions about the community and also dismissal of Dalit achievements, as one participant hints that "She (the professor) asked that how did I got the first division" (BI, female) or even

starting a sentence with the caste identity, "you are SC, how was your exam?" (AC, male). Additionally, the Dalit participants frequently heard words like "freebies" and "freeloaders."

Prejudiced assumptions about clothing and styling are realized through a certain sense of class and caste aesthetic, often attributed to caste labels like "dressing like a Bhangi" as one participant highlights: "There were girls in my class who came from villages and didn't speak English too well, and they were seen differently with comments like 'they are definitely from the reservation category, who has given them admission?'" (KI, female). Another participant has stated that the upper castes assign "facial" characteristics to certain castes. Hence, many Dalit individuals try to conceal their caste as much as possible, and the experience of being "outed" leads to stigmatization and a source of stress for these individuals as they know that once they are outed, their colleagues will treat them differently.

The tension to pass as an upper-caste member with a certain aesthetic sense has been documented by differentiating between a Dalit that belongs and one that does not, as one participant tells her upper-caste colleague of her caste identity who are quick to differentiate between those who look 'lower caste' and those who don't as they state, "no, but you are different; these ones look like they are from lower caste" (BI, female). The constant tension to 'pass' and also being constantly subjected to hearing stereotyped opinions about the community, "Look, he is a 'chamar,' they are speaking like 'chamars' how am I to tell them that I am also a chamar!" (AC, male)—this sense of stress can also lead to poor psychological well-being in the long run, as highlighted by a female participant: "It took a toll on the kind of people I was socializing with; I wanted to remain with the cool people." This suggests that identities are negotiated with a tension between their social location and the differential social location of upper-caste individuals.

Additionally, limiting them to the "upper-caste gaze" by making references to the social and cultural capital that members of dominant castes possess and separating the "good Dalit" from the "bad Dalit," who manifest themselves by looking like a Dalit (Dutta 2019; Jogdand 2023) are all examples of microaggressions. This has to be constantly negotiated with upper-caste individuals' desire to find and locate one caste; participants expand on instances when, following casual conversations, people would often enquire about their surname, which is one of the markers of caste, or ask about their father's occupation and ancestral village. This knowledge has multiple social implications, like friendship, marriage, and business, as hinted at by our participants.

Deficient Intergroup Contact

Intergroup contact is the phenomenon where two members of different identity groups engage with each other, popularized by Allport (1954) through the contact hypothesis, which asserts that prejudice and discriminatory attitudes are reduced by mere exposure and contact with another group member. While studies in social psychology have highlighted the beneficial potential for intergroup contact, our study has found that when Dalit members make contact with UC members, it has not been fruitful and

is frequently anxiety-provoking. Our participants have highlighted that upper-caste individuals are 'pathologically' obsessed with purity and often are uncomfortable allowing other caste members into their group. As a participant notes, "Once my uncle said that I will get married to a Muslim girl, that is fine, but an upper caste woman will not get married to me," (AM, female) perhaps the obsession with endogamy displayed by upper caste people has adequately captured this. Often, participants hear direct forms of discrimination, such as parents preventing their children from going to their (participant's) house. The different dining options at hostels for vegetarians and non-vegetarians highlight how reduced contact also comes in the form of purity practices. A participant highlights that contact can become psychologically violent given how upper-caste families treated them; he states, "Brahmin households, they wouldn't allow that kind of sharing from one plate to another plate, especially if somebody who comes from the lower caste, they wouldn't share because it's a question of purity and pollution" (AC, male).

Furthermore, while ingroup solidarity is encouraged for groups to function well, the nature of caste highlights that ingroup solidarity can exist within very insular small groups, which excludes other groups. Upper-caste solidarity often comes at the price of penalization for other castes. As one participant suggests, "They do not think twice before labeling a person from another caste, a criminal. They do not even consider if that person has committed a crime" (GI, female). Other participants highlight upper caste solidarity with people they choose to interact with: "They will talk nicely but only with those close to them, like Dwivedi (sic) will talk to a Tripathy and give jobs to a Trivedi" (AC, male). Hence, caste operates through an espoused level of castelessness in academic circles but gets practiced in pedagogy and social interactions (Kain 2022; Jogdand 2017).

Upper Caste Disgust and Production of Dalit Shame

This theme was challenging to define for the participants as their observation of disgust among upper caste individuals towards marginalized caste groups was at an embodied level, often given as a "look" or "gaze" mixed with "contempt." One participant states, "They do not say anything, but their expression changes. It becomes a judgment; their tone becomes judgmental" (GI, female). Another participant highlights how disgust is perceived through behavioral actions "The minute they find out who you are, they have this smirk as if everything has come to you for free" (BI, female). This embodied aspect of victimization is coupled with microaggression and feelings of inadequacy and humiliation experienced by the participants. Further, this disgust was associated with a strong sense of pride amongst the upper caste, which takes on an essentialist note (Mahalingam 2003), where Brahmins were attributed as thinking that they were superior just by their caste (Pathania & Tierney 2018).

Shame is a product among the Dalit participants through constant microaggressions, disgust embodied by upper-caste individuals, and dismissal of efforts made by ingroup members. It manifests as imposter syndrome, self-doubt, constant pressure to perform, feelings of space violation, and un-belonging to specific spaces (Kumar 2022).

Feelings of imposter syndrome, which were prevalent among most participants, made the feeling of shame worse. As one participant highlighted, "Always that feeling of being an imposter comes; if everyone is doing well and performing well, then why am I not able to perform?" (SS, male). Self-doubt can be a common manifestation of this, and often feelings of unbelonging are common, such as "I started doubting myself a lot, academically. I started feeling like all these people here have studied more than me and have got more marks than me" (AM, female). It might also increase negative self-fulfilling behaviors. As a participant highlights, "I would pretend that I don't study in public like I don't study, and then I would end up getting really good grades (BI, female)." This is often coupled with shame, and as it is felt at a physical level, the word embodied has been employed. As a participant points out, "I felt dirty from within" (KI, female). Shame can be understood as one way that humiliation manifests and could lead to negative self-esteem and other psychological outcomes.

Upper Caste Hegemony on Academics

Since most of our participants were post-graduates or research scholars, we noted an emphasis on how upper-caste individuals control academic spaces during interviews. This takes the form of espousing merit, cherishing meritocracy, dismissing reservations, and also the invisibilization of caste in syllabi in different fields (Kain 2021). Participants highlight that this leads to differential treatment of upper-caste students, as highlighted by a participant: "It is so conditioned in their minds from the very beginning of their education that somebody with a dominant upper-caste surname is very meritorious" (SI, male). Furthermore, this leads to a denial of the achievements of Dalit professors or professionals. As another participant highlights, "Reservation-availing professors have no merit; they have no standard; it's all a fluke" (BI, female).

Upper-caste individuals also signal caste blindness or deny caste in its existence: "I have been seeing that students are uncomfortable acknowledging caste, and they do not want to acknowledge it" (SU, Male). All of this leads to the dismissal of reservations, as it is seen as a way of getting "freebies." The lack of educational resources on caste furthers this: "We read so much on culture, globalization, and diversity, but why not on caste?" (KI, female) and further highlighted by its lack of appearance in the formal curriculum, as the same participant highlights, "Why is it not there in the syllabus? If it is not there in the syllabus, then how will the students point it out?" (KI, female). Historical denial also manifests in the removal of Dalit freedom fighters from syllabi, as one participant highlights: "Before, we did not have the opportunity to study; now that we do, then we see that our people are only not there (in books)." (VS, male).

Hence, caste to upper caste is only represented in reservations. As one participant points out, different castes experience caste differently, which leads to the dismissal of affirmative action efforts. "We talk about the pride of caste; we don't talk about the shame of caste; they don't know enough for them that caste equals reservation". Highlighting that while for upper-caste individuals' caste has served as a resource, and often in times of adversity, for lower castes, it has been a source of shame and humiliation passed on through generations. This creates a sense of historical denial over casteism and also a dismissal of the need for reservation.

Lack of Desired Representation

This theme pertains to media, books, and news channels. Dalit participants have highlighted that community narratives are either stereotypical or invisibilized, especially in the case of caste-based atrocities, as many participants have cited the lack of representation in media and newsrooms (Kureel 2021). One participant points out their frustration that those who have benefited from the caste system cannot appropriately represent caste issues. Further, they highlight that even liberal news reporters ignore the issue of caste, as one participant points out concerning the Unnao rape case: "Ravish Kumar (senior journalist), he has ignored Chandrashekar (Azad, a Dalit activist), he did not even show one second of his work."

Even in student politics, most decision-makers are upper-caste individuals, as participants highlight that only "Banerjees, Chatterjees, Mukherjees and Bengalis" are part of leftist decision-makers. Hence, caste is less discussed; when it is, it is in the light of the Savarna gaze (Kureel 2021).

Ways of Dalit Resistance and Resilience

The domain of resistance and resilience in this research have been used in conjunction, though differences exist, such that resilience is more of a protective process that aids a group in sustaining itself, whereas resistance is more of a process of confronting oppressive forces. However, some resistance strategies such as confrontation, political representation, and reclaiming knowledge systems also added to the resilience potential of the community, i.e., they engaged and created resistance capital (Yosso 2005). It is also important for us to point out that structural violence, due to its pervasive presence, is often negotiated at an everyday level, i.e., everyday resistance. Often challenging denial or forming ingroup solidarity in a climate that forces one to doubt oneself can be seen as emancipatory, resilience building, and honing resistance. It also increases the possibility of ingroup power and constructive power (Power Basis Theory by Bou Zennedine & Pratto 2017). This makes us think of these themes in the bigger picture of resistance that turns into resilience, which leads to healing zones like having goals and building caste-based solidarity against the larger political narrative of Hindu oneness, caste denials, and caste violence.

In this study, we identified the value of education and the rejection of the concept of caste. It also comes in the form of rejecting Hindu traditions and highlighting the role of sages who have mobilized for the cause of Dalits. Moreover, participants highlighted a movement from shame to pride about ancestry, seeing historical narratives differently, reclaiming spaces, and establishing belonging. Participants pointed out how Ambedkar is a crucial figure in their healing and that there would not be India as we know it today without Ambedkar.

As consistent with appraisal theory (Leach 2020), ingroup difference has existed in terms of mobilization and the role of politics, but most participants expressed gratitude that a political force does exist. Moreover, participants have demanded acknowledgment by reclaiming knowledge systems and establishing why they belong

in academia. Alternate ways of healing have also been highlighted through the internet, caste-affirmative therapy, and other psychological healing. Overall, it highlights that resistance by Dalits has been agentic and active (Vyas & Panda 2019; Hardtmann 2009; Yengde 2019).

Education as Disruption and Rejection of Caste

Getting educated is conceptualized as one significant way that discrimination can be challenged, as it also corresponds with the Ambedkarite doctrine of "Educate, Agitate, and Organize." Hence, the value of education has been highlighted strongly by most participants, as one participant emphasizes, "to be strong, education is the way, we need to gain knowledge" (SS, male), and some have highlighted that speaking in English is one way to confuse upper-caste individuals but a step towards social mobility. Moreover, a strong sense of assertion about academic ability was also present, as many participants clarified that they scored well if not outright as 'toppers' in their educational institutes. The value of education is one way Dalit individuals envisage social mobility and explore providing mentorship to fellow ingroup members once they enter the academy so that UC networks hold reduced power over them.

The rejection of caste takes place through rejecting the value of caste, rejecting the UC urge to locate caste, and rejecting stereotypes through confrontation through both assertion and humor. One participant said, "Once I was asked my surname, I said it is Singh" (SH, male). This kind of identity concealment or ambiguous surnames, as another participant possessed, allowed them to challenge caste location and point out the follies of the upper-caste individuals' attempts. Moreover, some participants reject the importance of caste by suggesting it is just a "label," and others have dismissed it as "nothing" in their lives.

Furthermore, when faced with casteism, participants have hinted towards direct confrontation with the casteist individual: "Dalit category people no longer sit and get hit but also counter nowadays; if they (upper-caste) hit one of ours, we also hit five of theirs" (VS, male). Whereas, in daily life, it could just be as commonplace as confronting a friend when they crack caste-based jokes or make prejudicial comments: "If someone is close to me and they make problematic comments, then I try to bring that up, like 'you know what you said bothered me, was offensive to me, and I hope that you don't say this again'." (AM, female). Interestingly, confrontations can also be humorous. A participant stated that they used to make fun of their casteist professors or students and used humor as a tool of resistance in their daily anti-caste practices (see Vollhardt et al. 2020).

There could also be instances of workplace discrimination, especially in academia, which has also been confronted. As a research scholar highlights, "I have fought against many casteist forces in my university, where they have casteist professors and students and taunt students from oppressed backgrounds" (SH, male). All these forms of resistance highlight everyday forms of overt and covert resistance that are often not easily captured in collective action literature (Leach & Livingstone 2015; Vollhardt et al. 2019).

Rejection of Hindu Traditions and Embracing Ingroup Role Models

It was interesting that participants signaled disillusionment with traditional Hindu gods but claimed to worship or have seen their parents worship gods and goddesses that cure medical issues or solve social problems like "Sheetla Devi." Further, one participant stated that Periyar's Ramayana must be read as it challenges the way most majoritarian Hindus see Rama. Some participants highlighted saints who have been influential in the emancipatory movements like 'Guru Ravidas,' which aspired for perfect equality among all beings, and one participant spoke of Bangladeshi saints such as "Guru Harichand and his son Guruchand," who mobilized against upper-caste hegemony in Bengal (Mukherjee 2018; Sinharay 2022).

However, some participants offer a complete rejection of religion or the importance of religion in their families. This is perhaps because it is through Hindu practices of karma that caste gets justified by upper-caste individuals. Participants have highlighted "my grandparents were atheists, and they followed no religion" (KI, female) and "I have become anti-god after reading newspapers and seeing what happens to our women" (SI, male).

Moreover, while there is a certain rejection of Hindu tradition, their source of hope is generated by looking up to Ambedkar as an ideal figure. Ambedkar, in the words of our participants, is seen to be a feminist, a guide, a reformer, as well as the maker of the nation-state. There is a strong sense of reverence for Ambedkar. "Babasaheb Ambedkar is worshipped and respected. We had bhajans on him and even songs" (VS, male). Another participant stated, "If you visit my house or my grandfather's house, there are so many photos of Dr. Ambedkar. He's not treated as a god but as somebody you look up to like a god" (AM, female). Moreover, other caste emancipators are also given importance in family functions such as marriage, as posited by one of the participants: "There will be Buddha's portrait, Dr. Ambedkar's portrait, or Savitribai Phule's portrait" (SH, male). Moreover, women participants hinted at Ambedkar's importance in bringing women's rights to India. However, a few narratives suggest that Ambedkar's ideas must also be questioned and challenged through a critical and moral standpoint that Ambedkar himself envisioned.

Pride and Acceptance of Ancestry

This involves appraising Dalit history as one of the producers and hard laborers instead of stereotypical notions that are associated with the community of 'freeloaders.' These challenge the feeling of shame experienced by our participants, as often shame results from feelings of inadequacy due to the lack of social and cultural capital that upper-caste individuals seem to possess (Alha 2018) and reclaiming and reappraising their ancestral experiences in a positive light can often serve to increase pride amongst the devalued group. They specify how they have navigated shame to pride over their ancestors, as the same participant states, "…I wouldn't invite anyone to meet her (grandmother), even if my grandmother were cooler; probably now I realize that my grandmother was way cooler than them (colleagues and classmates)," (BI,

female) and other participants have highlighted that their ancestors did not 'beg' for money but worked hard in their respective fields to earn their sustenance. Another participant discusses the negotiation from shame to no shame as an achievement and a form of healing with their identity "I no longer feel shame; even if I do not take pride, at least I do not feel shame. I am not demonizing my identity or accepting slang against my community," (AC, male) This highlights that a movement toward pride is not necessary for healing, but even movements that reduce shame and reduce the experience of humiliation could be equally valuable.

Moreover, success stories of parents and community are also seen as providing grounds for mentorship and serving as ideals for others to follow: "If I go to villages where the community is essentially Bahujan, then they are proud of my mother" (BI, female). Others acknowledged the space that Bahujan professors make for students. "He (professor) was very accomplished, but he made students feel like there is space for you here... Bahujan teachers make you feel that you belong." (BI, female).

Some participants have highlighted how they have been seen as role models themselves: "(a person to him) 'I didn't know that our community had such good people." He further added, 'I am happy to see you do research; good to see you reading and writing; just glad" (AS, male). Another scholar adds, "Since my joining as a professor, there are students who have become very confident because I have been teaching Dr. Ambedkar's idea of the annihilation of caste in India, I'm teaching Prof. Kancha Ilaiah's texts. Upper caste students are also joining the discourse" (SU, male)—highlighting how caste scholars have transformative potential themselves, de-ideologizing merit, and creating caste-sensitive spaces. Moreover, we also find the concept of paying back to the community as a strong motive in terms of the resources these participants had, and it could be in the form of using the internet to spread awareness, to the aspiration of being a mentor, and further, to help educate others (see also Sinha 2020). Hence, the goal remains one of social emancipation of the masses rather than only of a few select individuals.

Reclaiming Knowledge Systems

This theme focuses on highlighting the contribution of Dalit individuals, atrocities committed by upper-caste individuals, justifying reservation, de-ideologizing merit, and the importance of raising awareness among other caste members. Valuing reservation as just is seen as a continuous struggle, as participants have stated how there has been reservation for Brahmins in education for over 3000 years and highlighted its role in empowering the minoritized population. A participant said, "Reservation is a small part of caste; it is not a poverty removal drive, but it is about representation" (AC, male). Another participant mentions that it is necessary because they have never had access to the capital and network that upper caste individuals deprived other caste individuals of having. Hence, support for reservation is strong among Dalit individuals (Bhanot & Verma 2020).

This is also coupled with problem-awareness raising in themselves and others, generating a sense of pride among Dalit individuals. One participant adds, "If you look

at Dalit and Adivasi living and their practices, you would see that their food practices are democratic and nutrition-oriented" (SH, male). Further, the lack of Dalit freedom fighters is also a "we have to let people know that all fights and sacrifices were not made by upper-caste individuals, but also have been given by people whom you threw outside of your villages" (VS, male).

Moreover, justification of reservation follows de-ideologizing merit and redefining the markers of deservingness through notions of 'hard work.' A participant posited, "Lower-caste people have only used the help of their talent to come to this level and not availed other help" (VS, male), and another participant highlighted that even though their parents possessed all the necessary qualifications, they were subject to discrimination on both the gender and caste front, which led her to abandon the value of merit as proclaimed by upper caste individuals.

Establishing Dalit Indigeneity

The politics of indigeneity in India is complex and fraught with contestation and complexities; however, historical accounts of Dalit resistance and Adivasi resistance have highlighted that both groups assert and claim indigeneity in India (See Baviskar 2006 for an in-depth discussion on Dalit assertions of indigeneity). Two participants, in particular, highlighted that Dalits and Adivasis are the original inhabitants of India, and Brahminism is a foreign concept that has come through Aryan invaders. They point to caste movements that have been trying to establish Dalit indigeneity: "There is a movement, like the Aadi Dharam movement, that is trying to establish us as people of this land and that we are not Hindus but Aadhi Dharmis" (AS, male). Another adds, "My grandfather told me that we are against Aryans because we are the original inhabitants; basically, we are Dravidians" (AM, female). Both of these lines emphasize the Brahmin as a "foreigner' propagated through Aryan migration/invasion and that Dalits are either an alternate group opposed to the Brahmin or have existed before Brahminism took root in India. Both of these narratives highlight the wedge of Hindu unification that has persisted in modern nationalistic politics, and laying claim to indigeneity can also lead to political mobilization.

Finding Ways of Healing and Disruption(s)

In this section is highlighted the role of newer modes of voicing and healing that goes beyond the realm of collective action and politics and are often based at an individual level, such as propagating caste-affirmative therapy (Sawariya 2021), the use of the internet for communication, and internal psychological healing. For instance, one participant highlights that "caste-affirmative therapy accepts that these are my experiences and gives me the intervention. It gives me the freedom to tell the stories" (AM, female). The findings of Sawariya (2021), who emphasize that the psychology curriculum is caste-blind and frequently fails to account for Dalit experiences, support this and show the need for alternative spaces for these people to air their views. Other participants advocate the use of the internet and explain how it can be a zone of anti-caste politics: "When I started the anti-caste page, I wanted to talk; I had nobody

around me to talk about these things; I wanted to connect with like-minded people" (SI, male). The internet provides a safe arena to disclose caste and often find people who have similar thought processes, thus generating social bonds and cohesion. Another participant adds, "There is a lot of resistance on Instagram now; lots of pages are coming up; people are opening and talking about it; it gives me hope and a feeling that I am not alone" (AM, female). Hence, traditional invisibilization by media is countered through social media spaces where one can seek representation (Mehra et al. 2004).

Aspiration, Solidarity, and Collective Actions

These themes highlight the potential for the development of ingroup solidarity, establishing affective solidarity (Hemmings 2012), and future aspirations (Yosso 2005). Most participants highlighted the value of ingroup solidarity, which often takes the shape of understanding and empathy. One participant running an Instagram page states, "If you have empathy for the bottom of society, then you will understand the situation of your people" (SI, male). Often, it comes from solidarity through similar fate and experiences "My reservation friends, I can discuss my struggle or someone else's struggle or their struggle" (GI, female). Others have highlighted the value of community, stating, "I would probably be the same (with self-doubt and low self-esteem) had I not found a community" (BM, female). Participants have highlighted that anti-caste solidarity also involves questioning and challenging your own privileges and acting on the teachings and principles you claim to aspire to.

Few participants hinted at how they would teach their children differently so that they do not feel ashamed of themselves: "I will want to protect my children, but I will not fill them with shame about it. I will make them aware that there are certain castes, and you have to be cognizant of them" (AM, female). Most participants have highlighted the importance of teaching their children about the caste system so that they can navigate their experiences.

Representational Aspirations and Contestations

This was a contentious issue and brought forward substantial differences between the participants, highlighting that victim groups might appraise their victimization and the effectiveness of coping strategies differently (Leach 2020; Jeong & Vollhardt 2021). In media houses and movies, the participants have noticed a difference in how Dalit characters have been portrayed once a Dalit director is directing a film; as one participant points out, "Neeraj Gehwan (sic), the director of *Masaan*, takes out a casting call that is only for DBA members" (AS, male). Another participant highlights Neeraj Gehwan's (sic) influence on their lives: "The person who made *Masaan* also made *Geeli Puchhi*. After I got to know he belonged to the community, I saw his writings and his work, and I was filled with joy. Look at this man embracing it and killing it" (AM, female). Highlighting the space for radical hope, joy, and emancipatory potential that public figures and media representatives can bring to the community.

While representation in film and cinema has been viewed positively, politics, on the other hand, has been a challenging issue and is a contested area of Dalit aspiration and political movement. Dalit politics stand at a crossroads between young individuals such as Jignesh Mehwani, who mobilized Dalits for land in Gujarat, and Chandrashekar Azad, who is seen as a firebrand politician, and on the other side stand electoral party leaders like Mayawati. A participant stated, "I feel it's good that we have representation and young representation like Mehwani and Azad because the older generation is not very much in sync with the aspirations of young DBA members" (AM, female). While a difference of opinion exists, the Dalit vote bank is hailed as a feminist vote bank. As two participants pointed out, when the time came to choose a woman or follow a man, the Dalit electorate chose a woman in the form of Mayawati.

General Discussion

The current study analyzed how Dalit participants have understood their victimization, resilience, and resistance in their lives through narrative interviews, which were thematically analysed (Braun & Clarke 2006; 2019). The study presents a departure from previous studies on collective victimhood that have focused on intractable conflicts (Bar-Tal 2009) and have concentrated on structural injustices that affect a majority of people. Hence, in this study, the focus was on researching victimhood to explore how groups have actively resisted their victimhood through collective action and covert ways of resisting (Vollhardt et al. 2020). Like previous studies on colonialism (Jeong & Vollhardt 2021), we also find evidence of the primary appraisal process, secondary appraisal, and stress on coping strategies conceptualized as resistance and resilience against collective victimization in the context of structural violence.

We applied the appraisal theory to study collective victimization (Leach 2020) due to structural violence. We have found themes that highlight that the dominant outgroup is seen to be responsible for past victimization as well as continued victimization through acts of discrimination and microaggression. The article also sheds light on the 'pathological' desire of upper-caste individuals to control the Dalit body through ascribing certain aesthetics as well as desires to locate the caste of every individual, demarcating Dalit community members into Dalits who belong and Dalits who do not belong in certain spaces. The article also showed how different groups produce emotions in each other, as highlighted in Intergroup Emotions Theory, juxtaposing the upper caste member's disgust with the Dalit member's shame, which has been noted in the experience and propagation of prejudice and discrimination.

The article emphasized the varied forms of collective resistance/resilience, especially focusing on the myriad ways of fighting the devaluation of Dalit knowledge systems, Dalit individual's contribution to the freedom movement, and especially resisting the devaluation of their achievements. Moreover, it focused on ways of Dalit resilience through embracing their own identity, overcoming shame, celebrating their ancestry, aspiring to become role models for other Dalit members, and engaging in a project of radical healing and hope (French et al. 2021). Moreover, resistance was seen

through confronting microaggressions, valuing education, rejecting Hindu traditions, and embracing their own leaders, such as Guru Das, Ravi Das in the theistic fold, and Ambedkar in the secular fold. The study also highlights how Dalit individuals have creatively dealt with casteism by using covert ways of resistance, such as cracking jokes and not disclosing their surnames (Vollhardt et al. 2020). Moreover, the presence of aspiration and the desire to develop solidarity and engage in collective actions can be seen as avenues of resilience as well as healing, as they lay claim to a future that has yet to be realized. These allow the community members to restore their dignity, well-being, and self-worth.

Further, we find that the Dalit participants highlight the importance of proper acknowledgment through teaching history and drawing attention to their community's contribution to nation-building. In line with liberation psychology, Dalit groups have also stressed how important it is to "de-ideologize" both caste and merit, which is something upper-caste people have done to paint a stereotypical picture of Dalits. Further, this is one of the few studies exploring both psychological resilience and resistance (Sinha 2020) and victim beliefs among Dalits (Jogdand 2017; Nair & Vollhardt 2018). Interestingly, it also explores the importance of being heroes, role models, and community leaders, as that highlights long-term engagement with the problem and not a one-off event. It finds that claiming reservations can create a class of Dalit individuals who can potentially become mentors for future generations, and they can also aspire for social mobility. Hence, resilience is also one way to navigate the daily experience of humiliation (Guru 2009; Jogdand 2016).

Finally, it highlights that studies on minoritized groups should study how victim groups are replete with collective resilience and resistance resources, which traditional literature has hitherto underestimated (Leach & Livingstone 2015). Teaching about caste and acknowledging the historical effects of caste can be one way to have better interaction between Dalits and upper-caste individuals, where the upper caste is forced to recognize their violent past based on exploitation and oppression, forcing us to confront the insidious ways in which structural violence operates and victimizes.

Limitations

A significant limitation of this study has been that most of our participants were involved with academia as research scholars, graduate and post-graduate students, and professors. Hence, while not intended, the study has focused on caste resistance in academic spaces. Another methodological limitation is that these individuals were in contact through social circles or social media, where they ascribed a certain sense of anti-caste politics. However, many individuals facing discrimination may not resist or resist in the ways we have found in our study. Further, the research could also involve triangulation of methods, especially community-based participatory and action approaches, in understanding the effectiveness of different coping strategies within the ingroup and focus more on 'collective narratives.' While the lack of heterogeneity in the sample is a limitation, another limitation is the number of participants, which

prevents generalizability. However, research in qualitative psychology ascribes to different checks on the generalizability and validity of the data, which was firmly kept in mind (Tracy 2010).

Implications and Conclusion

The study also highlights the diversity of coping strategies within the community and how intervention in community resilience must also be multi-faceted, catering to the different needs of victim groups. This research is one of the many attempts to decolonize and de-ideologize Brahminism and caste discourse. Findings contribute to the larger discourse of anti-caste narratives—bringing their daily realities of hope and love to the forefront. It encourages sensitivity for affirmative policy and social action by problematizing the lens through which the Dalit community is viewed. Additionally, psychologists and educators can use the study's findings to develop curricula about caste and highlight Dalit individuals' contributions to community development and nation-building.

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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.

Acknowledgment

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The Promise of Memory: Politics of Memory and Caste Inequality in Collective Memory Consolidation

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Abstract

In the generic description of Indian society, the question of memory is about passive recollection of past. But in the caste-system based Indian experience, memory is also an active source of transforming one's condition in the present and reshaping the understanding of past. Based on the fieldwork conducted on the sites of important Dalit monuments in Uttar Pradesh with a focus on the process of memory consolidation in individual and collective entities, the role of memory in mobilization of political narratives and inter-group inequality is examined. The core argument is that Dalits are unequally placed as an entity in the caste-based memory structure of collective memory; this unequal placement of Dalits is carefully constructed and mobilized by the dominant castes. In the anti-caste struggle of Dalits, collective memory consolidation has played a vital role in ideologically creating counter-memories to challenge the Hindutva meta-narratives. Yet, there continues shaping of collective memory of Dalits by dominant castes by appropriating Dalit icons. Thus, the collective memory of creating an integrated Hindu identity as the only source of identifying with the past recently has led to the marginalization of Dalits' collective memory. Overall, this article highlights the role of collective memory for a meaningful understanding of the caste politics.

Keywords

Memory, Caste, Dalit, Mnemonic Injustice, Political Mobilisation, Uttar Pradesh

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Introduction

Memories are indeed personal; however, at the same time, they are also social, shared with our family and friends, received from our elders, and told to our young ones. But collective remembering is subject to the constraint of resources and control over media, leading to an uneven distribution of memories in 'mnemonic traditions' of any given society.[2] As a consequence, memories remain unequally distributed at the collective level.

Globally, there is interest and attention from various disciplines in the study of memory.[3] However, there is a notable dearth of studies addressing memory's political uses, functions, and relevance, primarily in a non-European context. In the Indian context, the relationship between memory and caste has not been thoroughly investigated too. Recently, social psychologists (Cotterill et al. 2014; Jaspal 2011; Jogdand et al. 2016) have attempted to examine caste from a psychological perspective. However, there has been scant focus on memory and collective remembering in this literature. Therefore, this article examines how memory plays an active role in transforming one's current conditions and reshaping the understanding of the past, against the backdrop of the caste-system. Specifically, drawing from existing literature and fieldwork in Uttar Pradesh (UP) conducted in November 2022 and April 2023, the connection between collective memory consolidation[4] and caste consolidation is explored. The primary goal here is to investigate memory as an analytical category capable of elucidating the distribution of power in a social and cultural context.

Process of Collective Memory Consolidation

Neurobiologists and neuroscientists, who have recently provided some important insights on memory, have built upon the foundations laid by developmental and experimental psychologists. Their recent work underscores the classification of

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[2]Eviatar Zerubavel uses the term 'mnemonic tradition' and explains that "a mnemonic tradition includes not only what we come to remember as members of a particular thought community but also how we remember it" (Zerubavel 1999: 87).

[3]The field of Memory Studies has progressed from introducing key concepts like cultural memory, collective memory, folkloric memory, digital memory, and communicative memory to its recent engagement with disciplines like disability studies, animal studies, ecocriticism, new materialism, and critical race studies (Craps et al. 2018; Knittel & Driscoll 2017). So far, the field of memory studies has well recognized three waves (Erll 2011). However, Olick et al. (2023) have observed a fourth wave, urging the field to transcend anthropocentrism and embrace ecological thinking (Olick et al. 2023). This transcending of the memory beyond Anthropocene in my understanding can be thematized as omnipresence of memory. For an overview of memory studies see Bond et al. (2017), Kattago (2015), Mendels (2007), Olick et al. (2011), Radstone and Schwarz (2010), and Tota and Hagen (2016).

[4]Thomas J. Anastasio, Kristen Ann Ehrenberger, Patrick Watson, and Wenyi Zhang in their work 'Individual and Collective Memory Consolidation: Analogous Processes on Different Levels' (2012) have dealt with individual and collective memory by analogically comparing the process of memory consolidation. Their work demonstrates the functional aspect of collective memory and explains its consolidation process. Based on content of memory, they note that "memory for facts and events is declarative, whereas memory for skills is procedural" (Anastasio et al. 2012: 37).

memory into two distinct types: 'declarative' and 'procedural' memory.[5] Declarative memory "essentially comprises" those memory that "can be enunciated" (Anastasio et al. 2012: 37) whereas procedural ones are related to skills such as driving a vehicle. In this article, the focus is on the process of consolidation of collective declarative memory (hereafter collective memory).[6] Moreover, this article adopts, in part, Sarah Gensburger's (2016) perspective on inquiring about memory, aligning with her assertion that memory should be examined not as a distinct research topic but rather within the broader framework of general sociology, "using the standard tools and methods of this discipline" (p. 2). However, our approach expands beyond Gensburger's suggestion, encompasses a broader viewpoint that not only emphasizes any one discipline but adopts an interdisciplinary lens. In this broader context, the article incorporates insights from the psychological, sociological, historians, political scientists, etc., perspectives to explain memory's consolidation to discuss political uses.

Further, among psychologists William Hirst and David Manier have noted that "collective memories may not always behave according to the rules that govern individual memory" (2008: 185). I acknowledge that the gap between individual and collective memory is difficult to bridge within the scope of this article. This article's treatment of the relationship between collective and individual memory comes close to the existing research of Anastasio et al. (2012) who have argued that "the brain is the medium for individual memory, society is the medium for collective memory" (2012: 55).

Anastasio's work has explored the impact of social phenomenon on collective 'entities' in memory consolidation. In their memory consolidation model, three zones are identified: the "buffer," "relater," and "generalizer". The "buffer" temporarily stores memory items, the "relater" identifies relationships, and the "generalizer" stores them efficiently for long-term memory (2012: 79). This model draws an analogy between individual and collective memory consolidation.

Before concluding this section and transitioning to our examination of memory for analysis, there is one point I would like to clarify regarding the conceptual limitations of scrutinizing memory for political analysis. It is the viewpoint that collective memory is primarily shaped by racial and cultural characteristics. The study does not follow the logic of memory's inheritance in a racial and xenophobic sense.[7]

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[5] Further, various contributors have added sub-classifications in the aforesaid two broad categories: as noted by Joseph LeDoux, "psychologist Endel Tulving proposed an influential distinction between two kinds of explicit memories—semantic and episodic." Further LeDoux explains Tulving's categorization by elaborating that episodic memories are autobiographical, but not all autobiographical memories are episodic. Tulving emphasizes the acquisition of factual (semantic) information during specific episodes. He introduces a crucial distinction: conscious experiences of semantic and episodic memories rely on different conscious states—noesis for semantic and autonoesis for episodic, the latter involving personal awareness in the memory experience. (LeDoux 2019: 306–308)

[6] Though our focus is on collective memory but an analysis of the impact of collective memory on individual life experiences as well as on individual memory is also provided.

[7] Anastasio et al. (2012) highlights that proponent of organic memory link memory and heredity, suggesting humans inherit memory from ancestors and society inherits the memory of

Identity, Memory and 'Counter Memory'

Scholars of memory studies have noted that "(c)ontestation clearly is at the centre of both memory and identity" (Olick & Robbins 1998: 126). Eviatar Zerubavel has discussed a wide range of concepts such as 'mnemonic communities', 'mnemonic socialization', 'mnemonic lenses', 'mnemonic synchronization', 'mnemonic transitivity', 'mnemonic others' 'mnemonic decapitation' and 'mnemonic sanitization'(Zerubavel 1999).[8] These concepts are important to what scholars have identified as the possibility of bringing together different memories into hegemonic memory or in other words "achieving mnemonic consensus" (Olick & Robbins 1998: 127).

Within the caste system the nature of contested struggle for memory depends on the extent of mnemonic socialization, presence of mnemonic tradition, choice of mnemonic lens, the process of mnemonic synchronization, how 'mnemonic transitivity' occurs, who are the 'mnemonic others', what is the impact of 'mnemonic decapitation' and how dominant mnemonic forces are undertaking 'mnemonic sanitization' within the society. Collective memory in its capacity to shape identity has been also explored as 'community of memory' or 'mnemonic communities' (Bellah et al. 1996; Zerubavel 1999). While explaining the notion of 'community of memory' in their work, Bellah et al. have emphasized on the importance of stories of those remarkable individuals who have embodied and exemplified the community's stories (Bellah et al. 1996). Exemplary figures in Dalit mnemonic struggle include figures such as Dr Ambedkar, Savitri Bai Phule, etc., and constitute a significant aspect of the tradition central to a Dalit's community of memory.

Foucault used the term 'counter-memory' to describe those memories that dissent with the dominant history (1977: 160). He acknowledged that memory is contested from below, from the non-periphery. It is within these dynamics of memory contestation that I will discuss how different castes and sub-castes[9] are mnemonically

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previous generations. This concept, when stretched, can lead to racially segregating ideas and predetermined identity that could result in xenophobic and prejudice believes among ethnic groups, For more on this see (Anastasio et al. 2012: 43–45).

[8]Eviatar Zerubavel has explained all these term in detail in his book I will briefly try to summarize all these terms in Zerbavel's words. On mnemonic communities, Zerubavel notes that "much of what we seem to 'remember' we did not actually experience personally. We only do so as members of particular families, organizations, nations, and other mnemonic communities" (Zerubavel 1999: 90). On mnemonic socialization Zerubavel notes that "we usually learn what we should remember and what we can forget as part of our mnemonic socialization" (p. 87). Whereas mnemonic lens is explained in context of role of family, Zerubavel describes "mnemonic lenses (are) provided by our immediate family" (p. 88). Further, mnemonic synchronization happens when memories are "not only commonly shared but also jointly remembered (that is, 'commemorated')" (pp. 96–97). Zerubavel explains mnemonic transitivity as the "social preservation of memories in stories, poems, and legends that are transmitted from one generation to the next" (p. 93) and mnemonic others as those who can "block our access to certain events in our own past, to the point of actually preventing some of them from becoming memories in the first place" (p. 83).

[9]By sub-caste, I mean that, according to the mnemonic logic of political mobilization, caste groups with characters in famous mythologies, epics, and stories—such as Nishad Raj or

at loggerheads and compete to have a definitive say in controlling the process which consolidates collective memory in the political arena. But before delving into the discussion on the politics of memory, it's crucial to note that applying Foucault's counter-memory framework though aids in comprehending the politics of memory has its own paradoxes and challenges. Foucault not only questions dominant historical narratives but questions the very capacity of social sciences which tends to generate knowledge that reinforces existing power relations. Following Foucault's call for research to be "provocative and complex" (Pignatelli 1998: 418), Pignatelli (1998) advocates a research approach that exceeds conventional expectations. This approach, based on Foucault according to Pignatelli, surprises and engages researchers, subjects, and readers, encouraging exploration beyond established distinctions of reality and imagination. The goal is to open new ways of approaching and understanding longstanding problems. In this context, the research attempts to discuss the problem of caste from a new and complex perspective, yet it remains limited within the paradigm of social science that Foucault questions.

Scholars using Foucault's ides of counter memory have explored it to rethink about time and history that goes beyond traditional dialectical frameworks (Tello 2022). Verónica Tello emphasizes that counter-memory, as conceived by Foucault, is non-dialectical and holds multiple histories together without reducing them to oppositional binaries. In the Indian context we will limit our discussion to the appropriation of counter-memories and different understanding of history that Dalit mnemonic tradition offers. The politics of appropriation for fulfilling majoritarian Hindutva project has been noted by various scholars (Berti 2006; Berti et al. 2011; Kanungo 2011; J. Lee 2021; Michelutti 2008). Joel Lee has highlighted a historical shift where, prior to independence, the ancient Sanskrit poet Rishi Valmiki (a crucial figure for Dalit Valmiki community), initially without influence among sanitation labor castes, was later acknowledged as their ancestor. Lee notes that "Valmiki became the sign of a new regime of recognition" as the government instituted "a government holiday in honor of Valmiki" alongside, "streets and parks were renamed after the *rishi*, and Congress and Harijan Sevak Sangh leaders like Ghanshyamdas Birla began funding Valmiki statues and temples intended for the sanitation labor castes (2021: 12). I will discuss counter-memory and political strategies to appropriate it as noted by scholars in their analysis of UP's politics, especially after 2014 in the next section.

Sabri—or any historical personalities renowned in the folklore of a given region (e.g., BJP also values castes whose historical figures, according to folklore, have fought against Mughal and other Muslim rulers), can be appropriated by political actors/parties. These castes are treated according to the mnemonic hierarchy, given preference in the allocation of positions within the party, installation of statues and celebration of birth anniversary of historical figures. In contrast, caste groups that lack references in any stories, myths, and folklores are considered relatively useful for political purposes. They are treated differently in terms of appropriation strategy. For instance, while a Dom and Mahar may both be Dalit, they belong to different sub-castes with their own historical references. Those sub-castes that align with the political party's narrative are approached favorably by the BJP and other political party for electoral mobilization.

Memory, Caste, and Politics in UP

Those who examine politics in UP for long have adopted the framework of identity politics (Jha 2021; Pai & Kumar 2018; Singh 2022; Tiwari 2014). Post 2014 repeated wins of Hindutva forces and recent developments have been explained as 'neo Hindutva' (Anderson & Longkumer 2018), others have explained it as "the new hegemony" resulting from "conflation between nationalism and Hindutva" (Palshikar 2017). Scholars contend that the mobilization strategy of Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) and Bhartiya Janta Party (BJP) is reshaping the "conventional understandings of Indian politics" and is currently questioning established perceptions of political dynamics (Jha 2021: 19). Furthermore, scholars like Badri Narayan Tiwari, who essentially replicate the established mnemonic hierarchy inherent in the caste system in their work, instead of critically engaging with it have argued that a "phoenix" like "a new RSS…can be seen emerging in the current scenario" (Tiwari 2021). This critique aligns closely with the previously mentioned Foucauldian perspective on social sciences.[10] Overall, the changing contours of UP politics, especially after the 2014 parliamentary elections have been understood as "subalterniz(ation) of the Hindutva agenda" (Pai & Kumar 2018).

Above analyses discussing the hegemony of Hindutva also suggests that the impact of caste on people's voting choices has diminished. These researchers have linked the reduced influence of caste to strategies employed by the RSS and BJP. They argue that the BJP, under its electoral strategy, has utilized ancient myths, memory, and narratives to integrate various sub-castes into its Hindu consolidation project. Consequently, they perceive the weakened influence of caste as a direct result of the strengthening of Hindutva.

In contrast, other scholars have suggested that caste identity remains resilient and crucial in its electoral prominence and essence (Gurjar 2019; Jaffrelot 2019; Singh 2022; Trivedi & Singh 2022). These scholars have also argued that while other factors such as development, governance, and national security may have influenced the outcome of recent elections, caste continues to play a significant role in shaping voting patterns in India. While these scholars acknowledge how various sub-castes have become politically active, majority of them overlook the use of memory and myths for mobilizing caste groups in their analyses. One exception is Shilp Shikha Singh's analyses, as she points out that political parties employ myths, and construct narratives in mobilizing various sub-castes, with BJP not being the sole protagonist in this process. Most importantly, she has noted that the electoral performance of Hindutva forces has developed a kind of 'cognitive blackout' in understanding the "subtle interconnections between the social and the political" in examination of political development in UP recently (Trivedi & Singh 2022).

In the context of the above discussion and within the framework of the current objectives of this article, it can be stated that memory based analysis of UP politics adds to the existing limited understanding of the 'subtle interconnections' and helps in

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[10]Tiwari provides a mystical account of RSS which appears not like a physical real world organization but more as an enigma or phoenix, especially when he writes "RSS constantly destroys and renews its image" (2021: 12).

overcoming the 'cognitive blackout' by discussing memory's mobilization based on caste to consolidate votes. In other words, consolidation and mobilization of voters is studied here as an outcome of the process underlying the consolidation of memory. Further, here, I argue that much-hyped consolidation of various castes into the Hindutva fold and explanations of it as the victory of Hindutva is nothing but reproduction of the Hindutva gaze. Overhyped scholarly work that glorifies Hindutva as mentioned before reproduces the dominant social bias and perception of India dominantly being a Hindu society while ignoring the democratic churning taking place at a micro level.[11] Any explanation adopting the macro lens for advancing a macro explanation of politics in UP falls short in taking a note of micro political developments which advance a better understanding of politics. Examining the changes related to politics at the micro level through the lens of memory, an attempt is made to acquire power through memory. In this process, the 'mnemonic battles'[12] manifest on the ground level, ranging from the installation of statues to government enforced changes in the school text books or the struggles depicted through religious and ideological stickers affixed to vehicles, all directly delineates the relationship between memory and politics. In the next section, I will discuss these aspects in detail and explore the context of those dimensions connected to memory, derived from the fieldwork, which will assist in achieving the objectives of this article.[13]

Unequal Mnemonic Structure: Insights from the Field

To understand the counter-memory struggle of Dalits and gather evidence for the same, I conducted unstructured interviews which at best can be categorized as

[11]The bias is implicit, but a significant example would be political anthropologist Badri Narayan Tiwari's recent work. In his recent work focusing on the parliamentary elections of 2014 and 2019, as well as the 2017 UP state assembly election, Badri Narayan Tiwari observes that the BJP is mobilizing Dalit, Tribal, and OBC groups by appropriating, co-opting, and integrating symbols, ideology, and faith associated with non-Hindutva goddesses and historical figures (2021). However, in early 2000s Tiwari wrote extensively based on the fieldwork in UP highlighting Bahujan Samaj Party's (BSP) use of memory for consolidating identity. However, in recent years his focus has shifted to uncritical examination of RSS and BJP's appropriation strategy. For BSP see (Tiwari 2001); For BJP (Tiwari 2009): For RSS: (Tiwari 2021). Similarly, in a different context Uma Chakravarty exposes upper-caste bias in academic views on caste, attributing it to an excessive focus on the Brahmanical perspective from Brahmanical texts. She argues that this overlooks the experiential dimensions of caste-based oppression as presented by Dalit writers. Additionally, she criticizes the dominance of scholars like Dumont and Moffat, who present the caste system as a consensual set of values, neglecting perspectives from scholars like Mencher and Berreman (Chakravarti 2018).

[12]Eviatar Zerubavel introduces the term "mnemonic battles", emphasizing the social dimension of human memory. These battles revolve around collective memory, often involving entire communities and taking place in the public arena through mediums like newspaper editorials and radio talk shows (Zerubavel 1999: 99). (This footnote should be paraphrased.)

[13]Eviatar Zerubavel introduces the term "mnemonic battles", emphasizing the social dimension of human memory. These battles revolve around collective memory, often involving entire communities and taking place in the public arena through mediums like newspaper editorials and radio talk shows (Zerubavel 1999: 99).

heterophenomenological interviews.[14] The participants belonged to Dalit, OBCs and upper caste groups. Here insights from Dalit participants have been included. Some of the discussants outrightly mentioned their exact caste, while some generally said 'SC community.' Following a heterophenomenological approach, the discussion was open ended while I also shared why I am visiting the park, Ambedkar Memorial Park, Lucknow (the location of these interviews). These interviews took place in two different visits: first, in November 2022 and second in April 2023. A total of 30 participants were randomly interacted with, resulting in discussions lasting from 15 minutes to over 2 hours.

In November 2022, I met a family of four, who were visiting the Ambedkar Memorial Park, Lucknow on a Sunday evening and enquired as to what brings them to the Ambedkar Park. The eldest member—father—of the family who works in the UP secretariat, agreed to respond on terms of anonymity.[15] He told me that "these places and statues remind him and his young children of the great people from their Dalit community who have helped them receive respect and resources." He wanted his children to remember that without the work of these great leaders (whose statues are in the park), their existence would not have been possible in this unequal society. Further, he stated that "anyone in this world will remember those who have helped them in their difficult times, and for Dalits, it was Dr. Ambedkar." In this case, insights from psychologist Frederic Bartlett (1995) can be helpful in explaining how individual memory and collective memory are connected and while remembering individually one also reflects on the caste identity one belongs to.

According to Bartlett, comprehending memory requires acknowledging how "families, classes, and religions, among others, influence individual remembering" (Bartlett 1995: 294–296). The assertion by the participant that in remembering Ambedkar, it is not only the personality that is recollected but the struggles of Dalits and Dr. Ambedkar's role in 'difficult times' and struggles. In this context, while rearticulating Bartlett's claim I argue that memorizing implies reflecting on the past, acknowledging the struggles and challenges faced by the community. The statues in the park for the respondent serve as tangible reminders suggesting that the statues are

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[14]This research is rooted in Edmund Husserl's phenomenological philosophy, serving as its foundational methodology. In its early stages, the study aimed to discuss unconventional approaches in political science, particularly in the examination of mobilization strategies for electoral gains. Drawing a parallel with David Chalmers' exploration of the 'hard problem' and 'easy problems'' of consciousness in his book 'The Conscious Mind' (1996). I applied a similar framework to identity politics. Here, explicit challenges involve voter mobilization and voting patterns, constituting easy problems. In contrast, the hard problems in identity politics encompass nuanced aspects like imagination, judgment, perception, sensory experience, and memory. Within the phenomenological tradition, the interview methodology aligns closely with heterophenomenology, an approach devised by philosopher Daniel Dennett. This method seeks to "access consciousness from the outside," focusing on "the mental life of others as it is publicly expressed or manifested" (Zahavi & Gallagher 2021: 19). For more on debates around heterophenomenology see: Dennett 1982; Dreyfus & Kelly 2007; Zahavi & Gallagher 2020).

[15]The identity of responded is revealed in some cases and anonymized, changed or hidden depending on the consent provided by them during the interviews.

not merely static objects but symbols of inspiration and guidance for himself and his children. At the same time the respondent realizes the privileges and opportunities are a result of the efforts and sacrifices made by these leaders. In essence, the narrative emphasizes the importance of historical awareness and a sense of responsibility embedded in the act of remembering.

In April 2023, during a casual encounter, I met C.V. Singh, in his late 60s from UP's Mahoba district. He recounted his observation on how the RSS is attempting to co-opt legends and icons from the Dalit community. Additionally, he shared his recent experience of visiting Mathura. He noted that there is a recently built Gautam Buddha's premises in Mathura, explaining that in the upcoming times, the presence of Buddha in Mathura will remind people that Buddha and Mahavir were avatars of Hindu gods. Similarly on his awareness of how RSS is making inroads in Dalit settlements, he commented that "yes I am aware of their strategy, however, it is the responsibility of Dalit community to be aware and notice who is placing *Shivling,* statues of Ram and portraits of Durga in their temples and places of worships." Another respondent, I met in November 2022, Abhishek (name changed), a primary school teacher in his mid-40s from the Kori caste in Kanpur district. He shared that previously (before 2019), it was the promise to build a temple and icon and memory-based mobilization did happen but recently (after 2019) it is mostly about free ration. On politics of memory, he complained that "we Dalits do not know about our icons as most of our icons are not part of school and college curriculum." Lastly, he asked me to look into how in the current syllabus the UP government has changed the parent's name of Sant Ravidas to appropriate Ravidas's identity as an upper caste and further stated that "upper caste, ruling elites and their media advertises any event related to their icons and legends whereas the same is not true for icons of our caste."

The insights from the two interviews above underscore a point also highlighted by psychologist James Wertsch, who notes that the mind is "something that 'extends beyond the skin' in at least two senses: it is often socially distributed, and it is connected to the notion of mediation" (Wertsch 1991: 14). While books, statues, and other artifacts influence and mediates the way individuals remember, the above interviews suggest that the mind also reflects on memories that extend beyond an individual's skin. As C.V. Singh observes in the placement of Buddha's statue in Mathura and Abhishek notes in changing the name of Sant Ravidas's parents. Moreover, it can be argued that they are not only recognizing memory's presence beyond the skin but also discerning the political intentions behind appropriation.

One of the respondents, Deepak (name changed), who works as a driver of a goods delivery vehicle in his mid-30s said that he "recently placed a graphic image of Buddha and Ambedkar on the windshield of his vehicle—of the company—to celebrate Buddha and Ambedkar Jayanti. Few days later, he found that somebody had deliberately scratched and removed it from vehicle." Further, he shared that at his current workplace most people belong to Thakur and Brahman caste and, whenever he "wants to say anything about politics and society or about Dalit icons in informal discussion during lunch period he has to hold back his opinion." On asking if he is

aware of icons belonging to Dalit communities, he stated: "I know a lot of them but cannot celebrate or discuss them in my workspace, as my seniors discuss their upper caste hero, I must agree with them. If I discuss about Dalit icons and thinkers, then they (seniors) might not like it and will remove me from the job." In this context, anthropologist Paul Connerton's ideas can help us in explaining the dynamics between memory, authority, caste and power.

Connerton (1989) argued that in everyday functioning of the human body "choreography of authority is expressed" in what he explains as the "mnemonics of the body", wherein memory is ingrained in bodily practices and not in materials such as books, flags, movies etc., (p. 74). In the above situation the fact that one cannot remember the way one wants because of caste hierarchy and conflict inherent in the commemoration of upper caste and Dalit icons, posits that authority and its choreography in formal space is reproduced in remembering as well. In other words, how an individual presents themselves publicly, the use of body language, where they speak and where they remain silent can be examined through—to rephrase Connerton—choreography of caste hierarchy and mnemonics of caste body. Put simply, in the Indian context, choreography of authority and mnemonics of the body in everyday experience are determined by the caste system as evident from Deepak's experience.

Another respondent, Rambabu, in his early 50s claimed that "Dalit people get carried away when RSS and missionaries arrive because their basic needs are still unfulfilled. Wherever there is an organisation promising them money or any other support, people get carried away. Our society has been kept so backward that people turn to opportunity wherever they find it." Most importantly, he commented that "even the OBC community needs to worship their ancestors, as they are carrying the burden of other people's ancestors/icons on their backs." With his assertive approach he counterquestioned me: "Who was Jyotiba Phule?" and he himself answered "He was from Maali caste and an OBC, was he an SC? Who is King Ashoka? Who is Lord Buddha?" and repeatedly suggested that "Dalits are still celebrating their icons and legends in whatever possible ways, but it is the OBCs which have left their icon and are running after upper caste icons." To understand Rambabu's viewpoint in the context of the politics of memory through Foucault, it can be comprehended more effectively. In other contexts, Michel Foucault states "memory is actually a very important factor in struggle, if one controls people's memory, one controls their dynamism. And one also controls their experience, their knowledge of previous struggles" (1975: 25–27). An example of this in case of OBCs is evident in Lucia Michelutti's (2008) work which provides a detailed account of the transformation under the process of 'Yadavisation' in Mathura.

Just as Rambabu suggests that the Dalit community is still striving to preserve its memory, the OBC community has, in contrast, lost its memory by getting absorbed into the memories of other communities. One significant reason for this is the RSS-BJP's 'memory schemata' (Erll 2011a) imposed on OBCs since the 1990s, which necessitates a thorough discussion. It is agreed among scholars of memory studies that

most of us rely on certain methods and processes to remember our past experiences. The concept of 'models of remembrance' (Rigney 2005) has been used to describe this process. According to these scholars, the scarcity of memory schemata results in individuals copying and recycling methods of remembering from each other. For further insights on 'scarcity' and 'recycling,' refer to Rigney (2005). Also, it is not that every story, myth and epic are remembered but only those stories which carry the memory, which has the capability to procreate itself are most remembered (Rigney 2008).

In addition, most of the participants during discussions mentioned that they were aware of icons such as Ram, Krishna, Shiva. I encountered a gathering of high school students, predominantly in the 12th grade, and inquired about their experience of attending Ambedkar's birth anniversary in Lucknow. Clad in their school uniforms, each provided distinct responses, ranging from viewing it as a chance to visit Lucknow and witness the capital to gaining insights into legendary figures whose statues grace the park. When queried about whether they observed any disparities in the celebration of icons from upper castes compared to those from their own community, they unanimously concurred. One of them stated that "upper caste Hindutva icons will take our society back in time, whereas icons such as Dr. Ambedkar and others from Dalit's anti-caste movement can fulfil future aspirations and make Indian society progressive." As in this case and mentioned by different respondents, they are aware of the ongoing RSS-BJP's 'memory schemata', therefore, giving all the credit to memory mobilization strategy of political party's equality reflects the failure to recognize the struggle for mnemonic justice. Unacknowledging the spirit of the marginalized community's increasing strive to assert the mnemonic importance—as evident in interviews—to overcome intergroup inequality and attain mnemonic equality is where future research should focus on.

To summarize, the mnemonic lenses, model of remembrance or schemata applied by Dalits are different. Furthermore, the mnemonic transitivity of privileged upper-caste groups—particularly Brahmin, Kshatriya, and Vaishya communities—facilitates the broad dissemination of their mnemonic values. This makes it more convenient to mnemonically 'sanitize,' 'decapitate,' or dilute the memory of historically marginalized castes within the caste system. However, what favors Dalits is that the consolidation of memory is more organic and extends 'beyond mind and skin' in everyday lived experience. The longstanding struggle against discriminations enriches the mnemonic traditions of Dalits and makes mnemonic culture of Dalits capable of challenging dominant traditions.

The Politics Underlying Unequal Mnemonic Structure

In political science literature, memory as a tool of political mobilization has been discussed as a process including two steps. As explained by political scientists David Myer Temin and Adam Dahl, "(t)he first step involves acknowledging the existence of past injustices as well as their causal connection to the present. The second step, in turn, involves paying attention to the narrative practices by which past injustices are

given collective meaning" (Temin & Dahl 2017). In the Indian context, of these two steps, the first step is yet to be accomplished as recognition of caste-based atrocities and enduring intergroup inequality among different castes is slowly emerging in public discourse.

To look at the second step, as noted by Temin and Dahl, what is most important for memory politics is the 'mnemonic tradition' in which past injustices are given a collective meaning. In RSS-BJP's memory schemata the marginalized memory has been reimagined; however, the RSS-BJP memory schemata is dominated by an upper-caste worldview which, although it strategically accommodates OBCs and Dalit icons, it fails to overcome intergroup inequality persisting in mnemonic hierarchy among icons and legends of various castes. To elaborate, previously, scholars have also noted how local myths, cultural practices, and stories were appropriated to aggregate a pan-Hindutva identity in north-east of India by RSS-BJP as well (Kanungo 2011). Daniela Berti's research shows how organizations within RSS have "tried to propogate its project on history throughout the national territory by creating 'local units' at province, state, and district level" (2006: 16).[16] On mnemonic traditions of Dalits, scholars have observed how the Dalit mnemonic tradition articulates symbols, myths, epics, and other intangible sources of political mobilization (Jaoul 2006, 2008, 2018; Krishna 2022; A. Lee 2019; Singh 2022; Tiwari 2001, 2004, 2009, 2021). Jaoul's research on the role of statues, events, and method of commemorating Dalit icons since 1990s tells us that the commemoration as an act of remembering is integral to the Dalit movement in UP (2006, 2008, 2018). In her research focused on "Azamgarh, Ballia, Ghazipur, Gorakhpur, and Varanasi districts of eastern Uttar Pradesh," Sangita Krishna asserts that marginalized communities resort to inventing their past as a means to express themselves and establish their presence. This process goes beyond creating a "counter-hegemonic imagination"; it involves negotiating an alternative form of power or authority where the ideals of social justice are transformed into reality (Krishna 2022: 2).

Shilp Shikha Singh in her work notes that "Sangh (RSS) and its affiliates…(are) tweaking the cultural politics of Bahujan mobilization" (2022: 2) In examining the "cultural interventions" by the BJP, Singh suggests that the Sangh and BJP "have effectively manipulated and accommodated even spontaneous cultural changes into their fold" (2022: 3). Consequently, various traditions initiated by individuals or groups without any inherent connection to the BJP, the Sangh, or its affiliates were subsequently utilized by the BJP and its associates to garner support from communities. With this, it would not be incorrect to argue that the existing caste system itself has a mnemonic hierarchy. The caste system possesses its own memory schema, whereby not only memory but also its formation and consolidation are hierarchized according to caste grades. The possibility to remove this hierarchy without dismantling the caste system is bound to reproduce mnemonic inequality. In other words, and to summarize

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[16]Daniela Berti noted that "the absence of any large-scale research programme on the study of regional culture has lent more space to a Hindutva organisation to impose their presence in the intellectual milieu" (Berti 2011: 15).

if the caste system exists, memories are not just about memory of caste but constitute a caste of memory as well.

In other words, the current strategy employed by BJP and RSS to politically engage various caste communities has its own limitation, as once a community reaches a certain stage, it will assert its share and strength. At that point, the existing strategy will reach a saturation point where the community will seek its own political ground and not foster the political growth of BJP and RSS. Despite this, the overarching challenges for Dalits mnemonic tradition will remain because mnemonic battles in India are embedded in caste hierarchy. Before concluding the article, I will highlight the challenges that exist by default due to the fixed hierarchy in the caste system.

The Politics and Promise of Memory

For caste groups positioned lower in the hierarchy of the varna-based caste structure, 'counter-memory' serves as a means of contesting upper-caste hegemony. In contrast, for upper castes, memory functions as a source for reproducing and sustaining privilege. Despite this dynamic, memory is often considered inherent and naturalized, remaining largely unexamined for its political significance. To advance an example of how memory is not apolitical, I will cite an excerpt from a 2021 interview I conducted with a functionary of ABISY[17] (Akhil Bhartiya Itihas Sankalan Yojna), explaining the systematic disadvantages created by the existing caste hierarchy and those wielding power and privilege derived from mnemonic injustice. In the interview, I asked the ABISY functionary if another museum project (in context of a new museum being inaugurated) is a wise decision by the government given the current economic situation in the country after Covid-19. In response, he drew four parallels but unequal lines on a piece of paper. Against the longest one he wrote Congress and against the second longest he wrote BJP and then asked me: "How would you draw a bigger legacy of your regime if there already exist Congress's and others longer legacy (the bigger line)?" to which I said I have no clue and then he answered: "RSS in general and present government in particular want to wipe-out the lines (read legacy) drawn by the past governments and organizations from people's *memory* (emphasis mine), and the only way to do that is to draw RSS-BJP's a bigger line by accommodating everyone in which BJP-RSS are the dominant force. This museum is a part of that bigger line."[18] Therefore, it becomes apparent that the endeavor to draw a longer line will further augment the Hindu ideology that the RSS and affiliated organizations have traditionally espoused as paramount.

As Anastasio et al. (2012) in their book explain 'three in one' model suggested and discussed at the beginning, the memory consolidation process involves a 'buffer,' a 'relater,' and a 'generalizer' located in an entity. If insights of existing and above mentioned works on UP's identity-based mobilization of memory and discussion are

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[17]ABISY is an RSS-affiliated organization with state-wise bodies. The one I interacted with is the Delhi chapter, and the anonymity of identity is maintained based on consent.

[18]This section is a translation of an unstructured interview in Hindi in July 2021 by the author with a functionary of ABISY.

to be fused in the Anastasio et al. model then caste identity is the 'entity' within which buffering of collective memory takes place, whereas the role of 'relaters' is played by political parties and their affiliated organizations in deciding the relationships between buffered memories of various caste groups and stored in the 'generalizer' or simply in the community domain. The functioning of the 'generalizer' mechanism is contingent on the ruling regime. Primarily, it has largely aligned with the framework described by Joel Lee (2021) in his work, which outlines the concept of "Hindu majoritarian inclusion" (p. 79). However, what distinguishes Dalits' memory is that their legends and icons stand strong in their claim of 'counter-memory' against the generalizer project of 'Hindu majoritarian inclusion.'

The significance and influence of icons in the Dalit counter-memory movement is apparent. For instance, present-day Dalits may not have directly witnessed Dr. Ambedkar's struggle against drinking water restrictions in Mahad Chavdar Satyagraha, Maharashtra. However, existing in a different spatial and temporal context, they continue to mobilize the memory of Dr. Ambedkar's struggle, along with that of many anti-caste thinkers, activists, and politicians. This contributes to the consolidation of a 'mnemonic consensus' among Dalits, presenting challenges to the prevailing upper-caste 'generalizer' mechanism aimed at Hindu consolidation. Further, within Dalits, it is also true that sub-castes might have a distinct memory specific to their geographical locations and local dynamics not only in UP but across the country. Yet, it is equally true that there is a broad mnemonic consensus in the anti-caste struggle and its mnemonic politics which consolidates into a distinct collective declarative memory of the Dalits different from the memory of other caste groups in the mnemonics structured of the caste system. Furthermore, based on above-mentioned scholarly works and insights from the field interview, it can be argued that, despite the efforts of various 'relaters' such as the RSS and others to 'co-opt,' 'appropriate,' and 'dilute' the memory of different sub-castes within Dalits for political advantage, the RSS-BJP memory schema lacks a coherent system to fulfil the political and social aspirations of Dalits in an absolute political sense in the long run.

Conclusion

In the generic description of Indian society, the question of memory is about a passive recollection of the past. However, this passive view of memory lacks the capacity to explain injustice, prejudice, and discrimination that memory practices based on the traditional hierarchical caste system reinforce. Like racial discrimination, the caste system too wrongfully discriminates against those considered lower castes by birth and systematically advances privilege for those considered upper caste in the casteist hierarchical system. The underlying caste dynamic in the established collective memory of upper castes is considered as given and naturalized, while treating mnemonic practices of lower castes as abnormal. Because of this unjust hierarchical system, the oppressor community draws from their preserved collective memory, which is dominant, stable, and popular whereas the marginalized groups struggle and

seek to draw from their impoverished but labile collective memory. Therefore, upper-caste memory's material, normative and affective dimension shapes and reinforces the collective memory. Occasional celebrations by organizations upholding upper-caste mnemonic values have tried to honor Dalits and OBC icons by appropriation, however, the pre-existing hierarchy of caste icons and mnemonic traditions still prioritizes those of the upper castes. Recently, in response to the epistemological, material, and underlying normative force of upper-caste mnemonic tradition, lower castes have developed a counter-memory tradition.

Lastly, discussing memory, social justice, and its politics is a challenging task, especially when expressing these ideas in limited words. This research has its shortcomings, and the most crucial one is arriving at a conclusion related to collective memory while considering individual memory. Additionally, the attempt to explore dimensions related to memory through the lens of heterophenomenology is inherently constrained. Despite this, there are contextual questions related to memory that should be addressed in psychology, political science, and other disciplines, ensuring that memory is perceived not as an end but is examined as means too. As I attempt to fill the gap in understanding the systematic bias reproduced within the caste system, more studies are required that can help us to better comprehend caste-related dimensions inherent in the formation of memories to gain a meaningful understanding of the caste system.

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Caste and Colourism: Analysing Social Meanings of Skin Colour in Dalit and Savarna Discourses

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Abstract

We know little about how skin colour is used to discriminate and dehumanise Dalits in everyday language. Thus, the construction of fairness and darkness of skin colour in savarna perception and the qualities attributed need to be understood through the lens of caste identities. Drawing on an ethnographic study in Nallapadu Palle Scheduled Caste Colony in Andhra Pradesh, this article aims to understand how various qualities are attributed to the skin and colour of Dalits and savarnas using Qualia, linguistic registers and indexicalities. The Telugu linguistic forms *"Nalupu"* (Dark) and "*Telupu*" (Fair), when used in registers, are analysed to understand the qualities indexed with these forms. It is essential to examine the process of caste manifestation in language through colour, which indexes several qualities through a specific linguistic form, varying its social meaning when attributed to a savarna and a Dalit. The study found that the social meanings of *Nalupu* and *Telupu* used in everyday conversations differed for savarnas and Dalits. When spoken in the context of Dalits in Palle, it indexed qualities to discriminate and re-establish caste. It is argued that these attributes lead to the creation of caste hierarchies. The article calls for examining the connection between colourism and caste discrimination further.

Keywords

Dalits, caste, qualia, linguistic registers, skin colour, colourism in India

Introduction

In the Telugu everyday language, one can notice that the word "*Chandala*", which is a community that has traditionally been assigned the occupation of dealing with the disposal of corpses, is used to mean "disgusting/ugly". It is so deeply assimilated

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into the language that most people do not realise the deep-rooted casteist origin of the term and use it in the context of undesirable. Rani (2018) explains how caste, through the medium of language, demonises and dehumanises Dalits: "Caste Hindus have humiliated Dalits with individual caste names such as Pallars, Paraiyars, Sakkiliars and some common names such as Dasa, Rakshasa, Asura, Avarna, Panchama, Chandalas, Untouchables and Harijans". The portrayal of Dalits as "less or no human" through the social myths associated with them often manifests itself through language, psyche and popular culture. Normalised Malayalam utterances like "*'Poyi kullikku, parayachi polle undu'* ('Go take a shower, you look like Paraya girl) and *'ayyo- ithu Pella karippu aanu'* (Oh no- this is Pulaya Black')" reflect these portrayals (Geetha 2022). Not only through the casteist slurs but as Das (2021) writes, the expressions *"You dress so well, you don't look like Dalit"… "I could never imagine you are Dalit"*, etc., are also casteist and discriminatory in nature. Jogdand (2023) shows how these comments constrain Dalits to an upper-caste[1] gaze, leading to their humiliation. It is important to ask oneself what stereotypical expectation or casteist associations one reproduces through this language. Do these statements associate Dalits with being dark, ugly, and dirty? If so, the process of attributing qualities to Dalit skin and colour in everyday language to reinforce caste needs to be analysed to understand the underpinning savarna[1] perception.

Colourism within the context of caste plays a crucial role in discriminating against Dalits. Feminist author Alice Walker defines colourism as prejudicial or preferential treatment of individuals from the same racial group based on their skin colour (Norwood 2015). Colour as an attribute is routinely employed to assess an individual's worth in Indian society. While Dalit bodies are read and judged in every sphere of life, it is a critical aspect through which they are stigmatised. Geetha (2022) has put this eloquently:

> "We are all guilty of reading the bodies of the people we meet, especially in the context of their skin colour. We decide the degree of their attractiveness, innocence, status, power, hygiene, and criminality from the tinction of their skin".

There is a clear impact of colour in the expression of caste dynamics in both private settings, like marriages, where darker-skinned people often face rejection and public spaces, like cinemas, where depictions of Dalits tend to promote caste-based preconceptions by showing them with darker complexions, unhygienic, less groomed looks, and filthy. Colour plays a significant role in establishing and maintaining social stratification in these cultural and social contexts and is read and expressed through language. Colour semiotics look at the psychological perception of colour as it is manifested in language and how the sensation influences the meaning of signs that an observer feels when they see the colour of those signs, influencing thought. The stereotypical associations of those mentioned above and other qualities with colour

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[1]The term savarna refers to the privileged caste-communities in the Hindu social order.

can be understood through the semiotics of colour, as the association of meanings are conveyed through colour as a sign. The Dalits, who are at the bottom of the hierarchy, their skin, colour and culture are termed impure by savarnas. This article tries to link speech, experience, and perception to understand how qualities are associated with skin and colour and how they are manifested in the savarna language or speech through Dalit experiences of caste.

The article is organised into four main sections. The first section of this article addresses the ongoing discussion regarding caste and colourism. It emphasises why it is essential to explore the complexities of colourism within the caste system using psychological and linguistic perspectives. The second section discusses the concepts of linguistic registers, indexicalities, and qualia. These conceptual frameworks serve as analytical tools for understanding the experiences of Dalits in the framework of caste, with a particular focus on colourism. The third section of the article shifts its attention to the crucial elements of the study area, author positionality, and research methodology. The last and final section provides a thorough analysis of the linguistic processes of attributing qualities to skin colour that have a complex relationship with caste. This part examines the attribution of specific qualities to fair and dark skin within both the Dalit and savarna communities to understand the deep-rooted casteist ideologies that contribute to the perpetuation of caste-based social hierarchy.

Fair and Beautiful in Opposition to Dark and Ugly

An individual's skin tone is a noticeable physical characteristic that others immediately observe throughout social encounters and utilise to make judgements (Maddox & Gray 2002). In his essay "Dating like a Savarna", Kisana (2023) writes that "Caste is not just a secret language of aesthetics; it is also the code to classify bodies as legitimate or illegitimate". The Dalit skin is often seen as impure and polluting and perceived as undesirable in a casteist society. Growing up, my mother always used to say, "You and your dad are fair; people will think you are brahmins, you will not face casteism like me." My mother, who has a dark complexion, experienced significant prejudice and discrimination in society, which regards fairness as beautiful. She wanted to marry my father to protect her children from the trauma of being a Dalit with a dark complexion. This has become deeply rooted in me, and I thought being fair is the key to earning love, opportunities, and, most importantly, respect. However, this perception of my fairness by my family was short-lived, as the savarna world did not share the same view. I hated myself for not being able to look fair and flawless like my savarna classmates; for them, I was dark, and it was visible and evident in me, which made them understand that I was not one among them. Indian society is obsessed with fair skin, which fits the brahmanical standards of beauty, employing skin tone as a marker of caste. Dark skin is seen as an indicator of caste and inferiority (Philips 2004). There is a debate on caste and colour, and research shows that the caste system's social structure significantly impacts skin pigmentation. Ayyar & Khandare (2013) discuss

the historical interplay of colourism, the caste system, and economic status in Indian society. Historically, oppressed castes were poor and uneducated; they were forced to do manual labour, mostly outdoors in the sun. However, oppressor castes had more income and education and avoided outside occupations, which eventually led to the association of dark skin with oppressed castes and fair skin with oppressor castes (see Zhao et al. 2023). A Genotype-phenotype-based study with various caste groups in North India also amply demonstrates the profound impact of rigid marriage customs and multi-layered endogamy, contributing to the variation in skin tone (Mishra et al. 2017). This gives us an insight into the persisting influence of historical practices like the caste system and contemporary practices like the inclination towards fair skin, thereby implicating an implicit caste-related dimension within prevailing aesthetic standards.

Skin colour is an important dimension that affects decision-making in Indian matrimony. The marriage advertisements, newspapers and preferences clearly show a social and cultural inclination towards fair skin while simultaneously displaying discriminating attitudes towards darker skin tones (Ayyar & Khandare 2013). However, even a fair Dalit undergoes caste-based discrimination, bringing out caste as a complex web of coded qualities. Gidla (2018) points out that caste is not a simplistic construct to understand just by looking at one's skin colour. It is complex, and savarna lives represent a constructed set of qualities termed pure by themselves when associated with savarna bodies. I always used to ask myself, "If fairness is the marker of savarnas, why is a dark brahmin still seen with respect and a fair Dalit not?". This question has led me to this journey to understand how savarnas perceive fairness and darkness on Dalit and savarna bodies as Dalits experience them. It emphasises the process of qualities attribution to skin colour on Dalits and savarnas through language and argues that it leads to the creation of hierarchies, thus re-establishing caste.

Caste is a social and psychological construct that fundamentally originated and evolved in the savarna mind (Ambedkar 1936). It is the deciding factor in South Asian society, and the caste system has been moulded to the benefit of savarna and exploitation of avarna. Jogdand (2023) shows how savarnas stereotypically portray and label Dalits to discriminate against them irrespective of how they look physically. As Gorur and Forscher (2023) discussed, stereotyping occurs when people use characteristics that are visible to establish their initial views of others, but caste is something that cannot be just seen. The conventional tests of bias that employ visual stimuli are insufficient to research casteism as caste is constructed in relation to other markers to form an image of caste as it is perceived. Language then becomes crucial for understanding caste-related biases. Applying psychological and linguistic lenses, this article uses the concepts of qualia, linguistic registers and indexicalities to understand the process of attributing qualities to Dalit skin and savarna skin to make caste concrete as it is perceived and experienced as a lived reality. This lens is essential as it allows one to understand how qualities are associated and perceived by savarnas and experienced by Dalits, centring caste as the foundation to construct meaning out of language and Dalit experiences in Nallapadu.

Caste Through Linguistic and Visual Perception

Experiencing caste is a complex phenomenon often manifested in the savarna language and perceptions; hence, it needs to be deconstructed by analysing the association of the word with the several qualities and images as it is perceived. This analysis of language provides a detailed understanding of how colourism is ingrained in linguistic expressions and reproduces caste hierarchy. Linguistic registers, which is the cultural model of speech, linking speech to the typification of the speaker, the relationship of the speaker to that of the listener and the people involved and the conduct (Agha 2006) is significant to understanding the contextual meanings of speech. This article will help us look at how these registers vary in social meanings as they get associated as qualities with Dalit and savarna skin. The social meanings of these qualities are understood through the concept of Indexicalization, which is crucial to my study as it is the process whereby signs acquire social indexicalities (Jaffe 2016). Indexicality acts as a basis for understanding speech and stereotypes. It helps to understand the relationship between linguistic forms and conventional images, further leading to the social meanings associated with them (Jaffe 2016). Keisling (2009) says it is context-creating and context-sensitive. The process of indexicalization is complex, and one linguistic form can have levels or orders of indexes and are projected from one order to the other order (Silverstein 2003). Indexes appear as contiguity to the objects and point them to something within a framework. Judith Irvine and Susan Gal (2000) say that contrasting registers each index a different persona, where the similarities are constructed in the context of differentiation (Gal 2016). Registers, which seem like indexes, can also act as icons in the process of rhematization (Gal 2016). Susan Gal says that using a lexicon of sensual attributes, speakers identify the opposing poles in axis differentiation as speech can be experienced ontologically to various phenomena like food or clothing (Gal 2016). Through this, it is possible to examine how a phenomenon such as caste can be indexed through the speech registers of savarnas, further pointing to different qualities for Dalits and savarnas.

The qualities, like colour, roughness, dirt, filthiness, and pollution, are often associated with Dalits in speech. Hence, it becomes essential to understand how these are attributed through the concept of qualia, which are the perceptions or experiences of sensual elements like visual aspects of colours and textures, sense of hearing like sounds, and sense of touch and experiencing feelings such as anger, anxiety and other emotions (Chumley & Harkness 2013; Naidu 2018). The Dalits, who are at the bottom of the caste hierarchy, their appearance, habits and way of life are termed impure, dirty, etc., and these are manifested in the savarna language or speech, which becomes a means of discrimination against the Dalits. Through this lens of experiencing the abstract qualities through senses, the anthropological theory, Harkness and Chumley use qualia to methodologically discuss how qualities are experienced as a reality of socially and culturally constructed life (Chumley & Harkness 2013). This can be extended to understand the qualities associated with Dalit fairness, Dalit darkness, savarna fairness, and savarna darkness to experientially understand caste through the

sense of sight. While these qualities, real-life objects or linguistic forms themselves do not possess caste, they are associated with specific practices of Dalits to perpetuate caste. These practices or objects then serve as "quali signs", which are signs to experience abstract qualities (Gal 2016). This association often leads to discrimination in the context of my study. In addition, exploring some research gaps in the earlier literature encouraged me to view caste from the lens of qualitative experience, perception and language. Qualia, in my study, has become one of the interesting means of concretising the experience of caste.

Nancy Munn (1986) placed a strong emphasis on the connection between qualities and value. One of Munn's most important findings from her ethnographic work in Gawa, an island in Papua New Guinea, is that a significant cultural quality like lightness, which is "*gagaabala*" in the Gawan language, is felt through a variety of sensory objects, such as the slippery and slime nature of the fish, wet quality and expanse of the water in the sea or the fluttering wings of the birds and gives many such examples for the same quality. Nancy Munn analysed the qualitative experience, and her analysis was based on the concept of iconicity explained by Pierce, which states that some qualities can connect objects with people as they are placed similarly. This resemblance makes the person iconic to the object and quality, which is rhematization (Gal 2016). Specific qualia allow for the perception and knowledge of the abstract nature of qualities. Qualia refers to some individual or group for some quality in some or the other means or capacity and represents a quali sign (Chumley & Harkness 2013). These signs of qualia or quali sign are conventionalised. This nature of becoming conventional enables social actors to identify specific individuals (and objects) as having specific qualities.

In a study, Harkness (2013) shows how the relatively "soft" or "hard" gustatory qualities of Korean soju serve as the foundation for more comprehensive frameworks of sensation and sociality. Just as they are connected to qualic experiences, hierarchies and orders are symbolic through indexing and figuratively, i.e. iconically related to the body. Metaphors using food's qualities also become prominent when describing a group of people. Susan Gal examined what is referred to as the qualia of conversation through food and pastry in a town in Hungary, which framed the narratives examining people's behaviour before and during World War II (Chumley & Harkness 2013). These studies show how people use memories of olfactory experience embedded in socio-cultural inequalities to categorise a community by how the smell of leather, which, more so than the smell of the leather itself, is the smell of the chemicals used to treat leather sensed and stays in the nose. In his study of interpersonal interactions in Russia, Lemon demonstrates how qualities play a role in society's structure and the nature of sociality concerning the significance of a community's qualitative experiences (Chumley & Harkness 2013).

Furthermore, qualia are pragmatic indexes that manifest remarkably in human behaviour as sensual qualities (Harkness 2015). Qualia are socio-cultural events of "qualic" orientation and evaluation rather than just subjective mental experiences, and Pierce's "Semiotic trichotomies" (1955) is a seminal work for the understanding

of qualia. He claims that quality is a conventional and consequently experienceable form of abstract qualities. (Gal 2016). Quale, which is singular for qualia, is a Latin word that forms the base of the theory of qualia. Sensations are qualia's culturally conceptualised channels. In this philosophical tradition, "quality" and "property" refer to the physical characteristics of things in the world. Qualia have cultural value, whether good or bad.

The semiotic idea of qualia is helpful for anthropologists studying issues with the senses, embodiment, and aesthetics. Qualia is expressed through linguistic forms as a quali sign to perceive the sensory realms. This can be a means to understand linguistic registers as they are perceived to display the attribute of the stereotyped speaker (Gal 2016). Pierce also studied sign relations, where a sign provokes hypotheses of what it stands for, which links the assumed sign with the object (Gal 2016). However, not the linguistic form which expresses, nor the object pointed to, but the attributed qualities act as a Quali sign. Sense of sight is experienced through real-life things concretely with the help of quali signs, and it plays a crucial role in indexing caste via language. This study aims to understand the manifestation of caste in the language and perceptions of the savarnas by analysing the concepts of qualia, indexicalization, and linguistic registers. Qualia explores the experience of caste through visual sense and perception of colour, which are employed to discriminate against Dalits. Further, by analysing the Dalit experiences of caste and colourism, the research aims to elucidate the casteist association between words and qualities using registers and the concept of indexicality to demonstrate how linguistic expressions reinforce caste hierarchies.

Ethnographic Exploration in Nallapadu, Guntur, Andhra Pradesh

We discussed how the linguistic construction of caste and skin colour in savarna perception through Dalit experiences of caste unveils the lived realities of Dalits and the oppressive caste system. To understand this more clearly, I discuss parts of an ethnographic study I conducted in December 2022 in Nallapadu Palle Scheduled Caste Colony (henceforth *Palle*, a Telugu term used by locals for segregated space in Nallapadu where Dalit families live) situated 3 km. inside the main centre in Nallapadu, Guntur district of Andhra Pradesh. The main centre is densely populated towards either side of the Hyderabad National Highway with all the facilities like markets, worship places, groceries, shops, Sachivalayam offices, banks and mart. However, Palle is excluded from the centre, and the connecting road is kaccha road (mud or dirt road), with fields on either side and Nallapadu railway station acting as a border towards the North. Nallapadu Palle merged with the municipal corporation in 2012 and is home to two prominent Dalit communities in Andhra Pradesh, Mala and Madiga, which comprise 27.26 per cent of the population in Nallapadu, according to 2011 census data. Upper castes such as brahmin, kamma and reddys also stay in the Nallapadu palle, who are Hindus. Guntur district, also known as the hub of education among locals, has seen some brutal massacres of Dalits, like the Tsunduru massacre in 1991. Andhra Pradesh recorded the highest crime cases against scheduled castes in

South India in 2021(NCBI). Hence, it was essential to understand how skin colour and caste function in these Telugu spaces. Even now, families from the Mala community of the Palle work in the savarna fields, and the work is passed on to them by their grandparents and parents. The Madiga population here to date lives in poverty and struggles to make a living. Many Dalits here are auto drivers, wine shop cleaners, lorry drivers, sanitation workers and hardworking daily wage labourers. I was introduced to my study area by Daavidhu, a Mala auto driver I met through mutual connections between my family and his family back in 2014, and he then introduced me to other interested people. Even though there was no monetary compensation, people came forward to contribute to this study.

I established good relationships with my interlocutors because of my positionality as a Telugu Dalit woman born into a Hindu Dalit family who attends church. The majority of the Dalits in this Palle are Hindu Scheduled Castes on paper but Christians by faith and believe that the love of God is the liberation from all miseries and hatred like casteism. In the homes of Hindu Dalits who worship Hindu deities, local deities' photos, such as *Poleramma*, *Gantalamma*, *Maredamma*, and *Puttalamma*, were seen. With the connections I made earlier in life and built during my previous visits to the study area and snowball sampling, I conducted qualitative interviews with 9 Dalits belonging to Mala (5) and Madiga (4) who were residents of the Palle and were above 18 years old. The savarnas in Palle primarily worship Shiva, Hanuman, Krishna and other local deities, which are savarna deities. There was an equal proportion of males and females, and this article uses the knowledge and experiences shared by the Dalit interlocutors to understand the savarna perception through the caste experiences of Dalits. As I re-introduced myself and asked them to share about themselves, their occupation, and how many years they had been living in the Palle, my interlocutors talked about their socio-economic conditions and the conditions of their physical and social geography. I asked open-ended questions to allow more sharing of narratives and counter-narratives. Introductory questions like "Can you share your experiences of growing up in Palle?" and "Can you describe the social and cultural environment in your community and "Other" community?" were asked to start the conversation, and questions like "How do you see yourself and how others see your identity?", "How does caste influence day-to-day interactions in Palle?" "Can you share specific events where you have experienced, observed or seen caste-based discrimination?" were used as guiding questions of the discussion. Each interview ranged from one and a half hours to two hours and was mostly semi-structured and unstructured, as the experiences of caste are very personal and emotional. Consent was taken before the phone recording of the interview to further hand transcribe.

I wanted my study's interlocutors to take the lead and tell me their understanding and feelings about casteism and colourism. Hence, I used qualitative data collection methods like semi-structured and unstructured interviews and participant observation, which helped me get a holistic view of society (Jodhka 1998). I have not used any online software or AI tools to transcribe or conduct thematic analysis to protect my interlocutors' privacy and security. Especially for the qualitative methods, staying in

the study area for a long time is required to build rapport, observe in-depth for a more extended period, and establish oneself as trustworthy. Moreover, the experiences of caste for the marginalised are often disturbing. During these interviews, my Dalit interlocutors were often emotional, as these experiences are integral to the community. Because of my identity, they were comfortable crying and sharing the trauma of caste with me. As I had questions, they also had questions for me, and this approach of sharing and learning rather than "noting down the data" helped me establish myself as a "community member" more than a researcher. Below, I discuss some critical insights developed through this fieldwork. This is primarily a thick description of my analysis and understanding.

The Brahmanical Standards of Beauty in the Palle: Fair Skin of Savarna vs Fair Skin of Madiga

Colour discrimination against Dalits can be seen in savarna speech and their jokes in the Telugu language. "The Dalits are referred to as *Karri mandha"* (dark flock), said Bhaskar, a farm labourer working in a reddy field. Be it the fair or the dark Dalits in the Palle, everyone admitted skin tone to be one attribute through which caste is experienced every day. A dark Dalit became a conventional image of a lower caste identity. Varna, a term from Sanskrit that refers to the societal division of labour and qualities, is frequently translated as "category" or "class." However, it can also be explained as "colour" as an innate quality or attribute (Ayyar & Khandare 2013). Many Dalits feel discriminated against based on their appearance and colour. Skin colour is one attribute that needs to be understood through the lens of caste identities, as dark skin points out the inferior social status, thus pointing to a lower caste identity leading to discrimination (Ayyar & Khandare 2013).

Most of the Dalit interlocutors complained and narrated incidents when they were easily identified through their appearance, especially the colour of their skin and were called out and ridiculed. The complexion of the Dalits, in contrast to the complexion of a savarnas whose fair skin is seen as pure, is seen as dirty and impure. This contrast and comparison between a bundle of qualities, attributes or speech through a single principle of contrast (for example, the distinction of fair vs dark with the principle of colour is known as the axis of differentiation (Irvine 2022). From eating practices to everyday life, the savarnas attribute qualities that are seen as filthy when used for a Dalit on an axis of differentiation. Without the idea of purity, an impurity cannot exist, and the savarna language, practices and lifestyle, everything has been put on the top tier of the caste hierarchy.

From a Mala perspective, fairness in a broader sense is more appealing and termed pure, which passes quickly in society without many hustles. A fair Dalit can have the edge over a dark Dalit and easily enter the elite spaces that are not open for the Dalits. However, it does not mean that a fair Dalit does not get discriminated as skin colour is one attribute among the bundle of qualities that lead to discrimination.

There is an understanding of the difference between the fairness of savarnas and Dalits in the Palle. Dalits said that the savarnas and the Dalits themselves could recognise the markers of a fair Dalit and a fair savarna, as it appears in speech, and they are socialised in that manner. In the Palle, there are fair-skinned Madigas as well as dark-skinned Madigas and Malas. Gidla writes, "Everyone thinks all untouchables are dark, but many of them, especially Madigas, are as light skinned as brahmins" (Gidla 2018: 83). Skin tone is one attribute through which Malas distinguish themselves from the Madigas and the savarnas. When asked about the idea of a brahmin, all the Dalits' conceptions had the image of pure artistic fairness for a brahmin. To understand this specific attribute of the fairness of a brahmin, it is essential to understand Pierce's trichotomies. Fairness can only be experienced when the abstract quality of fairness occurs in real-time and through conventional objects (Gal 2016). Hence, it is essential to analyse the quality of artistic pure skin tone and its association with a conventional object or quali sign occurring through qualia. Talking about the complexion of savarna women (brahmins and reddys), Ruthu and Vasanthamma said:

> "*Vallu pichi Telupu kaadhu Maadigolla la*" meaning they look different than the Madhigas, whose whiteness is not good.

> "*Kala untadi mohamlo, mahalakshmi kala antaru vallu*", meaning the savarna women glow in their faces; they call it the goddess Mahalakshmi's glow.

Here, one can see that the fairness of the Madigas is also differentiated from the savarnas through what Ruthu and Vasanthamma are trying to say. Though Madigas are fair, she says this fairness is not seen as equal to savarna fairness by society as the Madigas do not have the Laksmi glow, which only the savarna women have. The "*Telupu*", or the whiteness on a brahmin face, is of the highest quality of whiteness in the Palle and denotes spirituality, which is one reason they equate it to the goddesses' skin and aura. They call the whiteness on their faces "*Kala*", the artistic glow. The *Telupu* also points out the brahmin's vegetarian and dairy eating habits. Rojimary, while explaining her struggle as a Dalit dancer in the space of an upper-caste art form like Kuchipudi, has said that many of her upper-caste colleagues eat and suggest eating cow ghee and drinking cow milk for their healthy skin. Getting that glow on the face is a beauty habit for the savarnas, even in their families. The purity and the glow here are explained as the fairness of the cow, getting into the clarified and purified cow products (traditionally available in upper-caste homes), which are lighter in colour. Hence, when eaten by an upper caste, their fair skin colour is also recognised as pure and glowing due to the co-occurring feature of fairness. Even though the co-occurring features have different modalities like the animal (cow), food product (ghee, milk), and savarna (Human), the speaker, while speaking about brahmin fairness, still perceives them as naturally belonging together in some aspects resembling one another which gives the attribute of purity to the upper-caste through the colour of the skin (Gal 2016). People in the Palle believe that for the Dalits, the cow has never been a part

of the household and treating it like a daughter and rearing it was a savarna activity. As the brahmins consumed purified cow products, the purity of the cow, which is attributed to it by the religion, appears in their skin as the artistic glow of "*Kala*" as a form of glow and whiteness.

This association is also due to the relationship of cows with gods and goddesses. This innocence of the fair skin colour on a savarna face is appealing as it comes from the sacred cow. Motherliness and godliness are also associated with the colour of the brahmin's skin. Fair-skinned savarna women are called with goddesses' names by their families when they look beautiful and are born white. One such example is this typical attire of how an upper-caste woman should look according to the savarnas told by Rutu: "*malle pulu pettukuni Lakshim talli, kalaga udali antaru*", meaning a brahmin woman should look like a beautifully adorned mother Lakshmi with jasmine flowers in her hair and a glow on her face.

The linguistic form *Telupu* has a different connotation when a savarna speaks of a Dalit from a Dalit perspective. The fairness of the Madigas is associated with their beef-eating practice, and the word *Telupu* points them to the food they consume. The savarnas believe that the fairness of a Madiga is of the least quality, which should not be encouraged in society. The fairness of a Madiga is deceiving and gives them pride, according to the savarnas. Hence, in Palle, the Madiga's fairness is seen as less valued as it is associated with other things like less expensive clothes, body odour, and occupation, making fairness lower in quality. Rayanna, a wine shop cleaner, has said that Dalits also get ostracised at their workplaces due to their skin colour, and if they are fair in a savarna space, they are seen as flaunting pride. On his experience as a fair Madiga, at his workplace, when he got into an argument with his savarna owner, Rayanna said,

> "*Emanna annaamu anuko endhi jitalu ivatle anni, arustadu ma owner tellagunnav ani talapogarara niku ani*" (Even if we cross talk sometimes with our owner when he denies salaries, he shouts at me saying that I am prideful and ill-mannered because of my slightly fair skin tone)

He says that fairness on a Dalit is seen as something that is being exploited and misused to reach savarna status. Rayanna's entire family of six is fair-skinned, and he says that his daughter, who works at a supermarket, cannot be recognised as Dalit at first instance as she has long hair, fair skin and keeps a big round red sticker like a vermilion dot, on her forehead. His daughter believes that sometimes, with other savarna cultural aspects like costly cotton sarees, vermillion dot on forehead, thick kajal and hair adorned with jasmine flowers with fair skin, Madiga women can fool the savarnas by not giving them a chance to pass casteist and racist slurs but often with aspects like language one gets identified as a Dalit. If a fair Madiga gets identified as a Dalit, the fair skin in this context also denotes the cunning nature of the Madigas, as it is unconventional for a Dalit to be fair as they are not spiritually associated with the cows. Historically, Dalits are forced to eat dead cattle, and the skin colour associated

with eating dead cows is seen as low in Palle. The famous quote among the Telugu states and the Palle is that never one should believe a dark *baepan* (brahmin) and a fair Dalit, says Vasanthamma, a Mala Christian who heard it from her reddy landlords. When associated with a Dalit, fairness indexes a deceitful nature. The Malas in the Palle believe it is easy for a fair Madiga to get absorbed into the savarna society due to their fair skin, but only when the identity is kept private. Rege (2006) writes that the very famous Dalit women autobiographers Shantabai Dani and Kumud Pawde express how fair skin acts as a token, is exclusive in society, and enables one to enjoy higher social status within the community (Ayyar & Khandare 2013).

In conventional ideas, a savarna is the token of purity associated with fair skin tone. When a Dalit has it, the attribute points out the not-so-usual occurrence of fairness; hence, it is seen as a threat and attains negative connotations. Samrajyam says,

> "If a Madiga is fair, people assume him/her to be prideful and taunt them that they have *pogaru* (head weight). The reddys call them "*ey pogarupotha*" (hey, arrogant).

The fairness of a Madiga also shows the person's arrogance for being perceptually savarna. In this context, though *pogaru* means arrogant in the first order of the index, in the second order, it indexes Dalit fairness, which is unconventional. In the third order, it indexes jealousy due to the quality of fairness on a Dalit when an upper caste uses it in this context, addressing a Madiga. Through these different meanings of *Telupu* for a Madiga and a savarna, one can understand that it is not the linguistic form in itself nor the individuals who are inherent of fair skin. However, the quality attributed acts as a sign (Chumley & Harkness 2013; Gal 2016). The quality attributed to brahmin is the fairness of a cow, and it is experientially similar to the skin tone of an upper caste; hence, it becomes a quali sign for the savarna through language and the purity of the cow is also attributed to the skin tone. The association of the cow with purity and softness is given to the brahmins, who are seen as soft, especially the fair brahmin women, who are said to be delicate and chaste. Historically, in India, colour and physical characteristics were among the several factors that define moral and social categorisation (Philips 2004). Fairness has become a gatekeeping technique, especially in matrimony, to prevent the Dalits from mixing with the savarnas as it is often said in the Telugu states, "Kodalu nalupaithe, kulamantha nalupe", meaning if a daughter-in-law is dark, the entire caste is dark. The Dalits and savarnas are connected to cows, but in different ways, connecting savarna fairness through the consumption of ghee and milk, which is seen as pure and connecting Madiga fairness through the consumption of beef, which is termed impure. Hence, the sensorial metaphor of fair cow, seen as pure, is not attributed to the Dalit skin or the other qualities attributed to the Dalits. Within these multiple indexes associated with the skin colour of a person

of a specific caste, whiteness derives its meaning. Hence, it becomes a colour beyond just what is visibly perceived.

The Dark Skin of Savarna vs the Dark Skin of Dalit

The Palle also has dark-skinned reddy men and white-skinned reddy men. The kamma men and women are mostly fair-complexioned. However, when asked about the discrimination based on the colour the reddy dark-skinned men might face, the Dalits believed that with the darkness a savarna man has with his gold ornaments and the glow, he would not be discriminated. Dark skin is, in fact, seen as a marker of royalty on a savarna in this context. Paying attention to the conversation about the complexion of different castes in Palle, one keen observation was made that the Dalits described the Dalits' dark complexion, in Telugu as "*Nalupu*" (Black), and they stressed the syllable "lu" and higher intonation was observed while pronouncing it. The stressing of this particular syllable also points out the disgust one experiences with the quality of darkness on a Dalit. While talking about the sensorial attributes and qualia, Gal mentions that the softness of a consonant or vowel can seem experientially similar to the softness of a pillow or a tone (Gal 2016). Hence, the pronunciation of the linguistic term *Nalupu* can also refer to the attribute and how it is experienced. However, when *Nalupu* is used in the context of a reddy man's dark complexion, no higher intonation is observed as it is a positive attribute on them and does not matter to them as well as the rest of the Palle. The dominant castes' darkness here is associated with spirituality, again referring them to dark-complexioned gods like Krishna or Ram and the royalty they possess. This was one common notion in Palle about the reddys' skin tone. On reddy's skin tone, Stalin said,

> "*reddla nalupu Moratalla undadhuantaru, kalaga gambhiramga untaru*" means that the reddy darkness is not termed as barbaric but has an artistic glow and royalty.

Stalin further explains that the savarnas believe that even the exceptional dark-skinned savarna women have the *laksim talli kala* (motherly goddess glow) on their faces, though they are dark-skinned. The surface of this sentence explains a common stereotypical understanding of savarna darkness to a Dalit and puts savarnas on a pedestal, though they are dark. However, the word "*Nalupu*", when used in different contexts, can refer to various social meanings. *Nalupu*, when used for a savarna as discussed above, does not connote a negative meaning or impact them much due to the other aspects like the ironed clothing, neatly combed hair and the gold chains and rings, which is a conventional idea of a reddy-Naidu man. However, the darkness in the Dalit skin is very different for the Dalits, implying their lack of hygiene and cleanliness. *Nalupu* does not just mean blackness when used for Dalits. It is paired with "*Karri*" (dark), at a second order index, which points out the association between skin colour and the tough jobs, historically and at present, as well the jobs the Dalits

are forced into (sanitation and manual scavenging) and at the third order of index the sweat, dirt associated with the jobs as they involve in their jobs. While the Dalits interact with the kamma castes, who are primarily fair, they are referred to as "*Karri*", meaning utterly black and nasty looking.

Working in the wine shops, a Dalit man said that he was called by his upper-caste owner as *Karri Kaki* (ugly black crow) once in a funny way. He said that the Mala community is sometimes referred to as *Barre* (buffalo) and *Karri mandha* (black flock). The buffaloes and crows, which are dark, become indexical icons for sharing the quality of darkness, and Dalits are animalised due to their complexion and seeming resemblance with these. Daavidhu recalls an incident at his workplace, a wine shop run by a reddy, where his owner called him saying, "*Karrimohanni piluvu, table tudavali*", meaning call that *Karri* and ask him to clean the table. The skin tone inherently here for Daavidhu represented not only his darkness but also the darkness, which was not just black but filled with dirt and disgust. Dalit dark skin, the "*Nalupu*", also points out to *moratu* (Barbaric) when used for Dalits, especially for Dalit men, as it implies the skin tone as an effect of the Dalit's relationship with the "barbaric jobs". The dark skin on them also indexes the smell of disgust associating the historically coerced Dalit occupations with the Dalit skin. However, Dalits in the Palle, talking about their dark skin, believe that apart from geographic location, their complexion is due to the tough jobs they were coerced to do because of their caste, which had more prolonged exposure to the sun, leading to darkness. The complexion for them is an outcome of the hardships they face due to the caste system. However, inherently, skin colour becomes a visible aspect through which Dalits get discriminated against daily.

Conclusion

This article shows the interplay between language, caste and colourism and analyses how colour acts as a means of degrading Dalits. Crucially, it surpasses the oversimplified dichotomy of fair and dark skin, revealing the presence of caste-based ideologies that humiliate Dalits regardless of their skin colour. This highlights the pressing requirement to examine deeply rooted discriminatory systems. The article argues that the caste system in Indian society has established standards for beauty, and it plays a crucial role in shaping the psychological and social connotations of colour through language. The study's findings imply that the attribution of various qualities with the Dalit and savarna skin and colour essentially occurs in the context of caste society. Hence, there is no strict construction of what *Nalupu* (Dark) or *Telupu* (Fair) mean as a colour, excluding the caste.

The concepts of darkness and fairness within the framework of Palle are deliberately shaped by the savarnas to further their interests and maintain the caste system in everyday conversations. The ideals of beauty upheld by the savarnas are intrinsically linked to a light complexion and the glow observed on a savarna individual's face, which is perceived as pure and appealing. However, the dark complexion of an individual belonging to the savarna caste is also associated with

desirable qualities like royalty and the qualities of Hindu gods, which makes it socially acceptable. Within a society that practices caste discrimination, a Dalit individual with a darker complexion is dehumanised and regarded as dirty, stinky and polluted. In contrast, even the Dalits with a lighter complexion are often perceived as deceitful and arrogant. This illustrates that caste discrimination is observed through different frames of reference, revealing how colour as a feeling/quality is ascribed to numerous other attributes by associating it with the culture and caste, hence leading to diverse social meanings specific to caste.

Some limitations must be noted. This study only explored the experiences of caste and colourism from a Dalit perspective in a brief qualitative study. More work is required to understand the perceptions of colour and caste as they are experienced through the qualities associated with colour in language, making them a concrete, sensorial experience (Qualia) that can be experienced through quali signs. With a relevant theoretical focus and employing a set of quantitative and qualitative methods, future research needs to critically explore the connection between colourism and caste discrimination further.

Acknowledgements

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Endnotes

1. In this article, a deliberate choice has been made to employ lowercase letters when referencing terms such as 'savarna,' 'brahmin,' 'reddy,' and 'kamma'. These terms, typically capitalised in academic discourse, are rendered in lowercase here as part of an effort to recalibrate language and dehegemonise the dominance associated with terminology when addressing majority groups within the scope of this study.

2. Hierarchical terms like 'upper' or 'lower' are used in reference to a caste-stratified society, and the author does not encourage them.

Psychology Behind Rejection of Caste-based Reservations in the Private Sector: A Mixed Method Study Among Dalit Buddhists in India

Shweta Suresh Ahire[1]

Abstract

In a mixed method study focused on the urban ghettos in Mumbai, Maharashtra—Matunga Labour Camp, Shell Colony, P.L. Lokhande Marg, and Ramabai Nagar—a sample of Buddhists (*N*=162) reported variations in support of reservation in the private sector. It was discovered that a minuscule section of them have come to reject caste-based reservations in the private sector. Using mixed methods, combining a descriptive statistical analysis of survey data and a reflexive thematic analysis of interview data, this article attempts to explore the psychological motivations underlying the rejection of reservation in the private sector. The analysis suggests that a section of Dalits want to perceive themselves as equally "meritorious" as the upper castes. This is however a reaction to a deep feeling of inferiority, reflecting internalization of the psyche of the oppressors. Besides, the fear of being marked out as a 'Dalit' at the workplace is more pronounced by availing of reservation. This sustained fear of getting stigmatized stems from internalizing "disgust" and believing the stereotypes held by the upper castes. The discomfort with self-identity also leads to a cognitive dissonance that perpetuates itself in practices like concealing caste identity. Ultimately, this rejection is rationalized by advancing the claim that reservation in the private sector will reinforce caste identity. This article contributes to understanding the psychological grounds for negative attitudes towards reservation in the private sector among Dalit Buddhists.

Keywords

Dalit-Buddhists, private sector, caste-based reservations, feeling of inferiority, caste identity, psychology of caste, mixed methods

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Introduction

Indian society has been a deeply hierarchical one nestled, as it is, in the edifice of the caste system. The caste system has been a source of inequality and exploitation. At the lowest rung of the caste hierarchy were placed the Dalits, who have since been oppressed, marginalised, and subjected to discrimination. Considered to be "untouchables", they had to face the worst kind of restrictions and hardships as a result of being denied access to all and any possible sources of income and education. Dr. Ambedkar, father of the Indian Constitution and crusader of social justice, rightly pointed out in his *Annihilation of Caste* (1944) that, "As an economic organization Caste is therefore a harmful institution, in as much as, it involves the subordination of man's natural powers and inclinations to the exigencies of social rules" (as cited in Moon 2014: 48).

Acknowledging the historical injustices, in the post-independence period, the Indian Constitution provided special provisions for disadvantaged groups in order to bring them into the mainstream. As Sheth (1987) has noted, the entire package of reservations aimed to address three fundamental concerns: to eliminate social and religious disadvantages, to enable all socially disadvantaged groups to participate on an equal footing with others, and to safeguard the interests of all the groups, also known as the weaker sections, against all sorts of social injustice and exploitation. The intellectual and political contributions of Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar were crucial in bringing the reservation policy. His efforts in this regard date back to the pre-independence period, beginning in 1919 with the submission of a statement to the Southborough Committee to the forging of the Poona Pact in 1932[1] (Thorat & Kumar 2008: 2).

The affirmative action provisions were severely contested in the Constituent Assembly. They were challenged once again when the underprivileged groups started to make use of the democratic procedures and constitutional guarantees in the 1970s and 1980s (Thorat, Aryama & Negi 2005, foreword by Shah: ix). Large-scale political debates, including agitations, notably in North India, erupted in the 1990s after the central government announced the implementation of the Mandal Commission Report, which further increased the pre-existing quotas for the Other Backward Classes (OBCs) by another 27 per cent (Deshpande 2013: 1). Thus, the policy of reservation has been one of the most contentious issues in India.

Reservation or affirmative action policies have been a central theme in the intergroup conflict between the caste-dominant and the dominated in India. It was also utilized to humiliate the Dalits by calling them "Sarkar che jawai" meaning sons-

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[1]The political ramifications of the Poona Pact are a matter of several discussions. Kanshiram has attacked the nature of the Dalit politics that sprang from it. He argued that the making of independent Dalit leaders after Ambedkar was hindered since the electoral chances of popular scheduled caste politicians became significantly reliant on their good ties with non-Dalit voters. Hence, *chamchas,* or stooges, came to the fore instead of real and genuine leaders. See, Abhay Kumar Dubey (2001). *Anatomy of a Dalit power player: A study of Kanshi Ram*. In Ghanshyam Shah (Ed.), *Dalit identity and politics*. SAGE Publications.

in-law of the government who attract special treatment among many other things.[2] Gudavarthy (2012) also echoed the same argument to show how Dalits are stigmatized and reminded that what they are receiving is a type of "charity and not parity" (p. 55). Today, in the neo-liberal economy, there has been a withdrawal of the welfare measures of the State. The policies of liberalization, privatization, and globalization have led to the shrinking of the public sector. It severely restricted the number of job opportunities in the public sector, resulting in fewer prospects for SC/STs and OBCs in government administration and state enterprises (Thimmaiah 2005: 745) Therefore, the traditional policy of reservation has become redundant or rather has been virtually abolished.

Additionally, the Dalits continue to struggle in the new economy. Many studies, for example Weisskopf (2004), Thorat, Banerjee, Mishra & Rizvi, (2015), Deshpande (2011), Thorat & Attewell (2007), and Jodhka & Newman (2007), show the prevalence of market discrimination in India. This research indicates how hiring strategies and practices based on the notion of caste in the private sector and corporations have been detrimental to Dalit interests. Since familial networks[3] frequently play a large role in access to jobs, caste remains an important aspect in both economic and social life (Omvedt 2005: 137). In light of this context, it is critical to examine how Dalits feel about the extension of reservations into the private sector. Therefore, I wanted to investigate whether there is a section of the Buddhist community in Mumbai that has come to reject reservation, or, to put it another way, holds a negative attitude towards reservation in the private sector, and if there is, what psychological motivations may be responsible for it.

Reservations in India: Psychological Aspects

In India, not everybody among the Dalits has equally benefitted from the reservation policies. However, it did help to create a small middle class among the Dalits. Jogdand (2017) has similarly argued that the reservation policy has not improved the condition of the greater Scheduled Castes (SC) and Scheduled Tribes (ST) masses; rather, it has aided in the development of a "microscopic middle class" inside the community itself. Moreover, it also offered social security to the beneficiaries and their family members (Jogdand 2017: 2). Hence, the reservation policy brought positive changes by assuring social mobility to a sizeable section of the marginalized masses. However, social mobility came at a psychological costs discussed below.

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[2]In an interview with Sunil Kadam, a prominent social and political activist, this issue was raised.

[3]Ghanshyam Shah (2017) has argued that in the neoliberal era since individuals are unable to rely on the State, they are driven to seek protection in primordial social organizations, which is broadly referred to as 'social capital'. He shows that this has resulted in the revitalization of the old cultural ethos, which legitimizes and strengthens caste relationships. See, Ghanshyam Shah. (2017). Neo-liberal political economy and social tensions. *Economic & Political Weekly*, *52*(35), 62–70.

In his seminal work, Goffman (1963/2009) describes stigma as "an attribute that is deeply discrediting." Dalits have endured the stigma associated with being at the bottom of the caste hierarchy since ancient times. Many studies have shown that reservation has led to the additional stigmatization of the Dalits or scheduled castes. For example, Patel (2008) investigates the stigmatised typical image of incompetence built around the Scheduled Castes (SCs), who have benefitted from reservations in education and services for the earlier seven decades. She contends that stereotypes are a potent tool in everyday encounters and that the use of frozen images constructs stigma. She also deals with the issues of deflecting stigma through various means like concealment of caste names and changing surnames which form a part of impression management (p. 105). Gudavarthy (2012) has also argued that the system of reservations in India has the particularly crippling drawback of causing several social groups to increasingly experience different types of public humiliation, anger, and abuse. He further substantiates this by referring to Fraser (2008), who argues that stigmatisation is a mode of "adding the insult of misrecognition to the injury of deprivation"(p. 55). Deshpande (2019) also shows that university students who receive Affirmative Action (hereafter AA) benefits are stigmatised by their peers, but they may not internalise their peers' beliefs of their low worth. She further contends that it is not possible to draw the conclusion that weakening or doing away with AA would lessen stigma towards target groups. Besides, Jogdand, Khan & Mishra (2016) have also drawn attention to the evident stigmatisation and humiliation of reservation beneficiaries. They argue that claims such as, there has been a decline in merit and efficiency in education and administration due to the increasing admission of candidates from the reserved category, are manifestly humiliating since such claims undermine centuries of victimisation and add to the stigmatisation of the beneficiaries (p. 556). In short, it can be said that stigmatization has been a major psychological consequence of the policy of reservation. And to escape this stigmatization individuals have adopted various means. What remains to be explored is how the Dalits feel about reservation, particularly in the private sector.

Present Research

The demand for the reservation in the private sector has been a relatively recent one. It came to light after the Bhopal Conference of 2002 organized by Dalit intellectuals and activists with the support of the Congress government in Madhya Pradesh under the leadership of Digvijay Singh. The Bhopal document, an outcome of this conference, reflected the aspirations of a small yet influential Dalit middle class. It stressed the necessity of economic empowerment of the Dalits. Among other things like more reservations in higher education for improved academic accomplishments, it made a strong case for a share in business/industry through policies based on affirmative action in the private sector, and professional jobs in the emerging, higher-paying economic sectors (Pai 2014: 45).

Given this context, it becomes intriguing to look into what the Buddhists, the most numerous among the Dalits of Maharashtra, think about the extension of reservation to the private sector. As Gokhale (1993) has argued, the Buddhists or erstwhile Mahars are a distinct community among the Dalits of Maharashtra for two reasons. Indeed, due to their functional role in village society, they occupied a unique position among the lower castes. Furthermore, under the direction and leadership of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, the key architect of the Indian Constitution, the Mahars became the very first untouchable community to revolt against the adversities and disabilities posed by the exploitative caste system (Gokhale 1993: vii). They have been the most assertive among the Dalits of Maharashtra. Through this study focused on the four ghettos of Mumbai—Matunga Labour Camp, Shell Colony, P.L. Lokhande Marg, and Ramabai Nagar—I attempted to acquire their perspectives on the reservation in the private sector. It was discovered that a minuscule section of them have developed a negative attitude towards reservations in the private sector. This article, thus, attempts to explore the psychological motivations underlying the rejection of reservation in the private sector, thereby, establishing a linkage between caste and psychology.

Method

As this article attempts to explore the psychological motivations underlying the rejection of reservation in the private sector, a mixed-method investigation was utilised. The quantitative phase was carried out first, followed by the qualitative phase. The purpose of this arrangement was to first identify those who reject reservation in the private sector and then explore their psychological motivations for doing so. In Study 1.1 the researcher undertook charting of the Buddhist community's preference on the said question and looked for variations between the select ghettos with the help of a Likert-type question. This research required respondents who "Strongly disagree", "Disagree" or "Neither agree nor disagree" to the question, "There should be reservation in the private sector". Study 1.1 made it possible to identify such respondents. Once this phase was completed, the researcher went on to Study 1.2, wherein unstructured interviews and focus group discussions were conducted with such respondents. A reflexive thematic analysis was undertaken to discuss the findings of this phase. The analytic process for the same has been discussed in detail later. The sample and two phases of this research are as follows:

Sample

Table 1 shows the demographic composition of the sample. A total of 162 respondents were identified for this study. Responses from people of diverse age groups, education levels, sex, etc., were sought. About 40 respondents were identified from each area so that the differences become visible and proportionality will be maintained.

Table 1: *Demographic composition of the sample*

		n=162	
		Number	**Percent**
Gender			
	Male	94	58.02
	Female	68	41.98
Age			
	18-30 years	49	30.25
	31-40 years	23	14.2
	41-50 years	28	17.28
	51-60 years	31	19.14
	Above 60 years	31	19.14
Education			
	Up to 9th	21	12.96
	10th to 12th	66	40.74
	Undergraduate	9	5.56
	Graduate	44	27.16
	Post-graduate	20	12.35
Marital Status			
	Married	94	58.02
	Divorced	1	0.62
	Widowed	19	11.73
	Single	48	29.63
Annual Income			
	Up to 1 lakh	27	16.67
	1-3 lakhs	63	38.89
	3-5 lakhs	20	12.35
	5-8 lakhs	36	22.22
	8-12 lakhs	9	5.56
	12-15 lakhs	6	3.7
	Above 15 lakhs	1	0.62

Study 1.1

In the initial stage, the researcher began by mapping the perception of the Buddhist community over the issue of reservation in the private sector. A Likert-type question was administered to all the respondents. As there was no priori probabilistic structure for identifying the population, a cluster sampling approach was followed. The locations were carefully selected after confirming that the bulk of the locals were Buddhists. As a result, these locations might be considered "Dalit spaces or ghettos" or simply "areas with a preponderant Buddhist population." Four clusters selected from Mumbai city were, namely, P.L. Lokhande Marg, Ramabai Nagar, Matunga Labour Camp, and Shell Colony. The interviews and discussions were conducted primarily in Marathi and took place in private Buddhist homes as well as public settings like Baudha Vihar (such as Sugat Vihar in Sahakar Nagar or Supparak Baudha Vihar in P.L. Lokande

Marg). The respondents were often highly amiable and ready to express their opinions. They freely shared their ideas as if it was a duty towards their community.

P.L. Lokhande Marg is a slum locality in Chembur. The dwellings are mostly one-story. Two-story houses are also present. But mostly in such cases, the attic serves as a dwelling area. The living conditions were deplorable. Narrow lanes, crowded dwellings, and public toilets, all of which are typical of slum areas, can be found here. For the first data collection, housing societies like Ajanta, Sahdeep, Mahatma Phule Nagar (Number 2), etc., were included. These societies are further divided into chawls. For instance, the Sahdeep society has the Katare Chawl, Salve Chawl, and Jagtap Chawl.

Ramabai Colony is also a slum settlement on the Eastern Express Highway in Ghatkopar. In comparison to the P.L. Lokhande Marg slums, the living conditions here are improved. Many of the homes were well-furnished and had their own private bathrooms. With the 1997 Ramabai killings, which saw 10 Dalits killed during police firing amid demonstrations over the desecration of a statue of Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar, this locality gained national attention. Since then, Ramabai Ambedkar Nagar has been a hub of Dalit activism. People frequently gather around the Babasaheb Ambedkar Monument near Gandhkuti Vihar and D.B. Pawar Chowk to debate and discuss various concerns.

While in Matunga Labour Camp, the majority of the chawl-style buildings are three stories tall. Single- and double-story chawls are still present, however, they are further split into several wards. Formerly, this region was renowned for housing the migrant working class, mostly those who worked for the railways or the numerous textile factories that were originally located in Bombay. Ever since Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar's time, the Matunga labour camp has served as the Dalit movement's stronghold. It was a focal point for both the workers' movements and the Ambedkarite movement.

In contrast to this neighbourhood, Shell Colony or Sahakar Nagar is home to Dalit families who are employed in white-collar occupations and are a member of the Dalit middle class. Here, both Samrat Ashok Nagar and Everest Society are decent neighbourhoods with bungalow-style row homes. Besides, there are also four-storied buildings like the Nalanda Society, Bahujan Seva Society, and others. These societies have a preponderant Buddhist population.[4] The fact that the living conditions here are good sets it apart from a ghetto, nevertheless.

Procedure

This was entirely Android and ODK-based data collection. The responses that were saved were automatically coded as 1 for Strongly disagree, 2 for Disagree, 3 for Neither agree nor disagree, 4 for Agree and 5 for Strongly Agree.

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[4]All these co-operative housing societies were established as part of the "PWR 219" housing scheme, which aimed to give people from backward classes and oppressed groups access to homes. This plan required a 90:10 ratio, meaning that 90 per cent of the members had to fall under the backward category and 10 per cent under the open category.

Results and Discussion

Table 2: *Overall frequencies for "There should be reservation in the private sector."*

	n=162	
	Frequency	*Percent*
Strongly Agree	94	58.02
Agree	37	22.84
Neither agree nor disagree	6	3.7
Disagree	24	14.81
Strongly Disagree	1	0.62
Total	**162**	**100**

Table 2 shows that 58 per cent of the respondents strongly agreed that there should be reservation in the private sector, followed by 23 per cent of the respondents who also agreed to the question. While almost 15 per cent of the respondents disagreed that there should be reservation in the private sector. This shows that the majority of the respondents support reservation in the private sector.

Table 3: *Location-wise frequencies for "There should be reservation in the private sector."*

		n=162	
		Frequency	*Percent*
Ramabai Nagar			
	Strongly disagree	0	0
	Disagree	5	3.09
	Neither agree nor disagree	1	0.62
	Agree	5	3.09
	Strongly Agree	29	17.9
P.L. Lokhande Marg			
	Strongly disagree	0	0
	Disagree	5	3.09
	Neither agree nor disagree	2	1.23
	Agree	9	5.56
	Strongly Agree	24	14.81
Shell Colony			
	Strongly disagree	0	0
	Disagree	10	6.17
	Neither agree nor disagree	0	0
	Agree	12	7.41
	Strongly Agree	20	12.35

Matunga Labour Camp			
	Strongly disagree	1	0.62
	Disagree	4	2.47
	Neither agree nor disagree	3	1.85
	Agree	11	6.79
	Strongly Agree	21	12.96
Total		**162**	**100**

It can be gathered from Table 3 that only a minority of respondents (total 14.82 per cent) disagree that there should be reservations in the private sector. Such respondents are found more in the area—Shell Colony compared to the other areas. In terms of percent, Shell Colony has 6.17 per cent of respondents who disagreed which is double that of the others. As discussed earlier, Shell Colony is comparatively better off than the other three areas. The respondents here have a better standard of living due to their white-collar jobs and are a part of the Dalit middle class (DMC). Among such respondents who disagreed, there is an urge to dissociate from the stigma of the past. Also, they have access to resources like good education, which gives them the impression that they can get by with or without reservation. Besides, they felt that their children were as "meritorious" as the upper castes and hence can survive in the open competition. This aspect has been discussed further in the results of the thematic analysis.

Study 1.2

In the second stage of this study, only those respondents who marked their responses as "Strongly disagree", "Disagree" or "Neither agree nor disagree" to the question, "There should be reservation in the private sector" were identified. In total, 31 such respondents were found. With the help of unstructured interviews and focus group discussions, an attempt was made to gain in-depth insight and understanding of their position. As this problem is treated qualitatively, an attempt was made the examine the respondents' thought processes. Each of these interviews and discussions was then transcribed along with the field notes for thematic analysis.

Analytic Process

The reflexive thematic analysis was largely similar to that suggested by Braun & Clarke (2006, 2012) you will find descriptions of many techniques that psychologists and others have developed to help them pursue a shared understanding of why humans think, feel, and behave the way they do. These are the tools that we use to conduct our rational analyses. The variation was that a subset of 10 interviews was read first to look for potential themes. The sample required that the ten interviews from Shell Colony be read first since it had the most number of respondents in the "disagree" category and no respondents in the "neither agree nor disagree" category, whereas, all the other areas had some respondents in the "neither agree nor disagree" category.

Further, the initial codes were written. While doing the coding, the researcher took a more interpretative stance than a descriptive one in an attempt to accommodate the context of the respondent's argument. Sometimes, even for a single piece of the data, more than one code was used. For instance, lines like *Majhe colleagues vegveglya jaatiche aahe, koni mala vicharla tarch mi jaat sangto. Tasa hi jaati peksha maitri mahatva chi. Tyanchya sobat Diwali vagaire sajari keli tari kahi harkat nahi.* (English Translation: My colleagues belong to different castes, if somebody asks me about my caste only then I reveal it. As it is friendship is more important than caste. There is nothing wrong with celebrating Diwali or other festivals with them.) This was coded as "desire to be anonymous" and "desire to assimilate". Subsequently, each of the remaining interviews was similarly coded. The researcher decided which potential themes to pursue and to identify the presence of those themes in the text of the remaining transcribed interviews. Further, any miscellaneous and ancillary theme was also noted. After going through all the transcripts the researcher reviewed, modified and developed certain themes that aptly captured the psychological motivations behind the rejection of reservation in the private sector.

Analysis and Discussion

As shown in the Fig. 1, the researcher developed six themes which discuss the respondents' psychological motivations behind rejecting reservations in the private sector:

Theme 1: Internalizing upper-caste notion of merit

Theme 2: Internalizing the disgust associated with Dalit identity

Theme 3: Illusion of the ten-year limit on reservation

Theme 4: Reservation in private sector will reinforce caste

Theme 5: Anonymity of city-life will be compromised

Theme 6: Hopelessness and scepticism about its utility
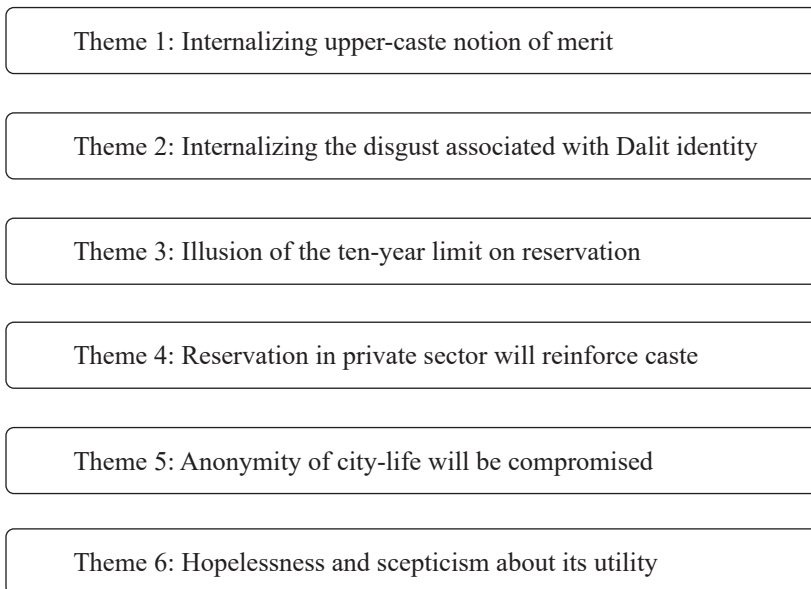
Figure 1: Various themes identified

Internalizing the Upper Caste Notion of "Merit"

As Kalantzis, Cope & Issaris (1988) have pointed out, the primary function of the "merit" principle is to sort human resources in a certain manner. However, the idea of merit is conditioned by culture and formed through history. Yengde (2019) has argued that those who enjoy the privileges of caste, their cultural and social capital[5] becomes 'merit'. One might acquire merit, if one enjoys privileges like access to good schools, educated parents, cultural bonds, and community networks. Ultimately, as Mehta (2005) has also discussed, the pertinent question that arises is who gets to decide what merit is (p. 211). Therefore, in a caste society like India, merit is a relative term. With the help of numerous other research, Crosby, Ferdman & Wingate (2001) have pointed out that meritocratic policies in the United States, although seeming to be race-blind, have in fact helped to sustain and even expand privileges for Whites. Furthermore, the criteria employed to determine "merit" in most organisations are based on majority-culture norms. In a similar vein, Omvedt (2005) argues that words like "merit" enable us to overlook or push aside the reality of unending social identity-based exclusion and discriminatory processes in society. Thus, they are misleading and insulting (p. 206). This word has frequently been used by the upper castes in their defence of the private sector's effectiveness as a result of the absence of quotas in the private sector. They think that reservations will reduce productivity and render private-sector businesses just as inefficient as those in the public sector.

Mostly while rejecting reservation in the private sector, the respondents would claim that "We are as meritorious as the Brahmins". Here, Brahmins are taken as the reference group by the respondents. These had internalized the interpretation of merit based on upper castes' hegemonic definition of "merit". A respondent (female, 46) had contended that,

> We don't need the crutches of reservation, our children are as qualified as those of the Brahmins. It is not that we have progressed because of reservation. It was mainly Babasaheb's ideas and philosophy that brought us ahead in life.

Another respondent (female, 51) argued that,

> *Amchi mula general madhun pan spardha karu shaktat. Ti pan tyanchyach itki hushar aahet. Savarnanpeksha ti kuthech kami nahi.* (English Translation: Our kids can compete even in the general category. They are also as smart as theirs. They are no less than the *Savarnas*.)

This form of feigned superiority complex is but a reaction to a deep feeling of inferiority. While it masquerades as a positive self-perception, such an argument

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[5]According to Pierre Bourdieu, social capital is formed via relational networks, particularly institutionalized ones such as the family. He refers to the social milieu in which human beings are socialized as a "habitus." Individuals thus conform to the rules and behaviours of their group in order to gain from the system. See, Elaine M. Power (1999). An introduction to Pierre Bourdieu's key theoretical concepts. *Journal for the Study of Food and Society*, *3*(1), 48–52. https://doi.org/10.2752/152897999786690753

turns out to be self-destructive in a larger context since the Buddhist community lacks the kind of cultural and social capital that is essentially needed to construct "merit" in the neo-liberal set-up. It is also a fallacious argument since the actual purpose of reservation is to enable the participation of marginalised sections, granting equity in opportunities, thereby, fostering social justice. While subscribing to Dr. Ambedkar's ideals does result in intellectual, spiritual, and societal upliftment, it does not serve as a shield against social and economic inequality and discrimination. Thus, they have internalised the Brahmanical worldview and prefer to interpret "merit" in absolute terms. Alternatively, it also shows that they have internalised the positive stereotypes surrounding the upper castes. Jogdand (2023) demonstrates this with the help of an example of how engrossed reading and being smart is associated with being Brahmin, while Dalits are stereotypically taken as "intellectually inferior" reflected in the reluctance to see a Dalit doctor (p. 45).

The cultural indoctrination makes the respondents hold the Brahmins as a reference group. This form of cultural imperialism has been formulated by Young (1990) wherein a dominant group's experience, culture and interpretation of social life is imposed on the oppressed group. Further, she believes that it leads to double consciousness because one's being is determined by two cultures: a dominant culture and a subordinate culture (1990: 60). This is also the case with Buddhists. So while they say that the Brahmins are "meritorious" and hold that they are also "meritorious" like them, they also acknowledge the contribution of Dr. Ambedkar's ideas and philosophy.

Internalizing the Disgust Associated with Dalit Identity

It was found that the respondents also rejected reservation in the private sector because they felt that it portrayed them in a negative light. A respondent (male, 27) had maintained that,

> *With reservation, people assume that even those with 35 percent marks are able to get into respectable institutions. They do not realise that the difference in the cut-off for the reserved category and the general category is not much, so they blame us for stealing their seats.*

They do not want to be labelled as "reserved category" or "Dalit" as it is taken to be synonymous with "unmeritorious" or "indolent". They would wish to refrain from reservation in the private sector to escape this stigma of Dalit identity which equates itself with poor academic performance. This demonstrates that they have internalised the disdain of the upper castes towards Dalits and the "reserved category" and seek to escape that disgust through the rejection of reservation. It is indeed, surprising, that such a thought process could come up at a time when most assertions based on caste revolve around the demand for reservations. Even dominant castes like Jats, Gujjars and Marathas are protesting for this exact demand today.

This is symptomatic of internalized oppression. As Rosenwasser (2002) has argued, internalized oppression is when members of a group come to believe the negative messages and stereotypes that others hold about them. Marginalized groups learn to despise themselves rather than see that these detrimental views are ingrained in them by a socioeconomic political system that pushes them to blame themselves and their people (Rosenwasser 2002: 54). So, despite understanding that it is not true that all SCs are unmeritorious, these respondents felt guilty to such an extent that they declined reservations in the private sector. They are also sometimes compelled to dispel those negative stereotypes by not revealing their Dalit identity.

Some of them recollected anecdotes about how they were singled out in schools or colleges due to SC scholarships or freeships. A respondent (male, 45) shared his experience:

> *In school, the teacher would read out our names loudly and scold us that if we did not fill out the SC freeship form, we will have to pay the full tuition fees. After this, the entire class would mock us. And we would feel isolated.*

They do not wish to undergo similar humiliation at the workplace. They would like to assimilate into the culture even including the festivals of the majority, at least, in the public sphere.[6] As David & Derthick (2013) have shown, internalized oppression is related to lower levels of enculturation and higher levels of assimilation. This, therefore, brings out the necessity to create space for Buddhist culture and ideals. Alternatively, Van den Berghe (1987) has noted that people assimilate and acculturate when doing so is clearly in their best interests. People generally prefer to remain as they are, that is, to maintain their ethnic identity, in the absence of such personal benefits to change (p. 186). Hence, an individual's sense of deriving benefits from the system plays an important role here. A lot, therefore, depends upon the willingness of the Buddhist populace to develop their own cultural symbols.

Illusion of the Ten-year Limit on Reservation

Among those who rejected reservation in the private sector, a common reason was the belief, rather ill-founded notion that Dr. Ambedkar was in favour of having the reservation system only for a span of ten years after its implementation. A respondent (male, 23) argued that "Babasaheb had said that reservation must be only for ten years". He said,

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[6]In one of the houses in Matunga Labour Camp, during the Ganesh festival, a Ganpati idol was installed. The reason was that their granddaughters were obstinate and insisted on getting it because all of their friends had placed Ganpati idols in their homes. The Buddhist community often looks down on such families. Recently, a well-known Marathi theatre and film actor too enraged his Buddhist-Dalit community by installing an eco-friendly Ganpati idol. See, Chandan Haygunde. (2017, August 31). Buddhists worshipping Ganesh face 'harassment, threat of social boycott.' *The Indian Express*. https://indianexpress.com/article/india/maharashtra-buddhists-worshipping-ganesh-face-harassment-threat-of-social-boycott-4821602/

Respondent: *Baryach lokkanna mahit nahi aahe pan Babasahebanna pan hech hava hota ki daha varshanpeksha jast aarakshan nako.* (English translation: Lots of people don't know but even Babasaheb wanted that reservation should not be for more than 10 years.)

His friend (male, 27) backs him up by saying, *Ho mala pan mahit aahe. Mi ek post vachili hoti FB var tyat hech mhantla hota, aplyach mansane takli hoti.* (English translation: Yes, even I know. I had read a post on Facebook which said the same, it was posted by a fellow Buddhist.)

The same argument is utilised by the upper castes shrewdly as a defence whenever there is a debate about reservations. This is also a vile strategy to make the oppressed masses believe that it is high time that they should give up reservation. As Sarkar (2022) has noted, this type of argument tries to make the oppressed castes feel guilty by making them think that they have benefited from reservation for far longer than they should have or were intended to and that their refusal to give up these privileges is now the root of social inequality.

Recently, one of the judges on the bench that presided over the case involving the constitutional validity of reservation policies for economically weaker sections made a similar argument. According to him, "The idea of Baba Saheb Ambedkar was to bring social harmony by introducing reservation for only ten years" (Ananthakrishnan G. 2022). This falsehood of the ten-year limit on reservation policies has made inroads into these predominantly young Buddhist minds. They have come to believe that they are adhering to Babasheb's ideas while in fact, they are unknowingly consuming false propaganda. Such misinformation is frequently shared via numerous social media sites.

In reality, reservations for disadvantaged groups in public employment and educational institutions did not have a time limit. As Bhaskar (2022) has shown, Ambedkar was never in favour of a set time restriction of 10 years for political reservations for SCs and STs. Dr. Ambedkar asserted for a 'larger time' (Bhaskar 2022: 6). Ignorance about this has led them to believe that if Babasaheb did not want reservations for more than 10 years, there must be some logic behind it. Such a thought process has also motivated them to reject reservation in the private sector. This also points towards improper inculcation of Dr. Ambedkar's thoughts and inadequate socialisation, mainly, of the Buddhist youth into Dr. Ambedkar's life history and philosophy.

Reservation in the Private Sector will Reinforce Caste

It was found that respondents would also think that reservation in the private sector will reinforce caste. A respondent (male, 47) assuming a rational posture argued that, *Jo paryant aapan jatichya aadhare aarakshan ghenar, toh paryant jaat nasht honaar nahi. Mi tar mhanto shaalet pan jaat lau naka* (English Translation: Till the time we

keep availing caste-based reservation, caste will not be destroyed. I say, do not even put your caste category during school admissions).

Another respondent (female, 29) remarked,

> *Mala Kamble adnavaacha sthal aala hota. Mi nahi sangitla. Pawar, More asta tar theek asta. Tari pan jaat ashich jaat naste. Category madhun aalyavar te aplyala veglach dhartat. Khasgi kshetrat arakshaana mule jaat ulat ajun pakki hoil ani vadhel.* (English Translation: I had got a marriage prospect with the surname - Kamble. I rejected it. Had the surname been More or Pawar, it was fine. Even then, caste is not going to disappear. Once you are appointed through the reserved category, they hold us as "different". Reservation in the private sector might strengthen caste and bias.)

It was gathered that such respondents believed that since a bitterness has already developed towards them because of *savalatis* (colloquial Marathi word for reservation benefits and concessions), reservation in the private sector would further aggravate the resentment and also jealousy felt by the others towards their community.

They held that extension of reservation in the private sector would also give the upper castes another arrow in the quiver to attack them. One respondent (male, 47) used the phrase, *Aadhich makad tyat maddya payala* (Literal translation: *Already a monkey and now on top of it drunk too!* which means bad getting worse) to explain this phenomenon. Another respondent (male, 25) echoed the same thought process,

> *Even if a boy from our community becomes a bureaucrat, he is identified as Dalit IAS or Dalit IPS officer. Similarly, if there are quotas in the private sector, it will strengthen the already present resentment against our community.*

First, it shows that although reservation policies have not introduced caste, in a caste-ridden society like India, the upper castes are unwilling to accept Dalits in top positions and stigmatize them for being beneficiaries of reservation. Second, the respondents have extrapolated this to argue that the same would happen with reservation in the private sector. Hence, they tend to argue that reservation in the private sector will reinforce caste.

Anonymity of City Life will be Compromised

For a few young respondents, Dalit identity was not a very significant factor or rather it was inconsequential. They harped on having friends from other communities and felt that it was not necessary to carry their identity at workplaces or the public sphere. They feared that affirmative action would bring the stigma of 'being Dalit' back again. One respondent (female, 28) contended that,

> *At the office nobody cares about my caste so why should I go and tell them that I am a Buddhist….All my close friends know about my identity and they are okay with it. But others tend to judge you on that, so it's better to disclose my identity only when asked about it.*

In their study on attitudes towards affirmative action as a function of racial identity, Schmermund, Sellers, Mueller, & Crosby (2001) found that support for affirmative action was highest among people for whom group identity was the most significant component of a sense of self, among people who were most proud to be black, and among people who think that oppressed minorities should create alliances. Similarly, considering Dalit identity as secondary and trying to subdue it by being anonymous was a tendency among these respondents. They had come to like the feeling of being "anonymous" in the public sphere.

Another respondent (male, 39) remarked that,

> *Mumbai sarkhya shahara madhe yevda farak padat nahi. Office madhe koni swatahun jaat vicharat nahi. Jast Punjabi, Sindhi aani Gujarati aahet. Tar swatahun sangnyachi garaj padat nahi. Aata amhala performance varun bagitla jaata, mag amhala jaati varun baghitla jaanar.* (English Translation: In a city like Mumbai, it does not affect much. Nobody asks about caste at the office. Many are Punjabi, Sindhi and Gujarati. So the need to go and tell them on my own doesn't arise. Now they look at us through our performance, then they will look at us through caste.)

Those young respondents who were already employed in the private sector were comfortable not disclosing their Dalit-Buddhist identity unless asked explicitly and specifically. Due to surname similarities, the majority of them were assumed to be from the intermediate castes. For instance, surnames like Pawar, Shinde, More, Kadam, Jadhav, etc., are often found even in the dominant and intermediate castes. Therefore, they have not experienced any overt discrimination as such. With the coming of quotas in the private sector, they will be expressly marked as Dalit. With this, the anonymity of city life will be compromised. It will be difficult for them to move around as a "non-Dalit". This was mainly found among respondents in Shell Colony and Matunga Labour Camp.

The thought process that quotas in private jobs would rob them of this anonymity stems from social conformity and partial acculturation. As Naudet (2014) and Guru (2018) have shown, it becomes problematic for the Dalit middle class to relate with their group of origin when they move from one social class to another. They want to dissociate with their caste fellows because it reminds them of their repulsive or embarrassing past.[7] Hence, they try to fit in the new social class group by arguing against reservation even if they might have benefitted from it. The tendency to mask their caste identity or to keep it hidden for as long as possible is a product of this dissonance.

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[7]Gopal Guru (2018) depicts how the Maharashtra Dalit middle class sought a reprieve from their humiliating history. Their previous lives had become so repulsive that they did not wish to be reminded of it. This he says was apparent when some Dalit middle-class families forbade their family members from viewing the TV series 'Najuaka,' which centred on a Dalit woman's horrible ordeal (pp. 147-148).

The rest of the ghettos are well-known "Dalit bastis", therefore a mere utterance of their place of residence invokes suspicion in the other person's mind about their caste or community. A respondent from Ramabai Nagar remarked that "The moment they say that they are from Ramabai Ambedkar Nagar, they are taken as 'Jai-bhim wale' or there is some suspicion about that in the other person's mind." Thus, while ghettos have become safe spaces to assert and preserve their own identity, they nevertheless are stigmatised for living there.

Hopelessness and Scepticism about its Utility

It was observed that respondents had little hope that reservation in the private sector would be of utility since they felt helpless within the already-existing system of reservation. Disillusionment with the existing system of reservation was conveyed by a respondent (male, 36) as follows:

> Eighty per cent of our Bahujan population is fit tightly in the fifty per cent reservation bracket because of the court judgement. In that too, those who are needy are fighting with those who are comparatively well-off. Getting admission to a good school itself has become so difficult. Our applications are rejected because we stay in Ramabai Nagar. How much difference will reservation in the private sector make?

Another respondent (female, 53) said,

> *Aajun pan amhi jhopdyatch aahot, BMC chya jhaadukhatyat jast Dalit samaj aahe. Arakshanamule kahich changlya huddyavar gele, mothya flat madhe gele. Khasgi kshetrat arakshane tech hoil.* (English Translation: Even today we live in slums. Most of them working in the sanitation department of the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation are from the Dalit community. Only some have achieved respectable posts and live in huge apartments. The same might happen after reservation in the private sector.)

Schmermund et al. (2001) have argued, with respect to African Americans that their reactions to the affirmative action policy may also be influenced by their personal experiences with it. The same can be said about the respondents from the Buddhist community. Such respondents felt that they have already faced enough hardships and cannot rely on the State for their emancipation. They feel alienated and left to fend for themselves. Thus, they have become sceptical about the ameliorative effects of affirmative action in the private sector. Additionally, they were also not in the mood to assert or undertake protests to demand such reservations. A respondent(male, 48) contended that,

> *Baudha samajanech ka rastyavar utrun andolana karaychi? Amhi ladnar aani fayda dusaryanna honar mhanje mehnat kare murga, anda khaye fakir.* (English translation: Why should only the Buddhist community step out onto the roads and protest? We will fight for it and others will simply enjoy the fruits of our labour).

Many respondents harboured resentment towards Maharashtra's non-Buddhist SCs,[8] believing that Buddhists are the only community that takes to the streets in protest, while non-Buddhist SCs come to reap the benefits of Buddhist protest and assertion. They claimed the same thing happened during rallies in support of OBC reservations and Mandal Commission, or in protest of Dalit atrocities. Further, they also argued that many of the SC candidates elected to the Maharashtra Legislative Assembly were non-Buddhist Dalits. Therefore, there was doubt in their mind that despite a strong assertion by the Buddhist community over the issue, it would be of lesser utility to them. However, when posed with the question that countries like the United States do have affirmative action and diversity policies which even Indians have come to benefit from, the respondents were appreciative of the US' efforts towards inclusion and diversity but felt hopeless that anything of that sort would happen in India.[9]

Conclusion

This study found that a tiny section of predominantly young, middle-class, well-educated or employed Dalit-Buddhists disagree that there should be reservations in the private sector. It is surprising that despite being one of the most assertive communities among the Dalits of India, a section of the Dalit-Buddhist masses is unaware of the academic studies on job market discrimination, ill-informed about Ambedkar's ideas and thoughts, and, therefore, lack group solidarity.[10] This study

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[8]Political parties like Shiv Sena also played a major role in creating a rift between the Dalits of Maharashtra. It appealed to the non-Buddhist Dalits in the early 1990s to join Shiv Sena and favoured them while criticizing and singling out the Buddhists. See, Suhas Palshikar (2004). Shiv Sena: A tiger with many faces? *Economic and Political Weekly*, *39* (14/15), 1497–1507. Also, Milind Dhaware (2013). Disunity and fragmentation among Dalit castes of Maharashtra. *International Journal of Innovative Research and Practices*, *1*(9), 23–37.

[9]The Cisco and BAPS lawsuits show that South Asians transported caste inequality and discrimination with them to the United States. Seattle became the first city in the United States to outlaw caste discrimination on February 21, 2023. Earlier, notable higher education institutions in the United States such as Harvard University, Brown University, Brandeis University, and the University of California Davis have incorporated caste into their anti-discrimination policies in recent years. However, as Samos (2023) has argued more rigorous global interventions are needed to bring any real transformation. See, Sumeet Samos (2023, March 3). What does Seattle caste discrimination ban mean for India?. *Outlook*. https://www.outlookindia.com/national/what-does-seattle-caste-discrimination-ban-mean-for-india--news-267013 Besides, Dalit employees in the US wish for non-South Asian managers as they offer fair treatment because they are not aware of caste. This demonstrates the persisting menace of caste. See, Rohit Chopra & Ajantha Subramanian (2022, February 11). The movement to outlaw caste discrimination in the U.S. *Time*. https://time.com/6146141/caste-discrimination-us-opposition-grows/

[10]This lack of solidarity can also be attributed to neo-liberalism. Jagannathan and Packirisamy (2019) discuss the lack of solidarity fostered by neoliberal social relations Though they have examined it in the context of academic labour, intellectual, love, and personal lives, the underlying idea is that individuals are unable to connect with one another because they keep their vulnerabilities to themselves owing to the spirit of competitiveness and entrepreneurship that neoliberal social relations characterise and impose. See, Jagannathan & Packirisamy (2019).

shows that their cognition is largely affected by caste- based stigmatization. The insidious way in which upper-caste notions and ideas have seeped into their psyche points towards "internalized oppression". The negative stereotypes have permeated their minds and thereby associating with Dalit identity has become uncomfortable. Acculturation and social conformity dictate that they argue against reservation despite having benefitted from it. While Ambedkar's ideas and thoughts are highly respected, falsification and appropriation of his ideas by the hegemonic castes have misled the Buddhist youth into believing that reservation has stayed for a much longer time than was intended. Ultimately, the reinforcement of caste is being blamed on affirmative action or reservation policies, which is nothing but another hegemonic idea that has been internalized.

This is an exploratory study; no quantitative conclusions regarding the precise group of people who reject reservations in the private sector are drawn from it. It would need more data to demonstrate that particular factors, like income or age, and other social psychological processes influences this rejection. The article also acknowledges that this can be a future area of research that can be accomplished with the help of a larger data set. Furthermore, the thematic analysis that was used attempted to reflect the requirements of the sample. The emphasis here was on the issue at hand and the question that has to be answered.

Notwithstanding these limitations, this article highlights the psychology behind rejection of reservation in the private sector among few Dalits. In addition, this article emphasises the need to bridge this gap between the academia and masses. The organic Dalit intellectuals can make a greater impact on sensitizing the Buddhist masses about these matters and enlightening them about the more sinister and modern forms of exclusion. In the absence of which, this minority will remain mere consumers of propaganda, unconscious of their own exploitation.

Finally, we must also note that the majority of respondents in the study believe that there should be some sort of affirmative action, necessary to protect their interests in the neo-liberal era. Several countries, including the United States, South Africa, Northern Ireland, and Malaysia, have enacted anti-discrimination policies for social groups subjected to discrimination in the labour markets (Thorat 2005: 336). It is high time that India initiates certain policy and institutional changes to ensure diversity, equity, and inclusion in the private sector. It is also clear that we need to develop a more targeted approach to mitigate the negative impact of caste-based stigmatization on the minds of Dalits.

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Psychology of Caste in Food: A Letter to My Upper Caste Friend

Angel Sophan[1]

Abstract

In the upper caste imagination, the general notion of caste has mostly been limited to marriage, reservation, and politics. However, the everyday nature of caste often lies in the state of dismissal or un-acknowledgement by the upper caste. This letter is addressed to individuals/ communities who assume the position of upper caste and it aims to ignite conversations with an open mind and heart about the lives of those at the other end of the caste spectrum. A key focus of this letter is on Food—an important aspect of our lives where casteism is blatant and brutal. The letter explores a history of food practices and also addresses how food choices aid in discrimination and social exclusion of communities even in contemporary times. Using a lens of 'psyche of the oppressor', we discuss how food practices shapes an upper caste individual's psyche along the factors of delusion of caste superiority, socially favored caste behavior and intergenerational transmission of caste attitudes. The letter does not comment on individual choices or preferences; it rather focuses on the system in which vegetarianism is considered supreme, which facilitates in ignoring the pluralities of the country and thereby pushing the 'other' into margins/ peripheries and does not take cognizance of their culture and history.

Keywords

Caste, food, Brahmin, Psychology, India

Dear Friend,

I hope this letter finds you well. I think it is time you and I had this conversation, an uncomfortable yet pertinent one. It is a topic we keep sighing away and shrugging off

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because we either think it is a problem that concerns the past century, or it is boring, or our country is not moving past that topic. No, I am not here to talk about reservation but caste itself. That is the mistake we make, too, don't we? We ponder and weigh the strengths and weaknesses of an affirmative action policy introduced to combat the caste system, but we rarely engage with caste in detail.

We feel caste is seen only in marriage, vote bank and reservation, don't we? However, the fact is that caste is present in everything we see, hear, smell and touch. Caste operates in the residential neighborhood we live in, classrooms we studied, in our words, language, tone, and accent, our attires, places and forms of worship, our access to public resources, among our friends, colleagues and so on. The list is endless in which caste molds us knowingly or unknowingly. Our entire life revolves around it, yet we never engage with caste; why is that? It is ironic and baffling that we are consumed by caste but barely acknowledge its presence.

However, here in this letter, I would like to talk to you about one such area where the presence of caste is brutal and gut-wrenching. If we have to walk through a lane of introspection, I would like you to think along with me in the following lines: Why do vast sections of society survive on others' leftover food? How did something as elementary as food decide who is treated as human and who is not? Why are human beings reduced to an extent where they fight with animals for a bare living and survival? Why do people rummage in the garbage to eat half-rotten food? If this was an issue concerning the past, why are the children beaten (to death) for drinking water in schools? (*The Hindu* 2022), Why do they have to purify the well after the Dalits[1] use it? (*The Wire* 2022). The list is painful and endless, but I would like to start by highlighting a few aspects.

Caste in Food

Just look around us; are we not surrounded by different cuisines, from different cultures to different regions? Why don't you and I come across Dalit cuisine(s)?[2] For the Dalit communities, it is not just flavors, spices and different cooking styles but digesting caste and trauma on a plate. Goody writes that history has never been so blood-soaked and stained with violence as that of caste on a plate. Because these histories of food carry generations of pain and cuisines forged through centuries of oppression. Dalit cuisines are neither popular nor common because mainstream[3] cuisines fail to acknowledge their existence. This is also one of the oldest ways caste thrives, as a tool of invisibility and silencing (Kader n.d.). Despite being consumed by caste, this probably answered our previous question about why we do not engage with caste. The mainstream fails to recognize the Dalit communities' food habits, not only

[1]Dalit implies those who have been broken, ground down, by those above them in an active and a deliberate way (Zelliot 1978).

[2]It refers to the plurality of the cuisines consumed by Dalit communities all over the country.

[3]Considered normal, and having or using ideas, beliefs etc. that are accepted by most people (Cambridge Dictionary, n.d.).

the food that is not acknowledged but also the people and communities. Is it not our collective failure to resonate with the pain of a larger section of society?

Rajyashri's (Goody n.d.) art explores every day and historical instances of Dalit resistance. Her writings capture tracing Dalit writers' memories of food. For examples, *Bhakri*[4] and cactus pods from *Prisons We Broke* by Baby Kamble (2008). By re-creating these recipes, she hopes to reveal to the reader how deep are the roots of caste, which can be noticed in the simplest activity of drinking water or consuming food. Jahnavi (Uppuleti 2020) writes about roasted winged termites (*Usillu*) as her favorite monsoon snack, a dish relished in the Madiga community- a Dalit community in Telangana which remains hidden from the mainstream narrative.

It is important to know our histories, is it not? Ghurye writes about the rules and regulations for sharing food or drink. He says that castes can be divided into five groups: first, the twice-born castes; second, those castes at whose hands the twice-born can take 'Pakka' food; third, those castes at whose hands the twice-born cannot accept any kind of food but may take water, fourth, castes that are not untouchables yet are such that water from them cannot be used by the twice-born; last, all those castes whose touch defiles not only the twice-born but any orthodox Hindu. All food is divided into two classes, *Kachcha* and Pakka, the former being any food in which it has been cooked with water and the latter all food cooked in ghee without the addition of water. As a rule, a man will never eat *Kachcha* food unless it is prepared by fellow caste-men, which means a member of his endogamous group, whether caste or sub-caste or by his Brahmin guru or spiritual guide. A Brahmin cannot accept *kachcha* food from any other caste (Ghurye 1969; Stevenson 1954; Freed 1970).

Did you know that both non-vegetarianism and vegetarianism were shared among all varnas? Sharma writes about how dietary habits are one of the main functions of the caste system. There was not much difference in food habits between ancient Aryans[5] and Anaryans. Later, the same food habits became the major grounds for untouchability. They lost their social prestige when Upanishadic[6] and Buddhist[7] criticism was directed at Brahmin[8] supremacy. On account of this, they began restructuring their social structure to gain lost social prestige. The killing of cows and beef-eating were widespread among all varnas,[9] and Brahmins, the biggest meat eaters, imposed restrictions on these food habits to secure their social prestige. The Sudras[10] were allowed to consume only the flesh of the dead animals, which was later declared

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[4]Hand-beaten bread (Sen 2019).

[5]Of or relating to hypothetical ethnic type illustrated by or descended from early speakers of Indo-European languages (Merriam Webster, n.d.).

[6]Philosophical religious texts of Hinduism; also known as *Sanatan Dharma* meaning eternal order or eternal path (World History Encyclopedia 2020).

[7]Someone who practices Buddhism, the religion based on teachings of Buddha (Vocabulary, n.d.).

[8]A Hindu of the highest caste traditionally assigned to priesthood (Merriam Webster, n.d.).

[9]According to Hindu scriptures refers to classification of people based on their qualities (Yogapedia 2023).

[10]A Hindu of lower caste traditionally assigned to menial occupations (Merriam Webster, n.d.)

the most hateful food and ex-communicated from the entire society. The Brahmin was the chief of the society and a priest to the men. He was the ruler of the rulers. Animal sacrifice was compulsory in yajnas,[11] and it was performed at the disposal of Brahmin priests. The meat was distributed among everyone, and a considerable portion was given to the priest. Meat eating was popular among all varnas from the Vedic age to the Sudra period. It is argued that there were butcher houses for killing cows in various places during the Vedic ages. In Vedas, there are examples of cow killing and beef eating. There is a provision for cow killing in Rig Veda for Agni and Indra devas. During the Vedic age, the Kshatriya soldiers wore animal skin. There are mentions of meat consumption in the Ramayana and Mahabharata. Sharma provides evidence with the verses from the mentions found in the above-mentioned holy books. The family who used to do yajna could only obtain a small portion of the animal's flesh. The Brahmin also performed the duty of a butcher. When Buddha came and revolted against the Brahmanical social order, the system of yajnas, and animal sacrifices, it was a massive blow to the social prestige of the Brahmins. King Ashoka banned the killing of animals. The reformation introduced religious texts and banned meat eating to restore the once-lost social prestige. Sudras were banned because their conditions were deplorable and also for the food practices. The only food left at their disposal was the flesh of dead animals (Sharma 2003; Khare 1966; Ambedkar 2009).

Dr. Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar is considered as a stalwart for social justice and the one who worked tirelessly for the emancipation of Dalits. Ambedkar (1948) stated that the Broken Men were Buddhists. They did not revere the Brahmins, did not employ them as their priests, and regarded them as impure. On the other hand, the Brahmin disliked the broken men because they were Buddhist and preached against them with contempt and hatred, resulting in them being regarded as untouchables. If a Brahmin comes in contact with a Buddhist or enters the Buddhist temple, a purificatory bath is advised for the Brahmins as Manu[12] prescribes. The broken men hated the Brahmins because they were enemies of Buddhism, and the Brahmins imposed untouchability on them because they would not leave Buddhism. The roots of untouchability lie in the hatred and contempt that the Brahmins created against those who were Buddhist. Beef eating is considered to be the root cause of untouchability. This divides Hindus into vegetarians and flesh eaters. It also divides Hindus into those who eat cows and those who do not—the Touchables, whether vegetarians or flesh eaters divide on the front of not consuming beef. There is abundant evidence from the scriptures, especially in Rig Veda,[13] suggesting that the Aryans consumed beef. A detailed analysis of the sacrifices involving cows and oxen was laid down, but the description was not restricted to the

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[11]A Hindu ritual that has been performed since ancient times in which Agni Deva, the fire God, acts as a medium between man and the gods. It is performed in front of fire and Vedic mantras are chanted. It is a Sanskrit word meaning worship, sacrifice or offering (Yogapedia 2023).

[12]The progenitor of the human race and giver of religious laws of Manu according to Hindu mythology (Merriam Webster, n.d.)

[13]The foremost and oldest collection of Vedic Sanskrit Hymns (Merriam Webster, n.d.)

sacrifices; it had a detailed analysis of what kind of cows and oxen were sacrificed and to what deities they had to be offered. Ambedkar says that Hindu society is stratified into three sections: One is those who are vegetarian, two, who eat flesh but do not eat cow flesh, and finally, some eat flesh, including cow's flesh. They are classified as Brahmins, non-brahmins and untouchables.

Having walked through the dark alley lanes of history, which are kept hidden, it is important to know why we equate Brahmins to oppressors/historically privileged. They are the epicenter of the caste ecosystem. Thus, communities closer to this epicenter have better social standing than those who do not share the same closeness. Closeness here refers to the services provided to the Brahmins. Madhavan (2003) writes that caste representation and writing culture in the colonial system represent the Brahminical self-perception of caste, which has been made as a frame of reference and incorporated into ethnocentric judgements. The Nairs, who are soldiers, always take arms and serve the king according to his command and will. Their proximity to Brahmans gave them recognition, and the Nairs imitated the rites and customs of the Brahmans.

Moreover, this closeness translated to the physical space that each occupied in the proximity of Brahmins. In the context of Kerala, there were prescribed distances that each person had to follow. For example, a Nayar may approach a Brahmin but must not touch him, a Tiyan must keep a distance of 36 steps from Brahmin and Pulayars, and Parayars must keep a distance of 96 steps from Brahmins (Ghurye 1969). Each community increased their social standing and status based on how close they were to Brahmins, and the greater the distance from Brahmins, the lower the social standing and position occupied in the society. Everything done by the Brahmins was seen as an act of reverence by the rest of the society. The food practices, the attire, ways of worship and so on.

We must ask ourselves an important question, keeping historical and contemporary times in mind: Why were the Brahmins revered so much? Because they were the temple priests, closest to God. Ambedkar stated that every other caste is an imitation of Brahmanism. The psychological interpretation is given in *Castes in India: Their mechanism, genesis and development* (Ambedkar 2020) on why the subcastes were endogamous and self-closed because Brahmins were so. He addressed it as 'the injection of imitation'. The proclivity to imitate is ingrained in the human mind and need not be considered an insufficient explanation for the formation of castes. Ambedkar quotes Walter Bagehot and Gabriel Tarde on how imitation is not a conscious or voluntary process and flows from higher to lower.

The details of Brahmin food are not discussed in this letter. Instead, the mental makeup that the medium of food facilitates in continuing the oppressor's/historically privileged mindset is espoused. Untouchability is best carried out in urban and rural spaces through this powerful yet subtle medium. We have all come across house rental signs boldly inviting 'only vegetarians'. The extent to which everyone else adjusts to accommodate Brahmins or the vegetarian sentiment is high in every social setting. A few examples are announcing prior if containers are non-veg, asking

permission to continue eating if it is not a problem, going to restaurants that only serve vegetarian even if only one member of the group prefers it, teachers and school/college management ordering students not to bring non-vegetarian food to respect the sentiments of vegetarians, and workspaces issuing notices asking employees not to consume non-veg in the office premises (Johari 2014). The list is endless.

Brahmanical hegemony dictates certain practices as the supreme norm, and the rest of the society, who do not belong to the Brahmin community, is expected to follow suit. The question being posed here is, how does that sense of superiority possessed by the oppressor/historically privileged community transcend to the internalization of every non-brahmin caste and religion? Furthermore, how blatantly does the medium of food operate to maintain hegemony in the attitudes and behavior of what one eats?

Drawing on the conceptual framework of the psyche of the oppressor (Sophan & Nair 2023), this framework indicates a few factors, such as delusion of caste superiority, socially favored caste behavior and intergenerational transmission of caste attitudes. The upcoming sections will elaborate on the factors in relation to food and how it contributes to the psyche of the oppressor/ historically privileged.

Delusion of Caste Superiority

Did you know that Brahmin vegetarianism is a very elastic concept? Dolphijn (2006) writes that in communities living closer to the sea, Kerala and Bengali Brahmins consume fish as part of their diet. Kashmiri Brahmins refrain only from pork and beef; chicken and mutton are mainly considered acceptable. The vegetarian diet of the Brahmins is interpreted as a result of their exclusion from physical labor. Their food was primarily limited to *Saatvik* food. It refers to natural and good food for the soul: food without warm elements such as meat (*Rajasik* food) and poisonous elements like garlic and alcohol (*Tamasik* food). The problem is not with communities having their own food preferences; it becomes problematic only when the historically privileged caste imposes its dietary restrictions on other members. The prevalent Brahmanical hegemony gives them an edge to showcase the kind of universality in concepts of good and bad. They judge not only their own actions but also the actions of other caste groups.

The rules of morality can be seen in the Bhagavad Gita;[14] Ilaiah interprets it as a Brahmanical work. In this, we can see moral regulations on dietary habits. Tasty, rich, substantial food (*saatvik*) is loved by the man of goodness, while pungent, sour, salty heated foods (*rajasik*) are loved by the man of passion. *Tamasik* food is described as spoiled, tasteless, putrid, stale, and filthy and is loved by the man of darkness. *Tamasik* food is also said to cause pain, misery, and sickness. The Brahmin caste defined their Saatvik food as good and considered the rest as bad. *Saatvik* food stands at the center of society. At the same time, *Rajasik* and *Tamasik* are pushed to the margins, which translates to the vegetarian menu standing at the center of society. In contrast, the non-vegetarian menu is banished to its peripheries.

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[14]Hindu devotional work in a poetic form (Merriam Webster, n.d.)

Similarly, Thomas (2020) calls IISC the Iyer Iyengar Science campus. She states that vegetarianism in India cannot be considered only as a choice and preference because there have been reported cases of discrimination of what one eats and cases reported on the existence of separate wash basins and entrances for vegetarians and non-vegetarians. IISC has three major dining halls (mess): A mess is a pure vegetarian, B mess is for north Indian vegetarians and non-vegetarians, and C mess is for south Indian vegetarians and non-vegetarians. When enquired about the purpose of A mess when B and C mess offered vegetarian food, it was said that 'A mess is Brahmanical, it is only for Brahmins, A mess is an Agraharam'.[15]

It is important to understand the role that food plays in maintaining the concepts of purity and pollution. Béteille (2011) writes on rather stringent rules for the exchange of food and water among different caste groups. It is said that superior castes gave food to inferior castes but they did not accept from them. It is important to introspect why the restriction was even in place, what does it imply? In ancient and contemporary times, assertion of superiority for a group of people had to be emanated in all their practices through rituals, endogamy, social interaction and exchange of food and water as Ghurye had stated earlier, but down the line, when there is no more threat or one need not try to assert superiority, the food itself became the statement of superiority and anyone who consumed had that status and individuals/communities who differed faced the repercussions too. Guru (2019) provides an example of certain cooked foods and how they create cultural hierarchies within social groups. He gives the example of *Shreekhand,[16] Puri and Deshi Ghee* came to be exclusively associated with Brahmins by the subaltern/Dalit perception. Chigateri (2008) stated that food hierarchy in India goes from vegetarianism to meat eating (no beef) to beef eating. The superior ethic of vegetarianism is combined with the values of non-violence that continue to frame the discourse around food practices in India.

Thus, we can see how the delusion of caste superiority is maintained alive in food and scriptures, aiding in the continuation of Brahminical hegemony. It adds that it is not about an individual's choice or preferences. By maintaining vegetarian superiority as a food culture, it continues to ignore the pluralities of the country, push the rest of the communities into the peripheries, and stigmatize them for their culture and history. It also captures how it is carried out in reputed educational institutions.

Socially Favored Caste Behavior and Intergenerational Transmission of Caste Attitudes

Can adherence to a vegetarian diet be a product of conformity? Young children tend to conform rather than confront, even when they are young as two. Researchers Li, Britvan, and Tomasello (2021) write that children are expected to learn the physical and social realities to become functioning members of society. Young children continue to

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[15]Brahmin settlements where houses are lined on either side of the road, one end of the road would be a Shiva temple and the other end would be Vishnu temple (Wikipedia 2023)

[16]An Indian sweet dish of strained Yogurt (Wikipedia 2024)

learn norms, conventions, and rituals for reasons such as identification and affiliation with members of their culture. They are motivated to act conventionally. This explains how human groups can transmit cultural practices over generations. How else will these practices pass down generations and stand the test of time if not for young children not motivated to acquire them? It was found that children conformed more to norms than to preferences. Children protest against transgressors and tattle about transgressors to observers. This indicates that children are committed to upholding norms even above their self-interest. Socially favored behavior translates to unquestioned ideal-orienting behavior. In the case of food habits, an interplay between intergenerational transmission of caste attitudes and socially favored caste behavior is seen at large.

Jingxiong et al. (2007) shows that, for young children, the most influencing factor with respect to eating habits is obtained from their immediate social context, which is their family. The family eating environment includes parents' actual child-feeding practices, their dietary habits, and the beliefs and attitudes they convey verbally. Parental influences can be transmitted directly (through the food served) and indirectly (behavioral models and social norms) to children. Children's food practices are also determined by parents' dietary comments and restrictions employed.

Thorat and Lee (2005) cite the example of a child from a Dalit community who was denied food in a mid-day meal scheme (MMS) because of her background. At the same time, her classmates did not face issues because they were from dominant castes; another instance brought to attention is in the government-run public distribution system (PDS), where shop owners belonging to dominant castes do not distribute goods to customers from Dalit community before a cloth screen is hung out. The localities in which mid-day meals are served regarding village caste geography constitute a vital factor in determining access to children from the Dalit community; if placed in a dominant caste locality, it becomes difficult and threatening. Opposition to cooks from the Dalit community is one of the most common blatant incidents that reminds the country of the cutthroat nature of caste. A few examples include local administrators blocking the hire of cooks from the Dalit community; if cooks have been hired from the said community, then dominant caste parents send the children with lunch boxes, and these same parents pressure the administration to dismiss the cook when these steps do not result in favorable results, such as dominant caste parents' campaign to shut down MMS programme in school. Alternatively, they take steps to withdraw the child from school or admit them to a different school where the cook is not from a Dalit community. What do we understand by this? Is it the parents or children having an issue? If children have an issue, where is it stemming from? This proves the intergenerational transmission of casteist attitudes and how children learn socially favored caste behavior.

Conclusion

In this letter, I have attempted to walk you through an introspective lane of how caste in food shrouds us regularly. We considered the historical details of *Kachha and*

Pakka food and social restriction within caste groups. We saw that beef eating was a widespread practice among all varnas and how it was given up by social elites to regain social prestige. The cow was then used as a symbol of sacredness, worth, and protection. This is very well discussed by Babasaheb Ambedkar and other anti-caste scholars. I hope that after reading this letter, you will continue to have an open heart and mind to read and engage with anti-caste literature, have dialogues and discussions among your friends, family, neighbors, colleagues, and community members and identify areas (food, language, attire, tradition, knowledge production, etc.) in which Brahmanical hegemony is upheld and how we can collectively work towards dismantling the system. I would like to conclude this letter with a translated Telugu poem, 'Goddu maamsam' by Digumarthi Suresh Kumar (SMCS channel 2015).

"When its udders were squeezed and milked,

You did not feel any pain at all.

When it was stitched into a chappal, you stamped underfoot and walked,

You did not feel hurt at all.

When it rang as a drum at your marriage and your funeral,

You did not suffer any blows.

When it sated my hunger, beef became your goddess?".

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The American Question: Ambedkar, Columbia University, and the "Spirit of Rebellion"

Scott R. Stroud[1]

Abstract

The education of Bhimrao Ambedkar is a vital part of his complex story. His experience at institutions like Columbia University with its progressive cast of academics helped him see how scholarship and activism can matter in the battle against caste oppression. His thought—and life—would have been radically different had he exclusively attended British institutions of higher education. But how did he end up in America, the imperfect land of freedom and democracy? Why did he choose Columbia University when so many other Indian students chose educational institutions in the British Empire? This study examines the question of Ambedkar's education and proposes some answers to these questions by starting with his relationship to an important early sponsor, the Gaekwad of Baroda. By tracing the engagement of Sayajirao Gaekwad III with the West, we can see the connections this ruler felt between Columbia University, America, and freedom. By placing the Gaekwad's story next to Ambedkar's— and alongside Ambedkar's nuanced lifelong engagement with one of his most prominent professors, John Dewey—we can reveal new connections between the American experience and what Ambedkar called "a spirit of rebelliousness." Both Ambedkar and the Gaekwad wanted an education that enshrined the right sort of rebellious freedom from oppressive external authority. This intelligent mediation of education resides in the unstable middle ground between a conservative complacency with a tradition's customs and a radical upturning of all that is through revolution. Ambedkar, like his pragmatist teacher John Dewey, wanted a sense of education that was reflective and reconstructive.

Keywords

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Introduction

Ambedkar's education is one of the common themes in numerous stories that others tell about his life. His education underwrites or foreshadows so much of what he thought and did in terms of his pursuit of social justice and democracy. A central part of his education was the time he spent in America at Columbia University during 1913–1916. He was sent to the U.S. with the help of a scholarship from the ruler of the princely state, Baroda. This relationship between Ambedkar and the Gaekwad of Baroda, Sayajirao III, is an often-mentioned part of the story of Ambedkar's educational exploits in the West. As virtually every biographical account about Ambedkar notes, it was due to the Gaekwad's support that Ambedkar was able to attend Columbia University in 1913, and then later, pursue further education in London. But one question has rarely been asked: How exactly did Ambedkar end up in New York at Columbia University? The detailed recent biographies uncover many details about Ambedkar's education in the West, but they still leave this question unanswered.[1] What might we add to Ambedkar's story—and the constructive lessons we draw from it—if we try our best to provide an answer to the "American question" of vital parts of his educational journey?

The magnitude of the American question strikes one when the vast number of Indians that were channeled toward English educational opportunities in London, Oxford, or Cambridge come to mind. Ambedkar represents the first untouchable sent from India to American higher education, and one of the most prominent of the limited cases of Indians sent to the U.S. for education in the pre-Independence period. As Brant Moscovitch notes, there was a reason for this choice: "most families encouraged their children to study in Britain in the hope of advancing their career prospects and possibly enabling them to eventually join the Indian Civil Service."[2] The question becomes more intriguing when one considers how stunningly different the Indian political scene, the movement for "untouchable" rights, and the eventual Indian constitution would have been had Ambedkar, a central figure in all of these areas and activities, not ended up in the seminar rooms of Columbia University but instead had studied only under British intellectuals.

Whatever the accuracy of counterfactual speculations may be, Ambedkar went to Columbia largely through the guidance and support of the Gaekwad. There is not much indication that young Ambedkar had a preference for Columbia specifically; Ambedkar's father—helped by his time in the British service—might have preferred his son to pursue more standard routes to higher education through the channels of Empire. Archival evidence that I have detailed elsewhere does seem to indicate that Ambedkar's father desired a British education for young Bhimrao, but Bhimrao himself did not like that option given Britian's domination over India.[3] Might the

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[1] Aakash Singh Rathore (2023). *Becoming Babasaheb: The life and times of Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar (Volume 1): Birth to Mahad (1891-1929)*. Harper Collins; Ashok Gopal (2023). *A part apart*. Navayana.

[2] Brant Moscovitch (2012). Harold Laski's Indian students and the power of education, 1920–1950. *Contemporary South Asia*, 20: 1,36.

[3] See Scott R. Stroud (2023). *The evolution of pragmatism in India: Ambedkar, Dewey, and the rhetoric of reconstruction.* University of Chicago Press.

tipping of the scales toward America have occurred at the hand of the Gaekwad? It is useful to explore the reasons why the Gaekwad might have prepared the way for Ambedkar in America. Understanding the ruler's history with both the British and with America (and Columbia) can give us new details to add to our stories of young Ambedkar's education, as well as his later pursuits of social and education reform in India. What will become apparent is that both the Gaekwad and Ambedkar valued a sort of rebelliousness in educative endeavors. They saw the value in a spirit that enshrined intelligent resistance to sources of power and domination. One can see this spirit across Ambedkar's works, but the concluding section of this article will illustrate how this orientation in Sayajirao was also present in Ambedkar up to his final years. America mattered for Ambedkar, and examining the conditions for it to so matter is a valuable, and understudied, part of his story.

Becoming the Gaekwad of Baroda

Who was the enlightened ruler who connected Ambedkar and Columbia University? The boy who would become the Gaekwad or ruler of Baroda, a princely state in Gujarat, and key benefactor to the young Ambedkar, was born in the extended family of the Gaekwads in Kavlana on March 11, 1863. He was elevated to the position of ruling Baroda at the age of thirteen through a fascinating story of intrigue and struggle between the British and the former ruler of Baroda, a prince by the name of Malharrao, an unseemly ruler who even descended to the level of supposedly trying to poison the British resident of Baroda to be rid of his interference.[4] Through a series of events that do not concern us here, the young boy was adopted into the royal family and pronounced the future Gaekwad of Baroda. The young Gaekwad was given a private and expansive education at the hands of a member of the Indian Civil Service and Director of Education in the State of Berar, F. A. H. Eliot. Eliot closely supervised an intense educational plan for the young ruler which included language training in English, Marathi, Gujarati, and Urdu, as well as the subjects of mathematics, history, and geography.[5] The young Gaekwad eventually rose to the levels that this education demanded of him, and became close to Eliot; he would later on demand of the British that Eliot serve him as an advisor during his rule of Baroda, a demand that was granted for a time. He would never forgive the British, however, when Eliot was recalled from Baroda's service in response to perceived defiance by the Gaekwad to British interests.

Sayajirao Gaekwad was a relatively progressive ruler for his time, insisting on founding many schools for his subjects. His forward-looking policies also included attempts to fight caste discrimination in Baroda through inter-caste dinners, employment schemes for disadvantaged castes, and scholarship programs for lower-caste individuals. Of course, it was the later initiative that so benefitted the young Ambedkar. But added on to these social reform predilections was an interesting relationship with the West. Eliot had introduced the young Sayajirao to the culture

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[4]Fatesinghrao Gaekwad (1989). *Sayajirao of Baroda: The prince and the man.* Popular Prakashan, 45–50.
[5]Ibid., 55.

and ways of the West, both good and bad, and the Gaekwad began a habit of making extended trips to Europe and America in the 1880s that would continue for decades. Sayajirao was even present for the historic World's Parliament of Religions in Chicago in 1893. He sometimes claimed that the trips that dragged him through Switzerland, London, and eventually America were done for his health—he loathed the hot summers of Baroda and could not accept the respite that traditional Indian mountain retreats provided Indian princes. Or perhaps it was the escape from the pressures of being a prince, the position of power that the young boy had not been born into and that seemed to have descended upon him in a rather random fashion. Whatever the motivation, Sayajirao experienced much of Europe and the West, and took these influences back to his dealings in Baroda. The British were torn about this habit of travel to the West. On the one hand, they did not like the Indian princes being so far away from an effective position of control over their Indian states—and the British officials there who might thereby influence them. On the other hand, the British had long criticized or looked down upon Indian princes precisely because they were perceived as crude and "unworldly."[6] Sayajirao's habit of staying away from his realm and among European and American communities pulled at both of these concerns.

Torn between Empire and America

There are two trips to America, however, that are particularly relevant to the issue of Ambedkar's education. Sayajirao, his second wife (Chimnabai), and his entourage arrived in the U.S. on May 13, 1906 with the intention of studying American industry; he also indicated an interest in visiting American universities and mentioned in the press that he had letters from a range of dignitaries offering to assist with his tour—including the president of Columbia University, Nicholas Butler.[7] Sayajirao's brother, Sampatroo, also accompanied the ruler and often spoke to the agents of the press; he admitted in one story he, unlike the Gaekwad, was Oxford trained, but quickly continued on to say that, "It is the educational system of this country that his Highness is most anxious to study…his Highness wishes to have all of his subjects educated."[8]

Wealthy businessman and president of the Chamber of Commerce in New York, Morris K. Jesup, arranged a variety of stops for Sayajirao at various educational institutions—out of which one of the handful of schools that the Gaekwad visited was Columbia University.[9] Jesup was also the president and benefactor of the American Museum of Natural History in New York, an institution directed for ten years by the naturalist, Hermon C. Bumpus (1862–1943).[10] Jesup brought Bumpus in to lead the programming and activities of the museum in 1901, and they became close

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[6] Ibid., 123.
[7] A Real Maharaja Here in A Shiny High Hat. *New York Times*. May 14, 1906, 9.
[8] Ibid.
[9] The Maharaja's Names Puzzle Hotel Staff. *New York Times*. May 15, 1906, 6.
[10] For more on Bumpus's life and education, see: Hermon Carey Bumpus (1944). May 5, 1862-June 21, 1943. *Science*, vol. 99, no. 2559, Jan. 14, 28–30; Hermon C. Bumpus, Jr. (1947). *Hermon Carey Bumpus: Yankee naturalist.* Minnesota Archive Editions.

colleagues.[11] Bumpus continued in this role until 1911 when he resigned and became a business manager for the University of Wisconsin. While in New York, the Gaekwad was interested in seeing all manner of educational institutions, so he asked Jesup to arrange a visit to the American Museum of Natural History. It was here that Sayajirao met Bumpus, and they quickly became good friends.[12] Their relationship would blossom so much that the Gaekwad would eventually appoint him "as Baroda's agent in America."[13] The Gaekwad would write to Bumpus in 1908 about the Gaekwad's son, Jaisingrao, who was initiating a course of study in America at Harvard University.[14] Bumpus would become the personal guardian of Jaisingrao, or "Jay" as the Bumpus family would come to know him, a task that surely created some stress on Bumpus given the young prince's irresponsibility with money and inexperience with life on his own.[15] Over the years, Bumpus would also serve as a periodic, but important, advisor to the Gaekwad, channeling a steady flow of American academics toward the service needs of Baroda. Following Bumpus's advice, Charles Cuthbert Hall was hired to be Baroda's Educational Advisor; he also sent young Americans like Ralph C. Whitnach, a graduate of Brown University, to Baroda, where he eventually created the first banking institution in that princely state.[16] Bumpus also recommended William Alanson Borden (1853–1931) from Yale as the person to lead the Gaekwad's new public library initiative in 1910.[17] Under Borden's leadership in Baroda for three years, the Gaekwad's ideas of enhancing public education for all of his people were greatly augmented—45 larger libraries were established, along with the creation of around 650 smaller village libraries.[18] Even after his time in Baroda was finished, Borden continued to seek out meetings with the Gaekwad when the ruler visited Europe in 1913.[19]

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[11]Interestingly enough, it was conflicts at the museum between Jesup and Bumpus and the anthropologist, Franz Boas, that would drive the latter away from the museum; Boas would shift his affiliation to Columbia University in 1906, where he would interact more fully with John Dewey and other stars soon to be in the orbit of young Ambedkar. For more details on this incident, see Rosemary Lévy Zumwalt (2019). *Franz Boas: The emergence of the anthropologist.* University of Nebraska Press. For more on Ambedkar and Boas, see Jesús Francisco Cháirez-Garza (2018). B.R. Ambedkar, Franz Boas and the rejection of racial theories of Untouchability. *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies*, *41*(2), 281–296. For a general account of anthropology's rise during Ambedkar's education and life, see Kamala Visweswaran (2010). *Un/common cultures: Racism and the rearticulation of cultural differences.* Duke University Press.

[12]Hermon C. Bumpus, Jr., *Hermon Carey Bumpus.* 73.

[13]Fatesinghrao Gaekwad. *Sayajirao of Baroda.* 204.

[14]Portions of this letter are printed in Stanley Rice (1931). *Sayaji Rao III: Maharaja of Baroda*, vol. 1. Oxford University Press, 136.

[15]Hermon C. Bumpus, Jr., *Hermon Carey Bumpus.* 75–76.

[16]Hermon C. Bumpus, Jr., *Hermon Carey Bumpus.* 73–74.

[17]*Cornell Alumni News*, vol. 12, No. 40, August 1910, 475. For more on Borden's activities in Baroda, see Murai Lal Nagar (1992). *William Alanson Borden (1853-1931): An apostle of international librarianship.* International Library Center.

[18]Stanley Rice, *Sayaji Rao III: Maharaja of Baroda*, vol. 2, 73.

[19]We know this detail from the reports of British intelligence agents tracking the Gaikwad's movements and meetings while in Europe. Fatesinghrao Gaekwad. *Sayajirao of Baroda.* 255.

In 1906, however, one of Bumpus's earliest influences on Sayajirao was to help convince him about the educational potentials of America; after meeting Bumpus and touring American universities in New York, Sayajirao was convinced to send his son to an American university, as well as at least "two young men from Baroda to America to 'study sociology and the science of Municipal Government.'"[20] Bumpus would remain in the Ambedkar-New York story even after the naturalist resigned his position at the museum and left for Wisconsin in 1911—Bumpus's name appears thrice in the detailed "Memorandum of Agreement" between Baroda and Ambedkar on June 4, 1913, that sets out the terms of the Gaekwad's support of Ambedkar's education in America. Bumpus was to receive reimbursement requests from Ambedkar related to his education, as well as be a channel for Ambedkar to report his progress in his studies. The 1913 agreement, signed just before Ambedkar left for America, indicates that "Mr. Ambedkar Bhimrao R. undertakes to proceed to America to be trained up in finance and sociology in the Columbia University, New York, and to obtain the Master's degree in economics, finance and sociology staying there for a period of two years or more as may be hereafter considered necessary. During this period he shall stay under the general supervision of Dr. H.C. Bumpus."[21]

The 1906 trip was important in other ways, as well. Sayajirao made a point to tell the American press, one often interested in only the exotic and impractical elements of Indian culture, that he was "glad to say that the caste barriers are breaking down slowly."[22] In a side trip to Washington D.C., the Maharaja of Baroda had an invited audience with President Roosevelt, and he also observed the rituals of Senate debates in the Capitol.[23] By all indications, he was getting exposed to a range of aspects of America, from Wall Street to Morningside Heights to Washington D.C., and he seemed to be increasingly fond of what America had to offer. Before leaving America's shores, the press reported his promises to return again soon and to send Indian students back to America for higher education.[24]

Sayajirao's interest in the U.S. education system was still in the foreground during his next trip to America in 1910. He arrived in Vancouver on June 5 and then worked his way to New York City once again, arriving in that buzzing metropolis on June 15, 1910.[25] He only stayed a week in New York, but his infatuation with the city was quickly reported in the press—next to a rather odd debate about whether he found American women attractive, a controversy spurred on by reported comments during his previous trip to the U.S. Trying to raise the coverage of Baroda and its rulers to a higher level in the American press, he praised the greatness of the U.S., and was quoted as saying that "I believe it has the greatest future of any country." The press coverage

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[20]Fatesinghrao Gaekwad. *Sayajirao of Baroda.* 204.

[21]This document hails from the records of the state of Baroda. The "true copy" referenced here of "The Memorandum of Agreement between Bhimrao Ambedkar and Baroda State" can be found in the Khairmode Papers at the University of Mumbai Archives.

[22]Ibid., 6.

[23]Maharajah Sees President. *New York Times*, May 24, 1906, 2.

[24]Gaekwar Is Coming Back. *New York Times*, May 25, 1906, 11.

[25]Indian Prince Coming. *New York Times*, April 23, 1910, 1.

of his short stay in New York also gives us some insight into why he continued to visit this city so often; his love of New York seeped through the reports that "he said he liked the noise of New York because noise always meant progress."[26] This visit also fell in the middle of Jaisingrao's matriculation at Harvard University. Jaisingrao, the son of the Gaekwad, joined Harvard and pursued his studies in philosophy and religion in 1908, after preparatory education at the Horace Mann School in New York City alongside Bumpus's son Carey.[27]

Jaisingrao ultimately earned his Harvard degree in February 1912, but not after making the formal and informal news circuits through his extravagant spending habits and expensive poker addiction.[28] Even though Bumpus was named as Ambedkar's guardian in the 1913 agreement, he was far from New York (taking over his new post in Wisconsin) by then and he was likely relieved to be free of the sort of tribulations that his previous guardianship role and Jaisingrao's troubles put him through.[29] It is no wonder that Ambedkar did not have any close contact with Bumpus, whatever Sayajirao's understanding of the agreement might have been. In 1916, Bumpus, busy with his new post as President of Tufts University, did write a letter on Ambedkar's behalf to his advisor, Edwin Seligman, imploring him to help the Indian student in his application for a travelling fellowship from Columbia University that would support his education in London the following term. Bumpus's letter evidences little connection with Ambedkar—even the promising line of "Mr. Ambedkar has impressed me as being a very earnest student" strikes one as not revealing much personal familiarity between them through its passive phrasing. The letter does, however, show the American's continuing respect of the Gaekwad and his projects, including sponsored students such as Ambedkar.[30]

It is clear that educational connections like Bumpus and the aura of progress exuded by New York were all tied together in the mental impression that Sayajirao had of America. But combining with this recurring theme in the middle of the Gaekwad's decades of rule was another tenor that so often lay just below the surface of his official dealings—his dislike of being under the thumb of the British. The Gaekwad seemed intrigued by the West and what it could offer India and its masses, but he consistently recoiled at the idea that India needed the British to be ruled well. His reign can be read as an attempt to constantly show the British—and their local "Resident" watching over Baroda's governmental happenings—that Indian princes could rule in an enlightened fashion. The Gaekwad had to request permission from the British in 1904 to travel to Europe, a sort of monitoring that constantly infuriated the Baroda ruler. As he was preparing to leave American soil during his 1906 trip, and freshly inspired by his interactions with Americans like Bumpus and with institutions like Columbia University, the Gaekwad penned a letter to the annoyingly inquisitive British Resident

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[26]The Gaekwar Has Gone. *New York Times*, July 14, 1910, 6.

[27]Hermon C. Bumpus, Jr., *Hermon Carey Bumpus.* 75–76.

[28]Gaekwar's Son Gets Degree. *New York Times*, February 9, 1912, 5.

[29]Hermon C. Bumpus, Jr., *Hermon Carey Bumpus.* 76–78.

[30]Letter by H.C. Bumpus to E.R.A. Seligman, March 24, 1916, Seligman Papers, Columbia University.

that "I enjoyed my visit to Free America."[31] It is no wonder that the British did not like the increasing American connections with Baroda and its educational endeavors through figures like Borden, given the Gaekwad's disposition toward his colonial rulers.[32]

The relationship of the Gaekwad and the British was tumultuous, but hostilities rarely broke out into the realm of overt conflict. Instead, a multitude of smaller acts of rebellion and resistance initiated by the Gaekwad continued to incense various agents of the British Empire. For instance, the Gaekwad had a habit of hiring bright, but anti-British, Indians to positions of influence and power within his court. Aravinda Ghose (later known as Sri Aurobindo) was one such appointment. Yet the British could not get rid of the Gaekwad that easily, given his status in the hierarchy of the Empire; he was one of the few native rulers in India accorded the high honor of a 21-gun salute, a status that also protected his political autonomy from much interference at the hands of the British Resident in Baroda.[33] This animosity came to a head, however, at the Coronation Durbar held in Delhi to honor the new British king, George V. The British used this elaborate public ritual to cement the loyalty of Indian subjects and its princely states to the crown, but Sayajirao raised a furor through his actions at this high-profile event. On December 12, 1911, in front of over 50,000 spectators, the Gaekwad strode up to the dais on which the newly installed king-emperor sat. The Gaekwad wore a Western-style suit, carried a walking cane, and bowed once to the king before turning his back and leaving. His conduct reached the status of a royal affront, since the British expected the "native princes" to dress the part with jewels and robes, not Western business attire, and to bow three times without turning their back on the king. Sayajirao followed none of these British-dictated protocols.[34] Despite his claims that his intentions were not to snub the king, the fact remains that many perceived his behavior as a purposeful move in the constant struggle he led to maintain autonomy in the face of British colonial power.

Why America for Ambedkar?

Any answer to our questions of why Ambedkar ended up at Columbia must include reference to these two prominent themes in Sayajirao Gaekwad's rule: his animosity toward the British, and his admiration for American educational institutions. The first reveals a spirit of rebelliousness in Sayajirao, one that we can also detect in Ambedkar throughout his own development. The latter theme, his admiration for American education, was only enhanced by the experiences that connections like Jesup and Bumpus orchestrated.[35] The Gaekwad's son was sent to Harvard, American

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[31]Fatesinghrao Gaekwad. *Sayajirao of Baroda.* 204.

[32]Ibid., 204.

[33]Lucy Moore (2004). *Maharanis.* Viking, 6–7.

[34]Ibid., 8.

[35]Both themes are related to the idea of enhanced freedom—or a spirit of freedom—felt by the Gaikwad, and then Ambedkar, in America. But the question is: what *enables* this spirit of freedom? Part of the answer is the sort of critical and probing education at leading institutions like Columbia University. And what *use* is this spirit of freedom attuned to? A response to that

administrators like Borden were imported to run library schemes back in Baroda, and various American educational practices were adopted in Baroda's own schools.[36] There is even evidence that Ambedkar's teacher at Columbia, Edwin R.A. Seligman, had ongoing contacts with figures in Baroda between 1909–1912, mostly orbiting around accusations by the British of subversive activity by the Indian professor, Samuel L. Joshi, undertaken when he was a student of Seligman's at Columbia University. In a June 26, 1909 letter, Joshi writes to Seligman indicating that the Gaekwad cancelled Joshi's appointment at the College of Baroda because of the British charges of seditious behavior; he also indicates that the Gaekwad was interested in reinstating his position once the British suspicions were removed.[37] Seligman wrote a general letter of support for his former student Joshi, perhaps seen by the Gaekwad, on July 5, 1909, trying to absolve Joshi of seditious intentions.[38] It would come as no surprise if the Gaekwad, given his urges to stand up to the British, his needs for educational and financial reform, the smell of progress and life that he loved around New York City, and his various encounters with the educational achievements of Columbia University and its faculty, would incline young Ambedkar to choose Columbia University over British educational institutions.

This rare, and unplanned, confluence of factors somehow led the young Ambedkar to Columbia in 1913. In many ways, it was an epochal decision that changed the course of much of Indian politics given Ambedkar's later successes and failures. More work is ongoing about Ambedkar, including Vijay Surwade's much-needed project on Ambedkar in Baroda. Among many new facts and details about Ambedkar's connection to Baroda, Surwade has unearthed documents that show that Ambedkar was originally going to be sent to the West for education in *pedagogy*, or the study of effective teaching.[39] What caused the shift from pedagogy to "economics, finance, and sociology" in the June 1913 order is unclear. All of these disciplines could translate into the practical projects of the Gaekwad's in Baroda. But America meant *progress* for the Gaekwad, and a practical university education was surely to be had in America and would certainly be useful for his state's future. Ambedkar was to be a vital part to the Gaekwad's sidestepping of the British in this initial planning of education that would benefit Baroda.

The focus on practical matters—and even the early focus on pedagogy as a subject matter—is intriguing. Did Ambedkar evince an interest in this topic? In a summary of original biographical work, the collected works of Ambedkar includes a reconstructed dialogue (drawn from Khairmode's biography) where he supposedly told the Maharaja

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question would entail the sort of rebelliousness or revolution that will be worked out in the remainder of this article. Rebelliousness requires an empowered freedom, but freedom does not always entail rebelliousness.

[36] Stanley Rice (1931). *Sayaji Rao III: Maharaja of Baroda*, Vol. 2. Oxford University Press, 120–123.

[37] Letter by S.L. Joshi to E.R.A. Seligman, June 26, 1909, Seligman Papers, Columbia University.

[38] Letter by E.R.A. Seligman, July 5, 1909, Seligman Papers, Columbia University.

[39] Vijay Surwade's forthcoming book, *Dr. Ambedkar in Baroda*, is sure to be the most detailed factual survey of Ambedkar's connections to the Maharaja and the princely state of Baroda yet produced.

on his second meeting in Bombay that he wanted to study "Sociology, Economics and especially Public Finance." The Gaekwad asked why Ambedkar wanted to study these topics; Ambedkar replied, "The study of these subjects would give me clues for improving the depressed condition of my society and I shall undertake the work of social reforms on those lines." The Gaekwad eventually pressed Ambedkar that Baroda too must be served by this education, to which Ambedkar indicated that he could both serve his community and the state of Baroda. The Gaekwad then tellingly indicated what *his* plan was—"I have been thinking on the same lines. I am thinking [of] sending you to America[,] will you go?" Ambedkar then responded that he would.[40] America answered many needs and desires of the Gaekwad, and it would soon fill Ambedkar with several desires—and the means to satisfy them—in turn.

Ambedkar was sent to Columbia University in America to learn important topics for the social improvement of Baroda. Of course, the intention was that he would use this education to improve Baroda (a task he couldn't sufficiently execute upon his return because of caste-based challenges in the workplace and in finding housing). He would, however, successfully put his expansive education to work in his efforts to organize and agitate on behalf of the Dalits across India. The Gaekwad looked at America as a symbol of rebelliousness against the British and a source of progress for his people. Ambedkar would imbibe these values in the specifics of his education at the hands of the progressive academics employed by Columbia in the 1910s.

Ambedkar in America

Some of the most moving parts of the experience at Columbia for Ambedkar came through his contacts with John Dewey, a prominent American philosopher and leader of the tradition of American pragmatism. Ambedkar had many influences, of course, but Dewey is one of the most documented influences that we can find, and his influence built upon the ideas of education and pedagogy central to this question about Ambedkar, Sayajirao, and the role of education in social reform.[41] Like so many parts of Ambedkar's incredible story, we are fortunate that incidents of fate lined up such that the seeds of Dewey's pragmatism had a chance to grow. The agreement from June 4, 1913 between the Gaekwad and Ambedkar explicitly committed the latter to focusing exclusively on economics, finance, and sociology—Ambedkar was commanded in the memorandum to "not devote any time to the study of other subject or subjects to the detriment of his study of those mentioned in the agreement without the consent of His Highness' Government."[42] Fortunately for the prospects for pragmatism, democracy, and social justice in India, and perhaps through the absence

[40]Bhimrao R. Ambedkar. (1979). I am a Man of Character. *Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar: Writings and speeches*, vol. 17, part 1. Government of Maharashtra, 211–212.

[41]For more on Ambedkar's other influences at Columbia, see Scott R. Stroud (forthcoming). Ambedkar at Columbia University, in *The Cambridge companion to Ambedkar*, ed. Anupama Rao and Shailaja Paik. Cambridge University Press.

[42]"The Memorandum of Agreement between Bhimrao Ambedkar and Baroda State," June 4, 1913, Khairmode Papers, University of Mumbai Archives.

of any sort of guardian figures in New York such as Bumpus, Ambedkar found enough room in his focused course of study for Dewey's courses in philosophy. He would end up taking three courses from Dewey—Philosophy 231 "Psychological Ethics" and the year-long series of two courses, Philosophy 131-132 "Moral and Political Philosophy." This latter course was shared with the soon-to-be voice of Dewey's pragmatism in China, Hu Shih.[43] There is no evidence that Ambedkar took any pedagogy course from Dewey while he was at Columbia. In all likelihood, what he learned about Dewey's views on education came from his acquisition of Dewey's book, *Democracy and Education*, while he was studying in London in January 1917.[44] There is the chance that Ambedkar had heard of Dewey's philosophy before he departed for Columbia in 1913, since he owned a 1910 reissue of the pragmatist's 1908 book, *Ethics*, but the available textual evidence makes this hypothesis unlikely; Ambedkar most likely stumbled onto Dewey's fame—and into Dewey's classrooms—once he was exploring in the intellectual environments of Morningside Heights.[45]

We know that Ambedkar valued Dewey's writings on education, as we can see from the constellations of annotations that emerge from his two heavily marked copies of *Democracy and Education*.[46] When he read these books is unclear, but it is definite that he saw major themes of Dewey's within their pages.[47] The ideas of habits, custom, and reconstruction were noticed, and would become central to Ambedkar's later critique of caste in his own writings. What we see emerging from many of these marked passages in Dewey will help us explore the impact—and orientation—of Ambedkar's education. Part of the account that's emerging in this article is that there was a spirit of reflection, criticism, and even rebelliousness that marked Sayajirao's interest in institutions like Columbia, and that these themes were shared by Ambedkar, and to some extent, Dewey himself.

We can start to tie all these threads together by looking at Ambedkar's own annotations in *Democracy and Education.* Like Dewey, Ambedkar valued the idea that education was a reconstructive endeavor, and that its reconstructive power was not merely material—meaning issuing in an observably changed social setting. It also meant an inner change of attitude and habit in the pupils it encumbers.

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[43]See Scott R. Stroud (2023). *The evolution of pragmatism in India*.

[44]We know when Ambedkar acquired this 1916 book because the copy preserved in the archives at Siddharth College, Mumbai, from his personal collection is signed and dated 1917.

[45]Ambedkar's heavily annotated copy of this book is signed by K.A. Keluskar, an important guide and advocate for young Ambedkar. It is more likely that Ambedkar gained this book around 1930 or after Keluskar's death in 1934. For more on this book and its mysteries, see Scott R. Stroud. (2018). Ambedkar's pragmatism drew heavily on the 1908 'Ethics'. *Forward Press*. https://www.forwardpress.in/2018/01/ambedkars-pragmatism-drew-heavily-on-the-1908-ethics/.

[46]Ambedkar owned four copies in total of this work. The earliest are 1916 and 1925 editions, and each is heavily marked in his distinctive annotation styles. The annotations noted in this article are taken from his markings in the 1925 edition.

[47]To take Ambedkar seriously as a reader means taking what he read—and what he marked while doing so—seriously. For more on this methodology, see Scott R. Stroud (2017). What did Bhimrao Ambedkar learn from John Dewey's *Democracy and Education?*. *The Pluralist*, vol. *12*(2), 78–103.

This approach to education as reconstructive is built upon a view of experience that many pragmatists share. It is that experience itself educates or shapes us. This engagement with natural and social environments not only changes what we do and gain, but also how we think about our projects and the obstacles facing them. In other words, experience shapes our attitudes as it resists and enables them. Ambedkar saw this theme in Dewey's book and marked it in his distinctive red pencil: the "social environment forms the mental and emotional disposition of behavior in individuals by engaging them in activities that arouse and strengthen certain impulses, that have certain purposes and entail certain consequences."[48] While this is a broad view of education—experience itself can educate—formal institutions like schools can give us more control over the results of these process. Thus, such organized efforts become an important way to alter and optimize the attitudes and habits of their pupils, a position noted by Ambedkar when he read Dewey: "it is the business of the school environment to eliminate, so far as possible, the unworthy features of the existing environment from influence upon mental habitudes."[49]

There can be many uses of education on this approach. Dewey, and Ambedkar, would not be content with education as indoctrination or brainwashing. Those sorts of non-reflective outcomes come close to not really being educative in the first place. What is sought from education by Dewey, and marked in Dewey's text by Ambedkar the reader, is the idea that education ought to emancipate through attitudinal change: "it is the office of the school environment to balance the various elements in the social environment, and to see to it that each individual gets an opportunity to escape from the limitations of the social group in which he was born, and to come into living contact with a broader environment."[50]

We must understand Dewey on this point to see what Ambedkar perceived as promising in pragmatist views of education. Social strictures and limitations—such as customs of caste—would not primarily be observable physical externalities. Students can be conditioned just like non-human animals to act and react in specified ways. What Dewey sought was marked by Ambedkar as he read through *Democracy and Education*: "The difference between an adjustment to a physical stimulus and a mental act is that the latter involves response to a thing in its meaning; the former does not."[51] Ambedkar saw what Dewey was after—a reorientation about how an individual thought about a world and its meanings. Meaning, after all, lay in how we anticipate and react to something given our past courses of experience. It was a meeting of the by-gone past and the yet-to-come future.

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[48]John Dewey (1985). *Democracy and education*, vol. 9 of *The Middle Works of John Dewey*, ed. Jo Ann Boydston. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 20. How do we know Ambedkar's annotations and their style? For an explanation and exploration of Ambedkar as a reader, see Scott R. Stroud (2023). How do we know what Ambedkar read? *Round Table India*. https://www.roundtableindia.co.in/how-do-we-know-what-ambedkar-read/.

[49]Ibid., 24.

[50]Ibid., 24–25.

[51]John Dewey. *Democracy and education*. 34.

This was precisely the sense of meaning that Ambedkar was concerned with in his 1936 text, *Annihilation of Caste*, when he claimed that "Caste is a notion, it is a state of the mind," and that caste concepts and labels led individuals to judge and react to others in a habitualized (and normative) fashion.[52] Caste was a learned attitude that assumed and instantiated certain meanings for what others were worth. It was, in other words, inherently limiting in its attribution of meaning to those who bore the weight of its labels. What Ambedkar sought was similar to what Dewey opined about in his work on education. It was a formation of community, but a formation that did not rest upon pacific and uncritical dispositions. Ambedkar marks such a commitment in Dewey's idea that commonality in meaning (and value) attribution through common habits was the instantiation of community: "To have the same ideas about things which others have, to be like-minded with them, and thus to be really members of a social group, is therefore to attach the same meanings to things and to acts which others attach. Otherwise, there is no common understanding, and no community life."[53] This sort of common understanding appears in Dewey, and in Ambedkar's *Annihilation of Caste*, in the engagement with social endosmosis.[54] The important aspect of this commitment for this inquiry comes in the *attitudinal* aspects to education—and in Ambedkar's own person during his educational experiences in the West funded partially by the Gaekwad.

Ambedkar and the "Spirit of Rebellion" in Education

Ambedkar made several passing remarks on education. He even made some longer pronouncements on education in his expansive body of work. Future work must systematically explore Ambedkar as a theorist of education and its social values. But here, let us look at a few of his arguments made later in his life since they hold the interesting combination we have been building to—education, pragmatism, and a sort of critical reflectiveness as attitude. A few months before his death, Bhimrao Ambedkar addressed the world—now divided into communist and non-communist blocs—through the "Voice of America" radio broadcast on May 20, 1956. His speech was on a theme that had surfaced often throughout his life and writings: that of the nature and benefits of democracy. Ambedkar, one of the chief architects of the Indian constitution, approached the question of whether there is democracy in India. Instead of providing a straightforward answer—and the affirmative one that newly independent Indians might expect—he indicated that it depended on how clear one was with their concepts. Pragmatically, what we answer depends for him on what we mean by "democracy." "No positive answer can be given," Ambedkar intones, "unless the confusion caused by equating democracy with Republic and by equating

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[52]Bhimrao R. Ambedkar (2003). Annihilation of Caste. In *Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar: Writings and speeches*, vol. 1, ed. Vasant Moon. Government of Maharashtra, 68.
[53]John Dewey. *Democracy and education*. 35.
[54]Arun P. Mukherjee (2009). B.R. Ambedkar, John Dewey, and the meaning of democracy. *New Literary History*, *40*(2), 345–370.

democracy with Parliamentary Government is removed."[55] Ambedkar is concerned with the natural, but harmful, assumption that external laws and institutions render some community a democracy.

Ambedkar then explains in this American radio broadcast what a democracy is in his use of the term: "A democracy is more than a form of government. It is primarily a mode of associated living. The roots of Democracy are to be searched in social relationship, in the terms of associated life between the people who form a society."[56] These are both Ambedkar's words—he would also use them in *Annihilation of Caste* in 1936—and not Ambedkar's words.[57] Dewey penned them in his own *Democracy and Education*, and Ambedkar marked this passage in both of his early editions of this book. This engagement and appropriation of selected parts of Dewey's texts are part of a general *reconstructive* approach taken by Ambedkar, one enabled and authorized by Dewey's own form of reconstructive pragmatism.[58]

In *Annihilation of Caste*, Ambedkar shows the pragmatist pedigree of this reconstructive use of past resources—including Dewey's own texts. In praising his "Prof. John Dewey, who was my teacher and to whom I owe so much," Ambedkar explicitly quotes *Democracy and Education*: "Every society gets encumbered with what is trivial, with dead wood from the past, and with what is positively perverse... As a society becomes more enlightened, it realizes that it is responsible not to conserve and transmit the whole of its existing achievements, but only such as make for a better future society."[59] Ambedkar's target in this planned speech was the religious tradition of Hinduism (with its sacred texts) that he saw as grounding existing caste hierarchies and their related caste attitudes. Such a tradition had long textual roots into the past. But the past wasn't a touchstone of certainty, however, or something to be mindlessly recreated and replicated in the course of formal or informal education. It was a resource that can be drawn upon and remixed in our ongoing experiments for forming better communities and courses of experience. If one notes the ellipses in Ambedkar's own use of Dewey's book, one can see his point—even though Dewey was explicitly talking about formal schooling and its appropriation of parts of a past tradition, Ambedkar alters the quotation in his own act of dealing with the texts of his past. Dewey's *Democracy and Education* was one of those past resources that Ambedkar the writer could selectively draw upon, both in enunciating the concept of reconstruction and in divining the nature of social democracy.

In this 1956 speech about democracy, Ambedkar continues his life-long chastisement of caste system as a "'Graded Inequality,'" in which "Castes are not equal in their status. They are standing one above another. They are jealous of one another. It is hatred and descending scale of contempt. This feature of the Caste System has most

[55]Bhimrao R. Ambedkar (2003). Prospects of Democracy in India. *Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar: Writings and speeches*, vol. 17 part 3. Government of Maharashtra, 519.

[56]Ibid., 519.

[57]Bhimrao R. Ambedkar. Annihilation of Caste. 57.

[58]Scott R. Stroud. *The evolution of pragmatism in India*.

[59]Bhimrao R. Ambedkar. Annihilation of Caste. 79, ellipses in original.

pernicious consequences. It destroys willing and helpful co-operation."[60] But shortly after broaching this theme, he explains how the caste system harms such cooperation:

> It means that when there is no equitable opportunity to receive the stimulus from and to return the response from different caste, the result is that the influences which educate some into masters, educate others into slaves. The experience of each party loses its meaning when the free interchange of varying modes of life experience is arrested. It results into a separation of society, into a privileged and a subject class. Such a separation prevents social endosmosis.[61]

If one is sensitive to Ambedkar's engagement with Dewey—and the sense of reconstruction and agency he draws from the pragmatist—one can again see that Dewey is being reconstructed in this passage. Parts of this passage appeared in Dewey's *Democracy and Education* over forty years earlier, and not in the context of the critique of caste.[62] Dewey's target was mindless forms of outdated pedagogy that aimed to produce factory workers for the never-sated form of capitalism he saw growing in America at the turn of the twentieth century. In making his own argument, Ambedkar reworks resources from John Dewey, his beloved teacher at Columbia University, to explain the problems of the thousands-year old caste system of the Indian subcontinent.[63]

The intrigue of Ambedkar as an Indian pragmatist figure, and as a partisan of an expanded sense of education, goes even deeper in this 1956 address, one of the last he was to give in his final year of life. He was clearly influenced enough by Dewey's *Democracy and Education*, a book that he acquired first in 1917, to weave its passages into his appeals, yet he insists on qualifying what many would take to be the linchpin of Dewey's whole philosophy: education.[64] The end of his address features Ambedkar departing from what might be expected of a Deweyan pragmatist. He does not tell his audience that education, especially formal education, is the solution to India's caste problems. This was the tactic that Dewey often employed in his lectures in China between 1919–1921, when he discussed topics such as student government and school activities as vital for developing a rich sense of democracy.[65] Ambedkar, in this 1956

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[60]Bhimrao R. Ambedkar. Prospects of Democracy in India. 520–521.

[61]Ibid., 521.

[62]John Dewey. *Democracy and education*. 90.

[63]For more on Dewey's relationship with India—and with Ambedkar—see Scott R. Stroud (2024). John Dewey and India: Expanding the John Dewey-Bhimrao Ambedkar. *The Pluralist*, vol. 19, no. 1, in press.

[64]Through my own investigations into the surviving parts of his personal library spread across various libraries at Siddharth College, Milind College, the Symbiosis Institute, at Rajgraha, and in private collections, I have discovered that Ambedkar owned at least four editions of Dewey's *Democracy and Education*—at least two of which (a 1916 and 1925 edition) are heavily annotated in his distinctive style of red and blue pencil markings. The 1916 edition is inscribed by Ambedkar as purchased in January 1917 in London, after his time with Dewey at Columbia University.

[65]See John Dewey, 1919–21. *Additional Lectures in China, 1919–1921*. Trans. Robert W. Clopton and Tsuin-chen Ou. Unpublished manuscript, University of Hawaii, Manoa; John

address, falls short of wholesale enthusiasm for education and asks "Can education destroy caste?" His answer is an enigmatic "'Yes' as well as 'No.'" His reasoning is interesting, at least when we take it as a way to possibly develop a complex notion of Ambedkar as pragmatist and to see him as continuing patterns in the Gaekwad's story from early in his life. If education merely gives dominant castes a reason to retain and reinforce the caste system, Ambedkar sees it as having no meliorative or reconstructive value. In that case education is, as Ambedkar puts it, "not helpful as [a] means to dissolve caste." Taken in another sense, however, it could be meliorative: "But education may be [a] solvent if it is applied to the lower strata of the Indian Society. It would raise their *spirit of rebellion*. In their present state of ignorance they are the supporters of the Caste System. Once their eyes are opened they will be ready to fight the Caste System."[66] Ambedkar both praises education and warns of its lack of efficacy if it simply reproduces a past system of discrimination.

The best education on this complex reading would be one that reconstructs Indian society—and the attitudes of specific pupils—through the "spirit of rebellion" he intimates in his radio address. What he wants in his international listeners, as well as in his followers back in India, is a trained orientation that would be courageous enough to demand a complete rejection of the religiously grounded system of discrimination set in the concept of caste. But his appeals are different from Dewey's insofar as Ambedkar seems committed to pursuing education often through less-formal means such as speech or oratory, as well as social organizations such as educational societies and hostels. These differences are part of what it means for pragmatism to evolve in Indian contexts, of course. It is true that Ambedkar founded a variety of educational institutions later in his life (such as Siddharth College in 1946), but he focused much of his energy on political and social advocacy and organizational efforts that involved direct communication and engagement with supporters and opponents.[67] He clearly held the commitment to experience being educative, and to the idea that educative endeavors can extend beyond the institutions of formal schooling. This purpose was also evident in his planned volume *Riddles in Hinduism*, a work who's intended Hindu audience was telegraphed in its planned subtitle—"an exposition to enlighten the masses"—as well as its prefatory chapter.[68]

What animates much of this lifelong course of argumentation, advocacy, and activism can be seen as the same sort of spirit that Sayajirao Gaekwad displayed in subtly and overtly resisting the British. He saw the promise for American education to help Ambedkar further amplify such a sense of rebellion. In Ambedkar's experience in

Dewey (1973). *John Dewey: Lectures in China, 1919–1920*. Trans. Robert W. Clopton and Tsuin-Chen Ou. University of Hawaii Press.

[66]Bhimrao R. Ambedkar. Prospects of Democracy in India. 522, emphasis added.

[67]Eleanor Zelliot (2013). *Ambedkar's world: The making of Babasaheb and the Dalit movement.* Navayana, 162.

[68]Bhimrao Ambedkar. (2003). Riddles in Hinduism. In *Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar: Writings and Speeches*, vol. 4, ed. Vasant Moon. Bombay: Government of Maharashtra, 1. For the rhetorical context of his planned volume and its arguments, see Scott R. Stroud (2022). Excessively harsh critique and democratic rhetoric: The enigma of Bhimrao Ambedkar's *Riddles in Hinduism*. *Journal for the History of Rhetoric*, *25*(1), 2–30.

the many classes he took in the West, he not only gained *from* his education—he gained an appreciation *for* education. In taking Dewey seriously as one important influence on Ambedkar, we can see the connection between education as *reconstructive* and education as *rebelliousness*. Ambedkar was not excited about revolution or rebellion for its own sake. Changes, major or minor, must be made in regard to the situation of a present ever-connected to a past and a future. Our resources and our needs and aspirations all meet in the present, and destroying or upending traditions just out of a sense of mechanical rebellion were not what Ambedkar was after.

Such a pursuit of massive changes out of dissatisfaction with the present, and with no concern about its social costs to community, also concerned Dewey. It destroyed too much of value, and too many of those who held such ends. This was precisely Ambedkar's criticism of the Marxists of his day, those in India and those implementing versions of Marx's thought in the Soviet Union and in China. These varieties of communism sought equality, but utilized forceful means that took away the capacities for fraternity or fellow feeling. Marx's thought lacked love and caring for others, including those labeled as opponents, in its pursuit of justice, a point that Ambedkar would make in his final years in various speeches and in his reconstruction of the Buddha's *dhamma*. Ambedkar consistently wanted to annihilate caste, and perhaps some religious texts or ways of interpreting religious texts, but he never wanted to annihilate or abandon the quest for supportive and unified community. He was forever committed to democracy as a way of life. Education was a means for creating such a shared association that democracy demanded; it was also a way to constantly support or preserve that community among its denizens' many differences. Ambedkar's preferred notion of education was just this means of reconstruction, perhaps radical, that lay between total revolution (with all its human costs to community building among opponents) and a complacency with traditions like the customs of caste. This builds upon Ambedkar's commitment to *reconstruction* in his broadly political endeavors, which mandated a path of radical reform that treaded an unsteady path between a pursuit of conservative preservation and the total newness that often motivates revolutionaries. He wanted revolutionary change, but his serious engagement with Dewey and other progressive thinkers at Columbia (as well as elsewhere) impressed on him the fact that the path to reconstruction featured an *intelligent* rebelliousness, one that did not forsake the ends of community in a shallow fixing of some social problematic. Education could be that desired means of intelligent rebellion. In taking Ambedkar's education seriously—and in considering his views on education seriously—we can start to flesh out both the historical story of Ambedkar's development *and* the conceptual story as to what he wanted out of his critique of caste.

Buddhist Roots of Ambedkar's Judicial Philosophy

Christopher Queen[*]

Abstract

In presenting the final draft of the Indian Constitution to the Constituent Assembly in 1949, drafting chair B.R. Ambedkar claimed the origins of Indian democracy in the parliamentary rules of the ancient Buddhist sanghas (monastic communities). In this article we trace the development of Ambedkar's embrace of Buddhism, consider the documentary sources of his reference to Buddhist proto-democracy, and propose that his judicial philosophy was further shaped by his study of Western constitutions and the political slogans "Liberty, Equality, Fraternity," and "Educate, Agitate, Organize"

On November 25, 1949, Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, serving as chairman of the Constitution Drafting Committee of India's Constituent Assembly, rose to introduce the final draft of what would be the world's longest and most complex democratic constitution. He noted that since its formation more than two years earlier, the committee had sat for 141 days to consider 395 articles and more than 7,000 amendments, of which 2,473 were eventually adopted. Ambedkar, who also served as the Law Minister in Nehru's cabinet, compared the proposed draft to constitutions of the United States, Canada, Australia, and South Africa, which contained fewer articles and subsections but contained many of the features that now marked the prospective Indian version. He proceeded to thank the committee and to review the foundations and the scope of the new constitution.[1]

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[1]Ambedkar, B.R. (1994). *Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar Writings and Speeches* (hereinafter *BAWS*), Vol. 13. Vasant Moon. (Ed.). (pp. 1206–1218). Education Department, Government of Maharashtra. Online: https://www.mea.gov.in/Images/CPV/Volume13.pdf. See also Das, Bhagwan. (2010) (Ed.). *Thus spoke Ambedkar: A stake in the nation,* Vol. 1. (pp. 204–221). Navayana.

It avoided the hazards of dictatorship of the proletariat urged by the Communists, he said. It rejected the end of private property urged by the Socialists. In its commitment to parliamentary democracy, it balanced the power of the people with the protections of the state and placed ownership of private property within regulatory guidelines. The mechanisms of parliamentary government provided for amendment of the constitution in changing times. "Each generation [is] a distinct nation, with a right, by the will of the majority, to bind themselves, but none to bind the succeeding generation, more than the inhabitants of another country," Ambedkar declared, quoting Thomas Jefferson. He defined federalism as the center's power to override the states in a national emergency. The constitution will give every citizen the opportunity to place loyalty to the nation over fealty to caste, creed, and party. Patriotism will take the place of sectarian division and discord.

To cheers, Ambedkar announced that on the following day, with final ratification of the constitution, India would again become an independent country. Instead of sharing the joy and optimism of the audience, however, he expressed his fears for the future. "It is not that India was never an independent country," he declared. "What perturbs me greatly is the fact that not only has India lost her independence before, but she lost it by the infidelity and treachery of some of her own people." Ambedkar cited the collaboration of Indian generals and rulers with Muslim invaders in the eighth, twelfth, and seventeenth centuries, and their passivity as the British tightened their grip in the nineteenth. "Will history repeat itself?" he asked. "It is this thought that fills me with anxiety."

Yet, as a bulwark against the loss of India's independence in the future, Ambedkar reminded the Assembly, the new constitution is founded on the practice of democracy—government of the people, by the people, and for the people. This precious achievement cannot be taken for granted. Now the Law Minister digressed again, placing hopes for a bright future on hold as he reminded the Assembly of India's loss of democracy in the past. He said,

> It is not that India did not know what Democracy is. There was a time when India was studded with republics, and even where there were monarchies, they were either elected or limited. They were never absolute. It is not that India did not know Parliaments or Parliamentary Procedure. *A study of the Buddhist Bhikshu Sanghas discloses that not only were there Parliaments – for the Sanghas were nothing but Parliaments – but the Sanghas knew and observed all the rules of Parliamentary Procedure known to modern times.*

> They had rules regarding seating arrangements, rules regarding Motions, Resolutions, Quorum, Whip, Counting of Votes, Voting by Ballot, Censure Motion, Regularization, *Res Judicata*, etc. Although these rules of Parliamentary Procedure were applied by the Buddha to the meetings of the Sanghas, he must have borrowed them from the rules of the Political Assemblies functioning in the country in his time.

> This democratic system India [has] lost. Will she lose it a second time?[2]

Ambedkar warned the Assembly of the threats to its newfound democracy: bloody revolution, "the grammar of anarchy," hero-worship of powerful personalities derived from India's love of holy men, and the false belief that the principles of liberty, equality, and fraternity "can be treated as separate items in a trinity." Without one the other two cannot exist. India is a land of massive inequality and a conspicuous lack of fraternity, unity, and solidarity. Without these conditions, freedom cannot be guaranteed, and India's bid to recover its independence and democracy will fail.

For those familiar with Ambedkar's training in constitutional law, economics, and history, his final speech as chairman of the drafting committee was no surprise. But for those unaware of his growing identification with Buddhism, his reference to the democratic culture of the first Buddhist communities may have stirred curiosity. Where is it written that the ancient Buddhist sanghas were influenced by the republican states of the time, and how do the workings of a modern parliament reflect the moral values of a Buddhist worldview?

In this inquiry, we will investigate the Buddhist roots of Ambedkar's judicial philosophy, as reflected in the Indian Constitution, and more particularly, in his reference to the proto-democracy of the early Buddhist sanghas. First, we consider the depth of Ambedkar's intellectual and spiritual engagement with Buddhism at the time of his speech. We know this trajectory culminated in the public conversion ceremony he shared with a half million followers in 1956, weeks before his death, but why would he introduce ancient Buddhist history into his remarks before a national assembly? Having examined some milestones on Ambedkar's road to conversion, we turn to possible sources of his claim that ancient Buddhist sanghas offer a template for parliamentary democracy. These findings must be tentative in the absence of specific references, yet we may make educated guesses based on the scope of his library and the research available to him by the late 1940s. Finally, we may form a general picture of the role Buddhism played in the evolution of Ambedkar's judicial philosophy by placing his public confession of the ancient formula, *I take refuge in the Buddha, the Dhamma, and the Sangha* alongside the two great slogans that defined his quest for a new India—a place where citizens *Educate, Agitate, and Organize* in their zeal to establish *Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity.*

II

It was only a few months after the ratification of the Constitution that Ambedkar began to advocate mass conversion to Buddhism. On several occasions in 1950,

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[2]*BAWS*, Vol. 13, pp. 1214–1215 (emphasis added). Ambedkar made similar remarks two years later, addressing a student parliament at the Dayanand Anglo Vedic College, Jalandhar, Punjab: "Parliamentary democracy is unknown to us at present. But India, at one time, had parliamentary institutions. India was far more advanced in ancient times. If you go through the Suttas of the Mahaparinibbana, you will find ample evidence in support of my point. In these Suttas it is stated that while Bhagwan Buddha was dying at Kusinara, a message to the effect was sent to the Mallas, who were sitting in session at that time. They were devoted to parliamentary institutions." Das, 2010, p. 80.

he publicized his conviction that conversion would benefit not only Untouchables, but all Indians, and finally, the whole world. On May 2, he declared at the Buddha Vihara in New Delhi that societies needed religion, and only Buddhism satisfied the requirements of reason and morality necessary to guide a society. The press took this to mean that Ambedkar was calling on India's seventy million "Harijans" to convert to Buddhism—still using Gandhi's term for the Untouchables—and that Ambedkar would finally act on his threat to abandon Hinduism.[3] Responding to the controversy, Ambedkar's ally, P.N. Rajbhoj, chairman of the All-India Scheduled Caste Federation, clarified that, based on his conversations with Ambedkar, the anti-caste leader was advocating conversion of *all Hindus* to Buddhism, not only Dalits.

Again in May, Ambedkar published an article in the leading English-language Buddhist journal, *The Maha Bodhi,* titled "The Buddha and the Future of His Religion." Declaring that "Hinduism is floating on a volcano" that is about to explode, the time has come for the sufferings of India's downtrodden to be addressed. Like the overthrow of paganism by Christianity in Roman times, India's backward classes will banish Brahmanism and embrace a religion that offers "mental and moral relief" from the scourge of caste. The steps to conversion will require a new Buddhist Bible, reform of the Bhikkhu sanghas from idleness to service, and the establishment of Buddhist missions throughout the land. He called on neighboring Buddhist nations to support this campaign.[4]

And nearly seventy years to the day after the arrival of the Americans Henry Olcott and Helena Blavatsky to express solidarity with the Buddhist revival in Ceylon, Ambedkar and his wife landed at the Columbo airport to attend the first meeting of the World Fellowship of Buddhists. Using his time there to visit Buddhist viharas and observe the lay practices up close, he ended his visit with speeches before conference delegates and members of the Young Men's Buddhist Association. He implored them to go beyond fellowship—to work for the spread of Buddhism around the world.

Accused by critics back home for cynically using Buddhism as a gimmick to lobby for political reforms, Ambedkar replied in a speech at the Royal Asiatic Society that his love of Buddhism was no political stunt—*he had been a keen student of Buddhism since his boyhood.* In September, he addressed Buddhists at the Japanese Temple in Mumbai, warning that political independence will not bring prosperity while immorality governs the country. "To end these troubles, India must embrace Buddhism, the only religion based on ethical principles." He pledged to devote the rest of his life to the revival and spread of the Dhamma.[5]

Today, some critics continue to regard Ambedkar's conversion to Buddhism as a political device that has failed. Anand Teltumbde, who has sacrificed his freedom to assert Dalit human rights, titled a recent chapter on Ambedkar, "Strategy of Conversion to Buddhism: Intent and Aftermath." He sees political calculation and what he calls personal "proclivities" as sources of Ambedkar's conversion, but he

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[3]Sangharakshita. (1986). *Ambedkar and Buddhism.* (pp. 70–71). Windhorse Publications.
[4]BAWS, Vol. 17, Part 2, pp. 97–108.
[5]Sangharakshita, 1986, pp. 73–74.

concludes ruefully that "the spiritual consideration eventually overwhelmed the existential one." Conversion linked Dalits with "a rich legacy of rebellion, which in turn gave them a feeling of self-esteem and self-worth." But Ambedkar was deluded in his hope that conversion would free Dalits from caste; their lives have not changed. In 1991 Gopal Guru disparaged the spiritual practices of the Ambedkar Buddhists, while Ananya Vajpeyi more recently dismissed any spirituality in Ambedkar's conversion. Following strong dissent of her position from the Ambedkar community, however, she reconsidered her assessment in a talk at the Library of Congress in 2014, painting the Dalit leader as one who exemplified the humanism of Rousseau, Tom Paine, Jefferson, and the Buddha.[6]

Notwithstanding the naysayers, Ambedkar's sincere attraction to the Buddha since his youth has been well documented. The English monk Sangharakshita has cited many of the milestones on his road to conversion. The young Bhimrao had been tutored by his father in the Hindu epics up through high school, but upon his matriculation at Elphinstone College in 1907 he was gifted a *Life of the Buddha* by its author, K.A. "Dada" Keluskar, a respected social reformer. As the first biography of the Buddha in Marathi, this book did more to shape Ambedkar's outlook on Buddhism than any other. Asok Gopal, in his new biography of Ambedkar, reports that Keluskar's Buddha was a reformer like himself and many other non-Brahmin writers of the day. His religion was anti-caste, anti-war, anti-polygamy and slavery, anti-animal sacrifice, pro-women, and profoundly collective. It was a proselytizing religion. While Ambedkar's massive library of books on Buddhism, collected throughout his life, would later contain scores of volumes that shaped his own portrait of the Buddha*,* Keluskar's book came first and made the deepest impression. "I read the book with great interest and was greatly impressed and moved by it," he recalls in his unpublished preface to *The Buddha and His Dhamma,* written in the last year of his life. Reading Keluskar, his childhood disdain for the heroes of the Mahabharata and Ramayana was vindicated.[7]

[6]Teltumbde, Anand. (2018). Strategy of conversion: Intent and aftermath. In Suraj Yengde and Anand Teltumbde. (Eds.). *The Radical in Ambedkar: Critical Reflections.* (pp. 219–239). Penguin Random House; Guru, Gopal. (1991). Hinduization of Ambedkar in Maharashtra. *Economic and Political Weekly*. 26(7), 16 February ; Vajpeyi, Ananya. (2012). Bhimrao Ambedkar: Duhkha, the Self's Burden. Chapter 5 in *Righteous Republic: The Political Foundations of Modern India.* (pp. 208–242). Harvard University Press. For the outcry against her position, see Jaouls, Nicolas and Anand, S. (2013). Outcasting Ambedkar. *The Hindu.* June 03, updated December 05, 2021, which critiques Vajpeyi's position: https://www.thehindu.com/books/outcasting-ambedkar/article62034822.ece. Vajpayi recanted her interpretation of Ambedkar's conversion in her address, "B.R. Ambedkar: The Life of the Mind & a Life in Politics" at the Library of Congress in 2014: https://www.loc.gov/item/2021689595/ accessed October 9, 2023.

[7]Sangharakshita, 1986, "Milestones on the Road to Conversion," Chapter 4, pp. 50–80. The author, a British convert and monastic, met with Ambedkar on several occasions and founded the Triratna Bauddha Mahāsaṅgha (TBM), formerly the Trailokya Bauddha Mahasangha Sahayaka Gana (TBMSG), "perhaps the most successful attempt to create an ecumenical international Buddhist organization" (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Triratna_Buddhist_Community); Gopal, Ashok. (2023). *A part apart: The life and thought of B.R. Ambedkar.* (pp. 634–636). Navayana; "Unpublished Preface to *The Buddha and His Dhamma." https://velivada.com/2020/05/06/unpublished-preface-the-buddha-and-his-dhamma/.*

A hint of Ambedkar's growing interest in Buddhism may be seen in his first publication, a review of Bertrand Russell's *The Principles of Reconstruction,* which appeared in an economics journal in 1918. Critiquing Russell's pacifism, the twenty-seven-year-old Ambedkar applied a distinction his Columbia University professor John Dewey had made—between force as violence and force as energy. Sangharakshita reads this as Ambedkar's application of the Buddhist notion of *vīrya,* the energy or vigor that is indispensable for the spiritual life.[8]

Much has been written about Ambedkar's fight for water rights in Mahad. In March 1927, Dalit activists took a ritual sip from the public water supply and were beaten back by angry caste Hindus. In December they returned to burn a copy of the Manusmriti, the Hindu code justifying violence against outcastes. The Mahad battle ended in the courts, where Dalit access to public water was upheld years later. But the Buddha was not far from Ambedkar's mind during the tumultuous campaign. Two days after the December protest, Ambedkar and a few friends traveled to the ancient Buddhist caves near Mahad. According to an eyewitness, Ambedkar was "overwhelmed" at the site.

> Looking at the main hall and the stone benches along the walls, he vividly described how assemblies were conducted at that time. He gave us a beautiful picture of how the Buddha's followers accepted celibacy and poverty and provided social service selflessly. He virtually ordered us not to insult the Buddhists by sitting where they once sat.[9]

In the 1930s Ambedkar continued to signal his growing attraction to Buddhism. In 1933 he told Gandhi that he could not honestly call himself a Hindu. He wrote from London that he was determined to leave Hinduism and was inclined to Buddhism. A year later, he named his new house and library "Rajgriha," after the place where the Buddha had given some of his most important teachings. In 1935, Ambedkar delivered his historic Yeola speech, vowing not to die a Hindu. A year later, addressing a conference of Mahar caste leaders, he ended with the words of the Buddha, "Be ye lamps unto yourselves. Look not for refuge to anyone else."

The 1940s saw Ambedkar's advocacy of Buddhism intensify. In February 1940 he told a reporter that Untouchability was originally imposed on Buddhists for their refusal to practice the Hindu dharma, a thesis he developed in his book *The Untouchables* in 1948. In 1944, speaking before the Madras Rationalist Society, he developed the thesis of an ancient struggle between Buddhists and Brahmins that became the outline for his unfinished book, *Revolution and Counter-Revolution in Ancient India* in the fifties. In 1946 Ambedkar named the new college he founded under the auspices of his People's Education Society, Siddharth College. Milind College, founded four years later, was

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[8]Sangharakshita, pp. 52f. B.R. Ambedkar, "Mr. Russell and the Reconstruction of Society." Review of *Principles of Social Reconstruction* by Bertrand Russell*, Journal of the Indian Economic Society*, Vol. I, 1918; reprinted in *BAWS*, Vol. 1, pp. 481–492. Sangharakshita offers no evidence for this observation, as plausible as it seems.

[9]Gopal, 2023, p. 642.

named for the first Greek convert to Buddhism. In 1948, Ambedkar wrote in his preface to the third edition of P. Lakshmi Narasu's *Essence of Buddhism* that the author "had fought European arrogance with patriotic fervor, orthodox Hinduism with iconoclastic zeal, heterodox Brahmins with nationalistic vision, and aggressive Christianity with a rationalistic outlook – all under the inspiring banner of his unflagging faith in the teachings of the Great Buddha."[10] Clearly, by the time of his speech before Constituent Assembly, he had begun to share the worldview of Narasu, if not to think of himself as a Buddhist.

III

Sometime in the late 1980s I made my first pilgrimage to the fourth floor of the Buddha Bhavan, the ornate colonial building in the Fort section of Mumbai that houses Siddharth College and a large archive of Ambedkar's personal library. Ambedkar founded the college in 1946, a year before he was appointed Law Minister and chair of the drafting committee. The building was already in need of repair forty years later. The main elevator was broken, and the stairs were worn and rickety. In the library I was greeted by S.S. Rege, the venerable librarian who had helped Ambedkar publish his last work and who was now ready to unlock the glass cases that held the founder's treasured books. Srikant Talvatkar, his assistant, showed me the special chair Ambedkar had designed to rest his aching legs during long hours of study, and helped by pulling down the books he thought I should see. All of this had been moved from Ambedkar's Rajgriha residence, which was thought to hold 50,000 books by the time of his death.

My intention was to survey Ambedkar's Buddhist collection and to imagine his study habits during the years of writing *The Buddha and His Dhamma*. I found hundreds of volumes on Buddhist history and literature, including volumes of Max Muller's *Sacred Books of the East,* volumes of Theravada scriptures in Rhys Davids' Pali Text Society translation series, volumes of *The Maha Bodhi* and other journals, and endless scholarly studies of comparative religion, social studies, philosophy, and history. Most significantly, I discovered that Ambedkar had marked many of his books with colored pencils, sometimes profusely, underlining passages he felt were important and filling the margins with notations that would help him classify and sort the material in the future.[11] To me, this was a secret passageway inside the great man's mind. And in years to come, other scholars would find this door too, notably Professor Scott Stroud from the University of Texas, exploring Ambedkar's engagement with John Dewey and other Western authors, and V. Geetha, a writer from Chennai, who investigated Ambedkar's immersion in the political, economic, and social thought of the 1940s.

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[10]Narasu, P. Lakshmi. (1948). *The essence of Buddhism.* Third Edition. Samyak Prakashan reprint edition, 2009 (First Edition, 1907), p. 6.

[11]Queen, Christopher. (2004). Ambedkar's Dhamma: Source and method in the construction of engaged Buddhism. In Surendra Jondhale and Johannes Beltz. (Eds.). *Reconstructing the World: B.R. Ambedkar and Buddhism in India*. (pp. 132–150). Oxford.

Both pored over Ambedkar's books, connecting his notations to the published works he released in the last years of his career.[12]

My findings related to the vision of Buddhist liberation and social ethics Ambedkar extracted from his collection, and the methods and justification he found for selecting only those teachings he believed to be authentic and useful for the struggle for Dalit human rights. In the thicket of his markings I saw Ambedkar as a teacher, building a new curriculum for social reform. I saw him as a gardener in the Deweyan sense, weeding out old beliefs and practices and planting fresh seeds in their place. And I saw him as a jurist and lawgiver, discovering evidence, filing litigation, repealing archaic statutes, and introducing new legislation to establish justice and due process for Indian society.

So it is with this perspective that we return to the last meeting of the Constituent Assembly before its historic vote to ratify India's first democratic republican constitution. What was the chairman of the drafting committee thinking when he pivoted to ancient history? Where is it written that the first Buddhist sanghas were influenced by the small republican states of the time, and how do the workings of a modern parliament echo the proceedings and judicial values of the ancient Buddhist assemblies? Did monks indeed have motions, resolutions, quorum, whip, voting by ballot, censure, regularization, and *Res Judicata*?

Modern scholarship, both before and after Ambedkar's time, has answered these questions in the affirmative. There is now a rich literature on the political environment in which the first Buddhist sanghas arose, including their adoption of proto-parliamentary procedures from the small republican states around them. It is likely that Siddhattha Gotama imported many of these practices from the Sakya republic into which he was born. Kancha Ilaiah, a political scientist at Osmania University and an activist in the Dalit civil liberties movement, describes the setting of the first Buddhist sangha:

> At a critical stage in Indian history when the free tribes were being ruthlessly exterminated or brought within the orbit of expanding state power, people were experiencing the rise of new values on the ruins of tribal equality. Buddha modelled his sangha on tribal society and advised his bhikkhus and bhikkhunis to mold their lives according to the principles of that society.[13]

The outlines of these principles, identified by Ilaiah, may be found in some of the earliest Buddhist records, the *Mahāparinibbāna Sutta*, the longest discourse in the

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[12]Stroud, Scott R. (2023). How do we know what Ambedkar read? https://www.roundtableindia. co.in/how-do-we-know-what-ambedkar-read/ (accessed 12 October 2023) and *The Evolution of Pragmatism in India: Ambedkar, Dewey, and the Rhetoric of Reconstruction.* University of Chicago Press; and Geetha, V. (2017). Unpacking a library: Babasaheb Ambedkar and his world of books. https://thewire.in/caste/unpacking-library-babasaheb-ambedkar-world-books (accessed 12 October 2023).

[13]Ilaiah, Kancha (2001). *God as political philosopher: Buddha's challenge to Brahminism.* (p. 208). Samya.

Dīgha Nikāya collection of the Sutta Piṭaka, and *Mahāvagga* and *Cullavagga* sections of the Vināya Piṭaka, the monastic code. Ilaiah identifies verses advocating frequent, regular, and harmonious meetings of the assembly and the guidelines for quorum, motion, voting by voice and secret ballet, the forming of committees when consensus is not possible, and barring the re-litigation of matters that were duly resolved in the past—the meaning of *res judicata* in modern law. As A.L. Basham concluded in 1954, "The Buddha himself, though a friend of kings, seems to have had a deep affection for the old republican organization, and in a remarkable passage is said to have warned the Vajjians shortly before his death that their security depended on maintaining their traditions and holding regular and well attended [assemblies]." It is with this well-known scene that the *Mahāparinibbāna Sutta* begins.[14]

Did Ambedkar study the Buddhist texts that have now been identified by scholars as precursors to modern judicial practice? Only by inspecting his copies of the Pali scriptures and observing his characteristic markings can this question be answered. I wish I could teleport myself back to the Siddharth library to find out for myself! We know that Ambedkar had these texts and that he pored over them in his preparation of *The Buddha and His Dhamma* and the unfinished companion volume he titled *Revolution and Counter-Revolution in Ancient India.* When I examined them twenty years ago, I was not studying the roots of his judicial philosophy. Perhaps some of you can go have a look when you are next in Mumbai.

Another avenue of investigation of the Buddhist roots of Ambedkar's judicial philosophy will be the inspection of his copies of certain secondary sources related to the history and political foundations of the early Buddhist movement. Ilaiah and other scholars often begin their assessment of the question with reference to these works, which had become standard by the time Ambedkar was collecting his library:

Henry Sumner Maine, *Village Communities in the East and West* (1898)

T.W. Rhys Davids, *Buddhist India* (1903)

K.P. Jayaswal, *Hindu Polity: A Constitutional History of India* (1943)

D.R. Bhandarkar, *Lectures on the Ancient History of India* (1818)

R.C. Majumdar, *Corporate Life in Ancient India* (1918)

Are these studies to be found among Ambedkar's books, and did he mark them with his colored pencils? And if they do not appear in the Siddharth College collections, might they reside elsewhere? We know that major portions of this library migrated to the archives at Milind College at Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar Marathwada University in Aurangabad, to the Symbiosis Society's Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar Library in Pune,

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[14]Basham, A.L. (1959). *The wonder that was India: A survey of the culture of the Indian Sub-Continent before the coming of the Muslims.* (p. 97). Random House Evergreen, first published in 1954. The passage begins the Mahaparinibbana Sutta, which Ambedkar would have read in the T.W. Rhys Davids translation in *Buddhist-Sutras*, Vol. 11 of *The Sacred Books of the East Series,* Max Muller, editor, pp. 1ff.

to branch libraries of the People's Education Society, and to personal collections of family and associates. Much more about the Buddhist roots of Ambedkar's judicial philosophy will be discovered as scholars follow these trails.[15]

IV

In the final section of this study I would like to propose another approach to understanding the influence of Buddhist thinking on Ambedkar's judicial philosophy. While I have developed this hermeneutic in another study, I believe it will prove useful in this context.[16] Dr. Ambedkar regularly invoked three slogans in his campaigns for human rights. During his graduate work at Columbia University, he studied the history and meaning of the motto of the French revolution, *Liberty, Equality, Fraternity*.[17] While attending the London School of Economics, he encountered the slogan of the British Fabian Society: *Educate, Agitate, Organize.*[18] And in his last years, he frequently invoked the Three Jewels (*tiratana*), the refuge formula that marks the commitment of practicing Buddhists worldwide and the core declaration of the conversion ceremony of 1956: "I take refuge in the *Buddha,* the *Dhamma,* and the *Sangha.*"

The eighteenth century French revolutionary motto was often cited by Ambedkar as an expression of Buddhist principles and a template for a just and compassionate society. At the time that these ideals were inscribed in Article 1 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and ratified by the United Nations in 1948, Ambedkar chose them for the preamble to the Indian Constitution. In an interview on All-India Radio in 1954, the retired cabinet minister made a surprising connection:

> My social philosophy may be said to be enshrined in three words: liberty, equality, and fraternity. Let no one, however, say that I have borrowed my philosophy from the French Revolution. I have not. My philosophy has roots in religion and not in political science. I have derived them from the teachings of my master, the Buddha.[19]

In a speech delivered before an international meeting of Buddhist leaders in Katmandu days before his death, Ambedkar compared the French ideals with the social teachings of the Buddha and Karl Marx. The French revolution promised equality but did not secure it. The Russian revolution, inspired by Marxism, offered equality but

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[15]Shetty, Sukanya. (2010). Through vast library, Ambedkar still stays close to his followers. *Indian Express*, 7 December. http://archive.indianexpress.com/news/through-vast-library-ambedkar-still-stays-close-to-his-followers/721368/

[16]Queen, Christopher. (2021). Ambedkar's Buddhist vision: A social democratic republic. In Sallie B. King. (Ed.). *Buddhist visions of a good life for all.* Routledge.

[17]Stroud, 2023, p. 54.

[18]For the significance of this slogan to a new generation of Ambedkarites in the diaspora today, see Dadasaheb Tandale, "Educate, Agitate, Organize,"
https://www.saada.org/tides/article/educate-agitate-organize

[19]Keer, Dhananjay. (1987). *Dr. Ambedkar: Life and mission.* (p. 459). Popular Prakashan, first published 1954.

sacrificed liberty and fraternity. In the end, he concluded, "It seems that the three [ideals] can coexist only if one follows the way of the Buddha."[20]

The slogan "Educate, Agitate, Organize," attributed to George Bernard Shaw, co-founder of the London School of Economics and a Fabian socialist, appeared often in Ambedkar's speeches. *Education*, for Ambedkar, who earned his second doctorate at LSE, was the key to personal liberation, particularly for Dalits deprived of property and rank. *Agitation*, in the absence of political consensus, was the key to social reform. *Organization* of social movements, political parties, government structures, and judicial due process was the key to enduring social change. Addressing 70,000 followers in Nagpur in 1942, Ambedkar prefigured his conversion there fourteen years later, tying the slogan of the British socialists to his belief in the power of religion:

> My final word of advice to you is educate, agitate, and organize, have faith in yourself. With justice on our side, I do not see how we can lose our battle. The battle to me is a matter of joy. The battle is in the fullest sense spiritual. There is nothing material or social in it. For ours is a battle not for wealth or for power. It is a battle for freedom. It is a battle for the reclamation of human personality.[21]

In *The Buddha and His Dhamma,* published posthumously in 1957, Ambedkar organized the narratives and homilies he excerpted from the Pali canon, along with his own interpolations, around the refuge formula of allegiance to the Buddha, the Dhamma, and the Sangha. The first two sections present the life and early career of the Buddha; the next two sections detail the Dhamma, his teachings and their meaning for today; and the following two sections present the values and practices of the Sangha in relation to the surrounding culture. The final chapters narrate the Buddha's last days and his place in history.[22]

To present the outlines of Ambedkar's judicial philosophy in the terms he used himself, let us combine the three slogans as follows. For him, *Buddha* exemplified personal freedom through formal study and practice; accordingly, nation builders must *"educate for liberty."* The *Dhamma* (Pali spelling of the Sanskrit *Dharma*), was a recipe for social reform through nonviolent struggle; founders and reformers must *"agitate for equality."* And the *Sangha* represented a community designed to maximize and practice democratic values; the architects of a just and free society must *"organize for fraternity."*

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[20] Ambedkar, B.R. (1956). Buddha or Karl Marx. *BAWS*, Vol. 3, p. 462. The essay "Buddha and Karl Marx" and its companion speech, delivered at the fourth meeting of the World Fellowship of Buddhists, Katmandu on November 15, 1956, contain what may be Ambedkar's final thoughts on religion and politics. The speech version is transcribed in *BAWS*, Vol. 17, pp. 549–558.

[21] Keer, 1987, p. 351.

[22] Ambedkar, B.R. (2011). *The Buddha and His Dhamma.* Annotated and edited by Aakash Singh Rathore and Ajay Verma. Oxford University Press.

First, then, *Buddha: Educate for Liberty*. In the pages of Keluskar's biography, the teenage Ambedkar perceived the Buddha as an independent thinker who rejected conventional wisdom, sought instruction from respected pundits, and formulated his own philosophy along the way. With encouragement from Keluskar and funding from progressive upper-caste patrons such as the Maharajahs of Baroda and Kolhapur, Ambedkar obtained and applied his elite international education to the ills of his own society. Little wonder that he would regard education as the cornerstone of a free society, and that John Dewey, the best-known progressive educational thinker of his generation, would become Ambedkar's mentor in conceiving the relationship of education to democracy.[23]

For Ambedkar, the political concept of liberty was grounded in the intellectual and spiritual notion of freedom—freedom of thought and expression and access to quality information and instruction. This conviction was reflected in Ambedkar's founding of the People's Education Society in 1945 and its many institutions: high schools, colleges, and residential dormitories for disadvantaged citizens seeking liberal, vocational, and professional training. Similarly, Ambedkar's commitment to primary and secondary education as a pillar of free society was codified in the Constitution, first as a desideratum and finally, years after his death, as a right for all citizens.

Second, *Dhamma: Agitate for Equality.* From the time of the water rights protests of 1927 to the gathering of a half-million pilgrims to the city of Nagpur in 1956, Ambedkar presided over protest marches, rallies, convocations, and, finally, one of the largest religious gatherings in Buddhist history. Like socially engaged Buddhists of the second half of the twentieth century such as the Fourteenth Dalai Lama and the Vietnamese Zen teacher Thich Nhat Hanh, who were driven into exile for their opposition to tyranny and war, and Sulak Sivaraksa, founder of the International Network of Engaged Buddhists, who was repeatedly jailed for denouncing the corruption of the military government in Thailand, Ambedkar was never "mealy-mouthed" in his challenge to the British imperial government and their caste Hindu collaborators. In this he followed in the footsteps of three anti-caste crusaders, whom he called his *gurus*. These were the Buddha, who challenged caste by welcoming petitioners of all backgrounds into his movement; the fifteenth-century poet-saint Kabir, who honored rich and poor Hindus and Muslims in verses that obliterated hierarchy and privilege; and the nineteenth century anti-caste writer and educator, Jyotiba Phule. Ambedkar's parents were devotees of Kabir and introduced his caste-blind mysticism to their fourteenth child, the talented Bhim, while Dalit activists throughout India were familiar with Phule's writings on the social liberation of the underclass.[24]

Freedom of thought, speech, and assembly inevitably entailed the freedom to choose and practice the religion of one's choice. At a gathering of ten thousand leaders of the Depressed Classes movement in 1935, Ambedkar announced that, though he

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[23]Stroud, 2023, *passim.*
[24]Zelliot, Eleanor. (2013) *Ambedkar's World: The making of Babasaheb and the Dalit Movement* (pp. 21-57). Navayana.

was born Hindu, he would not die as one. His declaration at Yeola was vigorously contested by Gandhi, who denied that one's religious identity may be changed at will. But Ambedkar never backed down on the freedoms that were basic to the great democracies of the West and to the republic he envisioned for India.

Finally, *Sangha: Organize for Fraternity.* Ambedkar regarded the ancient Buddhist sangha as a model of social inclusion, deliberative government, and judicial due process. But he was ambivalent about the voluntary poverty, renunciation of private property, and common ownership of goods described in the early records. Unlike the laity, monks must be celibate, obedient to seniors, and unencumbered by property. Yet Ambedkar was quick to condemn the poverty of the traditional ascetics of India, whom he viewed as "hypocritical and deceitful . . . envious and grudging . . . cunning and crafty, hard-hearted and vain."[25] Strongly rejecting the Christian teaching of "blessed are the poor," he wrote,

> Religion must not sanctify or ennoble poverty. Renunciation of riches by those who have it, may be a blessed state, but poverty can never be. To declare poverty to be a blessed state is to pervert religion, to perpetuate vice and crime, to consent to make earth a living hell.[26]

On the other hand, monastic wealth and privilege, in the absence of service to the poor, was offensive to him. Visiting Ceylon in 1950, he observed monks comfortably cloistered in permanent viharas, preoccupied with ritual and meditation and not visibly serving the community—"a huge army of idlers."[27] To consider the ancient sangha as a paradigm for a modern republic based on liberty, equality, and fraternity, the issue of property ownership and affluence required closer attention.[28]

Ambedkar was a trained economist who published his graduate theses on "Administration and Finance of the East India Company," "The Evolution of Provincial Finance in British India" (Columbia), "Provincial Decentralisation of Imperial Finance in British India," and "The Problem of the Rupee – Its Origin and its Solution" (London School of Economics). His approach to economics evolved over time and may be described as an amalgam of Keynesian capitalism, where state-regulated private property forms the basis of social prosperity, on one hand, and the democratic socialism of the British Fabian Society, where the state plays a more assertive role in regulating the ownership and distribution of wealth. His differences with Gandhi encompassed many issues facing India, but his opposition to Gandhi's village-based subsistence economics, symbolized by the Mahatma's spinning wheel

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[25]The Buddha and His Dhamma, p. 231.

[26]"Buddha and Future of His Religion," *BAWS,* p. 104, first published in *The Maha Bodhi,* journal of the Maha Bodhi Society of Calcutta, Vol. 58, May 1950.

[27]Ibid., p. 107.

[28]For an overview of Buddhist teachings on wealth, see Queen, Christopher (2019). Economic Justice in the Buddhist Tradition. In Richard Madsen and William M. Sullivan. (Eds.). *Economic Inequality and Morality: Diverse Ethical Perspectives.* (pp. 235–260). Brookings Institution Press.

and homespun clothing, was pronounced. Ambedkar, in his three-piece suits, engaged in tireless fundraising for his publications, schools and colleges, and promoted collective farming, heavy manufacturing, and the belief that property and wealth, while not evil, must be closely regulated through taxation and market intervention by a strong, democratically elected government.[29]

It is significant that Dr. Ambedkar's final speech was devoted to a contrast between the social visions of Karl Marx and the Buddha. Delivered days before his death at the fourth meeting of the World Fellowship of Buddhists, held in Katmandu on November 16, 1956, the ailing freedom-fighter argued that the two great social philosophers, separated by 2,500 years, nevertheless agreed on two things: (a) that oppression and suffering were caused by poverty and the violent competition for resources by classes or castes, and (b) that control of the means of production, in the form of private property, was the way the poor are dominated by the rich. Ambedkar argued that the Vinaya rules restricting monks to a few personal items were more rigorous in their implications for a socialist society than were the teachings of the Marxists, but he admitted serious doubt about the relevance of such teachings for a secular republic. "The only question is, to what extent can this rule of denial of private property be applied to society as a whole?"

In the last words of his valedictory speech on the comparative merits of Buddhism and Communism as guideposts for modern society, having stressed the objective of removing impediments to liberty, equality, and fraternity, Ambedkar stressed the decisive importance of means over ends:

> The means that the Communists wish to adopt in order to bring about Communism (by which I mean the recognition of Dukkha [and] the abolition of poverty), is violence and killing of those opposed. There lies the fundamental difference between the Buddha and Karl Marx. The Buddha's means of persuading people to adopt the principles are by persuasion, by moral teaching and by love. He wants to conquer the opponent by inculcating in him the doctrine that love and not power can conquer anything.[30]

In this we hear, not the pragmatism of Dewey or Ambedkar's other modern mentors in political and economic theory, but an echo of the *Dhammapada*, the early sermon of the Buddha, with which Ambedkar was intimately familiar: "Enmity is not quelled by enmity. Only by non-enmity is enmity quelled. This is the ancient truth."[31]

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[29]A detailed overview of the evolution of Ambedkar's economic theories ("Ambedkarism") vis-à-vis those of Gandhi, Nehru, and the Indian Communist Party may be found in Omvedt, Gail. (2014). *Dalits and the democratic revolution: Dr. Ambedkar and the Dalit movement in Colonial India.* Sage.

[30]B.R. Ambedkar, "Buddha or Karl Marx," in *BAWS*, Vol. 17, Part 3, p. 554.

[31]Dhammapada 1.5. Ambedkar's quotation from the Dhammapada in *The Buddha and His Dhamma* is extensive. In the section "On Anger and Enmity," he paraphrases, "Cherish no anger. Forget your enemies, Win your enemies by love. This is the Buddhist Way of Life." (Ibid., p. 189.) For Ambedkar's references to the Pali sources throughout *The Buddha and*

Ambedkar's fraternity is perfectly expressed by the Buddhist *metta,* "friendliness," "lovingkindness."

In these connections we may see the influence of Buddhist ways of thinking on his emerging philosophy of government. It was reflected in his reconstruction of the history of class and caste in India, but it was also reflected in his vision of a society based on republican and democratic principles and procedures he encountered in his study of the earliest Buddhist literature. A hint of the importance of these connections was the digression regarding ancient Buddhist republican order that he made in his final speech before the Constituent Assembly on November 25, 1949.

The draft constitution, with its distant Buddhist ancestry, was ratified the following day and became the law of the land on January 26, 1950.

His Dhamma, see footnote annotations in the Oxford annotated edition, and "Pali and Other Sources of The Buddha and His Dhamma," *BAWS*, Vol.11 Supplement.

Justice for the Marginalized in a Constitutional Democracy

Justice P. S. Narasimha[*]

Abstract

This article draws attention to the historical context of the Criminal Tribes Act 1871 to throw light on how colonial logic worked with the existing caste structures in India to produce a unique form of legal and social disadvantage for these communities. It deals with how the constitutional promise of equality recognizes these historical wrongs and places responsibility on society and the State to correct them. The article then discusses the social and legal challenges that these communities continue to face even today. Lastly, it proposes that we must inculcate Dr. Ambedkar's articulation of fraternity not only in our laws, but more importantly, in our society and psychology in particular, as the way forward—towards freedom, equality, and justice.

Keywords

Background

This article is an edited version of the lecture delivered by Justice P.S. Narasimha (Judge, Supreme Court of India) on 6 September 2023 at the Community for the Eradication of Discrimination in Education and Employment (CEDE),[1] Vimukta Diwas Lecture.[2]

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[1]CEDE is a network of lawyers, law firms, judges, and other organisations and individuals, who are committed towards reforming the Indian legal profession. It was founded in April 2021 by Disha Wadekar (Lawyer, Supreme Court of India), Anurag Bhaskar (Assistant Professor, O.P. Jindal Global University, India), and Avinash Mathews (Lawyer, Supreme Court of India). Since its inception, CEDE has been organising several lectures on issues related to the marginalized communities.

[2]The Vimukta Diwas (or Liberation Day) is marked on 31 August each year on the occasion of the repeal of the Criminal Tribes Act, 1871 in 1952. The CTA criminalized several marginalized castes and indigenous communities.

Introduction

I would like to thank the Community for the Eradication of Discrimination in Education and Employment, or CEDE in short, for inviting me.

I am delighted to deliver this lecture on the occasion of Vimukta Diwas. CEDE is a network of lawyers, law firms, judges, and other organizations and individuals, who are committed towards reforming the Indian legal profession.[1] CEDE works towards improving the representation of minorities like Dalits, Adivasis, Other Backward Classes, Nomadic and Denotified Tribes, transgender persons, persons with disabilities, and people from North East India within the legal profession and judiciary. I take today's lecture as an opportunity to further their conversation on justice for these communities, specifically in the context and in light of Vimukta Diwas, which is celebrated every year on 31 August.

This date marks the repeal of a colonial law called the Criminal Tribes Act. This law was enacted by the British in 1871, and it criminalized entire communities of people as being "criminal tribes". Every person who was born into these communities was branded as a criminal and subjected to police verification, arrest, and violence based on their birth. The Act continued to remain in force even after our independence in 1947 and the establishment of our constitutional republic in 1950. It was repealed only on 31 August 1952, when the so-called "criminal tribes" were de-notified. Vimukta Diwas is celebrated as a day of independence by people belonging to Denotified Tribes (Bajrange, Gandee & Gould 2019). In fact, it is for us to celebrate more than them.

In today's lecture, what I propose to do is to locate the history of unfreedom and inequality that these communities faced and discuss the path to justice for them through our constitutional democracy and values.

First, I will draw attention to the historical context of the oppressive law to throw light on how colonial logic worked with the existing caste structures in India to produce a unique form of legal and social disadvantages to these communities. Then, I will deal with how our constitutional promise of equality recognizes these historical wrongs and places responsibility on society and the State to correct them. Things do not stop here because mere constitutional declaration is not sufficient. Legal reform and the guarantee of fundamental rights do not mean that discrimination has come to an end. I will discuss the social and legal challenges that these communities continue to face even today. Lastly, and as a practical measure, I will propose that we must inculcate Dr. Ambedkar's articulation of fraternity not only in our laws, but more importantly, in our society and psychology in particular, as the way forward—towards freedom and equality.

The Origins and Impact of Criminal Tribes Act 1871

Let us discuss the Act first. To fully understand the origin of the Criminal Tribes Act, we must note two things. *First*, criminal activity was seen as biological and habitual in nineteenth-century Britain. This meant that when a person committed crimes, it was

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attributed to him being born a criminal and being a criminal for his whole life. The imposition of this idea in the Indian context brings me to my *second* point, which is that the British understood India as a collection of castes, where each caste was seen as a homogenous unit committed to a hereditary occupation (Yang 1985).

These two assumptions of the British on criminality and the caste system underlay the Criminal Tribes Act. James Fitzjames Stephen, who is credited with introducing the Indian Penal Code (IPC) and Indian Evidence Act, reflected these assumptions when he introduced the Criminal Tribes Act, and I quote:

> *...when we speak of 'professional criminals,' we...[mean] a tribe whose ancestors were criminals from time immemorial, who are themselves destined by the usages of caste to commit crime, and whose descendants will be offenders against the law, until the whole tribe is exterminated or accounted for in the manner of thugs*. (Yang 1985)

This is what his perception was. These words show a deep-rooted bias of British and Indian society in criminalising these communities. With the colonial project of codification and uniformisation of law, a pan-Indian juridical order was established that criminalised several tribal, nomadic, and lower caste communities by dubbing them to be 'criminal tribes' (Kamble, Kumar, and Chowdhury 2023). The people who were labelled as being "born a criminal" hence faced "*double discrimination*" as they were oppressed and ostracised within the social order of India's caste system and at the same time by the legal order introduced by the colonial masters.

Criminalisation was not sudden in the case of these communities. As we know, many of them also participated in the freedom movement. History therefore indicates that several indigenous communities had revolted against the colonial administration prior to the mutiny of 1857 (Minj & Soren 2021). Even in the mutiny of 1857, the British regime saw indigenous communities as the facilitators of goods and weapons. Consequently, they sought to maintain law and order through extreme measures such as the Criminal Tribes Act.

The Act contained provisions that empowered local governments to designate "any tribe, gang or class of persons" as a criminal tribe if they were "addicted to the systematic commission of non-bailable offences". The people of these communities were required to register themselves at local police stations and report their whereabouts on a daily basis (Bokil 2002). Any travel or change of residence required official permission. These communities faced not just discrimination, but also systemic control over their daily lives (Bokil 2002).

In 1897, the Act was amended to make the penalties even more severe (Report on the Criminal Classes in the Bombay Presidency 1908), because the freedom movement had intensified by that time. Children between the ages of 4 to 13 years could be separated from their parents and placed in so-called reformatory settlements (Reddy & Raju 1999) which often resemble prisons, with barbed wire compounds and restricted freedom (Glover 2005). These settlement camps were also sites of forced labor (Tucker 1923).

Another aspect of this Act that is less-studied is that it also criminalised the lives of *hijra* communities in the North-Western Provinces. Under Part II of the Act, the police would maintain a register of transgender persons who were suspected of kidnapping, castration, and sexual activity that was penalised under Section 377 of the IPC. The police were given powers of surveillance over the *hijra* persons who were prohibited from wearing female clothing or performing in public, and children were also taken away from their households. Part II of the Act characterised the entire community as criminal and deviant by virtue of their identity. This Part was repealed in 1911, which is why *hijra* communities are not considered Denotified Tribes. However, we must recognise the oppressive effect of this law on them and their persistent association with criminality under Police Acts, anti-beggary laws, and anti-sex work laws which is prevalent as of today (Hinchy 2019).

The Criminal Tribes Act was entirely repealed in 1952, marking a critical step towards acknowledging the injustice meted out to these communities. The Ayyangar Committee which was constituted to enquire into the law found that it violated various constitutional promises of equality, liberty, freedom, dignity, abolition of untouchability, and prohibition of forced labor. Based on these, the Committee recommended the repeal of the law (Criminal Tribes Enquiry Committee, 1949). In this way, the Constitution enabled recognition of historical wrongs and provided a language of rights to question the historical injustices.

Correcting Historical Wrongs through the Constitution

What happens after the advent of the Constitution? The Constitution was formulated as a forward-looking societal blueprint, carving out significant provisions of fundamental rights. These rights uphold the essential principles of freedom and equality for citizens, and also dignity most importantly.

The drafters crafted an intricate framework that prioritizes the advancement of Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, and Other Backward Classes. The framework, reflected in various constitutional provisions, is a testament to our collective resolve to build an equitable and harmonious society.

The golden triangle of Articles 14, 19, and 21 embodies the values of equality, liberty, freedom, life, and dignity for all persons. In no unclear terms, these provisions guarantee equal rights to those belonging to marginalised communities. Within the equality provisions, one of the most profound declarations is Article 17, which unequivocally abolishes the practice of Untouchability. Article 46 serves as a beacon of hope, charging the State with the duty to provide special attention to the educational and economic advancement of these marginalised communities. This mandate is aimed at shielding them from the clutches of social injustices and exploitation that have hindered their progress for far too long. Article 15(2) of the Constitution embodies a fundamental principle of equality and non-discrimination. This provision ensures that no citizen is subjected to any form of discrimination based solely on factors such as religion, race, caste, sex, place of birth, or their intersections. Article 15(4) lays

down a clear roadmap for their progress by providing specific provisions for their advancement. Article 16(4) provides for affirmative action for marginalised social groups in public employment, and it is a facet of the Fundamental Rights chapter.

And then we have Article 23 and Article 24, addressing human trafficking, forced labor, and child labor, holding particular significance for Denotified Tribes. So these are articles not just given as a protection, but are intended to ensure direct benefits to the Denotified Tribes. They reiterate our commitment to safeguarding their rights and dignity.

We must be cautious however in not mistaking the guarantee of these rights as automatically translating to a change in the material conditions of society. These are constitutional declarations. It is the obligation of the constitutional authorities therefore to translate our constitutional promise to reality—whatever has been thought of, believed, and put forth in the Constitution.

In an unequal society, authorities are under an active obligation to prevent any form of discrimination and reduce inequalities. It cannot be an excuse for the authorities to say that society is unequal and that they are performing their role neutrally. Having read the constitutional mandate, I will now focus somewhat on those who are to implement the provisions of the Constitution. In an unequal world, staying neutral amounts to leaving the weaker and the oppressed in their situation. In that sense, authorities not performing their roles and responsibility amounts to perpetuation of these inequalities. It is only through the substantive efforts of our legislature, executive, and judiciary that the spirit of the Constitution is entrenched in our society. It is not merely the institutions that we are talking about; a reason why the final concluding speech of Dr. Ambedkar at the end of the Constituent Assembly Debates is significant to remember. I quote:

> However good a Constitution may be, it is sure to turn out bad because those who are called to work it, happen to be a bad lot. However bad a Constitution may be, it may turn out to be good if those who are called to work it, happen to be a good lot. (Constituent Assembly Debates 1949)

So, therefore, a great amount of responsibility falls on those who occupy constitutional positions and positions thereafter in governance. However, does it really stop there? Is it merely those who are in a constitutional position and those who are in governance who must take responsibility? My speech today says that we must travel beyond that.

Constitutional Safeguards in the Context of Denotified Tribes

Let me first deal with the constitutional safeguards for the Denotified Tribes.

Our law-makers and political leaders at the time of independence envisaged affirmative action and reservations as 'compensatory discrimination' essential to undo the historical wrongs faced by marginalized communities, to uplift them to an equal status as the majority. Social welfare also played a significant role in the development of these communities. The Ayyangar Committee that recommended the repeal of the law also placed responsibility on the central and state governments to provide welfare to the Denotified Tribes (Gandee 2020).

In terms of constitutional protections, however, the cause of the Denotified Tribes did not extensively feature in the deliberations and debates of the Constituent Assembly. The issue of oppression and violence faced by these communities was brought up largely in the context of Article 19(1)(d), which guarantees the right to freedom of movement. H.J. Khandekar, one of our constitutional fathers (Constituent Assembly member), was the only Assembly member who brought up this cause in the Assembly debates (Gandee 2020). He stated that a fundamental right to freedom of movement is necessary to fight against the restrictions placed on "criminal tribes" under the Act. So what we thought is a general right of Article 19(1), ensuring benefit to all, actually had direct impact that it will enure to the benefit of these communities who are otherwise restricted, as they were to report even after the repeal.

However, the caste-based disadvantages faced by these communities were not explicitly addressed in the discussions on equality provisions. These communities instead received the benefits of affirmative action by being included in the list of Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, and Other Backward Communities (Gandee 2020). So what then are the contemporary challenges that we are going to face? I have divided them into a few specific instances. One challenge is lack of consistency.

Contemporary Challenges

Lack of Consistency

While being included within the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (SC/ST) list extends the benefit of equality provisions to these communities, the challenge of classification adds another layer of complexity to their struggle. Although some Denotified Tribes subgroups are included in lists of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, the lack of uniformity across states creates inconsistency. This lack of consistency has led to anomalies where tribes are categorized differently in various regions. For instance, the 'Phanse Pardhis' are recognized as Scheduled Tribes in Maharashtra, while their counterparts, the Haran Shikaris and Gaon Pardhis, are designated as Vimukta Jatis and Nomadic Tribes (Bokil & Raghavan 2016). Such inconsistencies underscore the urgency to establish a coherent and uniform classification system that ensures equitable treatment across the nation. It also adds an enormous amount of litigation; maybe a time has come to answer this.

The lack of a uniform approach in their administrative classification also excludes them from using the framework of other beneficial legislation like the SC/ST Atrocities Act 1989 to report against acts of oppression. The absence of specific safeguards weakens their ability to combat human rights violations effectively (Jenkins 2006). The Bhiku Ramji Idate Report of the National Commission for Denotified Nomadic and Semi-Nomadic Tribes took note of this situation and recommended the separate and explicit inclusion of denotified and nomadic tribes in the SC/ST Act and within constitutional safeguards (Idate Commission Report 2017).

Disproportionate Criminalization

Another challenge is disproportionate criminalisation. These legal protective measures are essential because the social stigma against these communities remains deeply ingrained despite the repeal of the Criminal Tribes Act. The criminal tag continues to haunt them, perpetuating a cycle of bias and discrimination. This social stigma has legal repercussions when we note that some criminal laws are still disproportionately used to target members of these communities. The Habitual Offenders Act was introduced in 1952 as a substitute to the Criminal Tribes Act. While many provisions regarding restriction of movement, registration of habitual offenders, and police surveillance continued, the key difference was that the Habitual Offenders Act did not associate criminality with certain communities but with individuals. However, the individuals who were labeled as habitual offenders largely hailed from Denotified Tribes. There is also a lack of a common definition of who is a habitual offender, and police manuals in certain states still define a habitual offender with reference to the caste of the person (Bokil & Sonavane 2020). The police continue to formally and informally administer the law with the assumption that members belonging to these communities are inherently criminal (Bajrange, Gandee & Gould 2019). Even other laws like the Wildlife Protection Act, Indian Forest Act, Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act, excise laws, and anti-beggary laws are deployed in a discriminatory manner (Sonavane & Bokil 2020). These are practical problems.

Social Stigma in Education and Employment

The third challenge is social stigma in education and employment. Beyond the laws, Denotified Tribes also face discrimination in education and employment. The Ayyangar Committee noted that employers refused to employ persons belonging to Denotified Tribes, as they perceived them to be of criminal nature (Report of the Criminal Tribes Act 1949-1950). The educational journey of Denotified Tribes is also fraught with pervasive discrimination. A report indicated that within the walls of educational institutions, students from Denotified Tribes often find themselves marginalized, considered to be backbenchers, and subjected to neglect from teachers (Hebsur 1981). Their peers further exacerbate their struggles by branding them as unintelligent, perpetuating stereotypes that hinder their academic progress. This critical issue underscores the imperative need for comprehensive sensitization programs among educators and students alike.

A crucial aspect is an examination of the educational status of the Denotified Tribes which shows that about 61 per cent of their members are illiterate (Korra 2017). The sad part of schooling is that there are numerous children from Denotified Tribes who drop out of schools and colleges every year (Korra 2017). A major factor for drop out is the absence of identity certificates which deprive the children of Denotified Tribes from getting scholarships, therefore, they do not get the encouragement needed to send their children to schools and colleges. While education holds the promise of transformation, barriers like social discrimination, poverty, and societal oppression impede their children's access to learning.

Fraternity as the Way Forward

What is the way forward? We have seen the repeal of the Act, examined the constitutional promise, considered the new statutory scheme, and we have also observed the rules and regulations establishing and formulating the entire regime of laws and beneficial legislations. Yet, it has not fully worked. There is something more we need to do. It is not merely in the law, but a matter more fundamental which goes beyond the letter of the law. It lies in the attitude, belief, behavior, and habits. From the accounts, we observe that the problem is not only a legal one but more of a social and psychological one. It is therefore imperative for us to move beyond the realm of legal protections and rights in seeking to address the issues faced by marginalised communities. The constitutional authorities cannot work in isolation; citizens must play an important role in ending social discrimination and holding the State accountable to its promise of equality and upliftment. A higher obligation rests on those communities who reaped the largest benefit with no semblance of the trappings which marginalised communities have faced. So the biggest responsibility, at this time, is not on the obligation of the State, but is about the obligation of the general citizenry, specifically those who receive the best benefit all through, without any kind of hindrance.

Let us recall the words of Dr. Ambedkar, which is a little longer quote, but I think a very important one. It is in these words that he underlines the importance of social democracy as being necessary for achieving our constitutional vision. He said:

> *We must make our political democracy a social democracy as well. Political democracy cannot last unless there lies at the base of it social democracy. What does social democracy mean? It means a way of life which recognizes liberty, equality and fraternity as the principles of life. These principles of liberty, equality and fraternity are not to be treated as separate items in a trinity. They form a union of trinity in the sense that to divorce one from the other is to defeat the very purpose of democracy. Liberty cannot be divorced from equality, equality cannot be divorced from liberty. Nor can liberty and equality be divorced from fraternity. Without equality, liberty would produce the supremacy of the few over the many. Equality without liberty would kill individual initiative. Without fraternity, liberty, equality could not become a natural course of things. It would require a constable to enforce them.* (*CAD* 1949)

Therefore, what he is talking about is the belief and the trust you have in this trinity, and have complete confidence, and live with the fraternity. He continued:

> *We must begin by acknowledging the fact that there is a complete absence of two things in Indian Society. One of these is equality. On the social plane, we have in India a society based on the principle of graded inequality, which is elevation for some and degradation for others. On the economic plane, we have a society in which there are some who have immense wealth as against*

> *many who live in abject poverty. On the 26th of January 1950, we are going to enter into a life of contradictions. In politics, we will have equality and in social and economic life we will have inequality. In politics, we will be recognizing the principle of one man one vote and one vote one value. In our social and economic life, we shall, by reason of our social and economic structure, continue to deny the principle of one man one value.* (*CAD* 1949)

We should test ourselves as to how far we have achieved and gained this situation of one citizen, one person, one value.

> *How long shall we continue to live this life of contradictions? How long shall we continue to deny equality in our social and economic life? If we continue to deny it for long, we will do so only by putting our political democracy in peril. We must remove this contradiction at the earliest possible moment, or else those who suffer from inequality will blow up the structure of political democracy which the Assembly has [so] laboriously build up.* (*CAD* 1949)

In Dr. Ambedkar's articulation, fraternity is what enables the materialisation of a society of liberty and social and economic equality. It is only when fraternity becomes a way of life that the conflict of liberty and equality can be resolved as accommodation, inclusion, and cooperation with the needs of disadvantaged communities as socially valuable. Dr. Ambedkar understands fraternity as a "*sense of common brotherhood of all Indians- if Indians being one people. It is the principle which gives unity and solidarity to social life*" (*CAD* 1949). It is only through this *sentiment* of mutuality, unity, oneness, and brotherhood that our fundamental rights will be safeguarded. The sentiment emerges from your strong belief. Thus, unless we believe in that and move forward with that belief, the constitutional legal infrastructure, which is of course so necessary, will not attain its completion till the psychological intention marries and merges it together, and gives its total effect to what we believe.

But we must not mistake unity and solidarity to mean sameness or homogeneity. Our idea of fraternity must not be at the cost of diversity and acceptance of difference; rather, fraternity must be the foundation for equality of those who deviate or are different from the majority. Marginalised citizens must be united into the majority not through demands of assimilation into the mainstream but through access to institutional and structural remedies that redress the disadvantage suffered by them and allow them to maintain their difference, thereby fostering values of plurality and multiculturalism (Gupta 2007).

Such an understanding of fraternity must be socially and psychologically inculcated within our country. Dr. Ambedkar was not only influential in drafting the Fundamental Rights, but he also acknowledged that they must be protected by the social and moral conscience of society. If social conscience is such that it is prepared to recognise the rights which the law proposes to enact, rights will be safe and secure. But if the fundamental rights are opposed by the community, then no law, parliament

or judiciary can guarantee them in the real sense of the word (Moon 2020). Our social and psychological attitude must change from one of discrimination, stigma, and exclusion to equality and inclusion. This change is possible through the feeling of fraternity, which Dr. Ambedkar has also characterized as love. In a letter which he has written to Mr. A.V. Thakkar in 1932, he wrote:

> *The touchables and the untouchables cannot be held together by law… The only thing that can hold them together is love. Outside the family, justice alone, in my opinion, can open the possibility of love, and it should be the duty of the Anti-Untouchability League to see that the touchable does, or failing that is made to do, justice to the Untouchable.* (Moon 2020)

The letter is eloquent. Drawing from this idea of fraternity, I propose that communities who have been oppressed need to be treated with a sense of institutional empathy. Where does the burden lie? It is with the institution-holders. It is their obligation to treat the marginalized communities with empathy, to take an extra mile, extra step. 'Empathy' by those in power should not turn into a 'paternalistic' or a 'savior' approach. That is to say, we must understand the issues and take into consideration the struggles of marginalized communities, rather than impose our own worldview. First, members of marginalized communities should not only be treated as someone who needs *saving*. We must treat them as equal citizens, who are conscious of what they need. Second, we must not stop at merely recognising the problem, and should take active steps to question even our own privileges, and to state poetically—make dignified room for those who were kept *out of houses*.

Within the legal profession itself, we have much work to do to ensure better access and representation of marginalized communities at par with everyone else. A Report by the American Bar Association highlights the barriers faced by individuals belonging to the Dalit community in entering the profession (ABA 2021). Such barriers are also faced by other minorities like women, persons with disabilities, Adivasis, OBCs, Denotified Tribes, and gender and sexual minorities. Therefore, in the legal fraternity, we must create spaces for students and professionals from marginalized communities. We must adopt steps to have adequate representation of marginalized communities in the Bar and the Bench. That is why at this stage I wish to congratulate the very imaginative way in which CEDE was constituted. These are the additional steps, those extra miles that need to be taken. What is needed is not merely providing the individual benefit, but rather institutioning the steps as CEDE was created. It is in that manner that we need to proceed with individual law firms, those who are in a startup phase, wherein a few extra steps must be taken.

It is my suggestion that every Senior Advocate should recruit and mentor at least one member from the marginalized communities in their chambers. However, I must add a caveat that such mentoring needs to be accompanied very, very importantly by dignity and patience. Patience is a very important word—as a routine or as an obligation that 'yes, we need to do it'. Sometimes, people take a step and then forget

about it or do not remind oneself that somebody has been taken in. Therefore, for that little extra step to continue requires some amount of patience. That patience is again important, else it will have negative consequences. It should not be done only to resemble 'tokenism', but rather a humanist approach is needed. This practice can even be institutionalized through the regulations of the Bar Council of India. Till such practices are institutionalized, voluntary acts of inclusion by senior members of the Bar can lead to major change, as young professionals from marginalized communities whom we mentor today may become successful professionals of the future, who may even change the world. The Supreme Court of India has tried to do so by adopting a 'diversity' clause in the new scheme for recruiting law clerks.

We need to make efforts to make the legal profession inclusive. Statistics show that only 80 out of the total 4,434 candidates, who applied for the law clerks/research associate examination conducted recently in June 2023, were Scheduled Tribes; a number which is not even 2 per cent. This shows that even at the stage of application, we are not able to reach the Scheduled Tribes. This is a systemic problem. We must make active efforts to ensure that the law does not remain a profession of only certain communities, who have been historically dominant and power-controlling.

By taking *active efforts*, we will not only recognise the social problems, but also create structures of justice for the marginalized. Unequal access to resources and opportunities has kept these oppressed communities trapped in a cycle of marginalization and oppression that is difficult to break. It is important now, more than ever, to speak and more importantly *act* on issues that have contributed towards the alienation and oppression of historically marginalized communities.

After independence and the adoption of the Constitution, the marginalized communities in India chose to show faith in the constitutional framework, despite facing continuous challenges and discrimination. Only when those in power and also those who are not in power but are sufficiently endowed, make active efforts to remove barriers of injustice, can the marginalized communities retain their faith in the constitutional justice system.

It is with this commitment I thank CEDE, all the founders, members actively associated with CEDE, and team Live Law. I thank the audience, though it is online, for patiently listening to me and letting me share my thoughts, having spent so many years as a lawyer and also a few years as a judge.

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Poothapattu: Sobs of a Broken People, Fragmented Ethos, and the Lost Land

Anilkumar Payyappilly Vijayan[1]

Abstract

Keeping three radical ideas of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, which have not been seriously dealt with by mainstream Indian/Kerala historiography, at the backdrop, namely, the Nagas and Dravidians are the same people, the untouchables were Buddhists, and India's history as the history of mortal conflicts between Buddhism and Brahminism, the article attempts to study a Malayalam poem that has attained a classical status in the language, *Poothapattu*, to unravel the concealed layers of Kerala's past. Drawing on the distinction the filmmaker Sergei Eisenstein establishes between the image and representation and on the insights provided by the Sangham Thinai conceptualizations, the article argues that in the Pootham image created by the Savarnna Malayalees, one could see sedimentation of history, where representations of the untouchable population of different historical moments are fused into a complex image, attesting to the veracity of Ambedkar's radical ideas enumerated above.

Keywords

Dalit-bahujan history, Poothapattu, Pariah, Buddhist philosophy, Brahminism, Sangham Thinai, Savarnna representation, image of the other, sacrificial myth, violence and non-violence

Mythically, two journeys, undertaken in two different directions, inform the demography and topography of Kerala: Kannaki's and Parasurama's. While the Kannaki of *Chilapathikaram* journeyed from the east to the west, from Madurai to Kodungalloor, from Tamil Nadu to Kerala, through the imposing mountains on the eastern border to the rocking waves of Arabian Sea on the western border, traversing the highland, midland, and lowland of Kerala, the Parasurama of *Keralolpathi* traveled from the north to the south, from Karnataka to Kerala, traversing only the midland

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and avoiding the highland and lowland. The Brahminic text *Keralolpathi* gives a cautionary sermon as regards the highland and lowland: "He (Parasurama) then tells them to stop the evil goddesses from the mountains by chanting evil mantras and avoid bad times by worshipping Lord Rudra…He further tells them to stop the water goddesses coming from the seashore by appeasing the Satkarmamurti and ward off dangers during bad times by worshipping Goddess Durga" (Keralolpathi 03-04). The two journeys roughly document the migratory movements of two different people: the people of the Sangham age, who had, as attested by the recent Pattanam excavation and also by the Old Testament and ancient historians like Gibbon and Pliny, engaged in trade relations with West Asia, Africa, the Mediterranean, and China 2500 years ago and were later fragmented into various caste and religious groups (whose religious ethos in principle are opposed to Hinduism), and the Brahminic population which is believed to have migrated to Kerala from CE sixth to ninth centuries, and was quite conscious of its distinct caste identity after having grabbed the land from the ancient layers of the population. What is most striking is the gendered nature of the journey: the ancient population had a woman as their mythical figure; the Brahminic population a man. The Indian philosopher Debiprasad Chattopadhyaya, in his work on the Lokayata tradition, has touched upon this binary as the difference between the matriarchal tradition of the indigenous population that was based on agriculture and the patriarchal tradition of the Vedic people. In Chattopadhyaya's formulation:

> The Social importance of the sexes is correlated to the development of the economic life. The original pre-hunting stage was characterized by mother-right. With the development of hunting, however, the social supremacy was shifted to male. In the post-hunting stage, among those people that developed pastoral economy this male-supremacy came to exercise even greater hold; among those, however, that discovered the agriculture, the situation was reversed. There was a revival of mother-right among them. With the further development of agriculture,-more specifically, with the introduction of the cattle-drawn plough to the field-this agricultural mother-right was finally overthrown.

> Gods and goddesses are after all created in human image; these shifts in the social importance of the sexes were naturally reflected in the form of parallel shifts in the celestial sphere. Deities representing the hunting and the pastoral stages are predominantly male whereas those representing the earlier stages of agriculture were predominantly female. (Chattopadhyaya 241)

What is to be borne in mind here is that this transformation of Indian society from a predominantly matriarchal culture, where the primacy of the female principle over the male principle, of prakriti over purusa, of the matter over the ideal, is the built-in assumption, to a Brahminic patriarchal culture in which "the entire cosmic order was conceived in terms of the original male" (245), was not a smooth one but was achieved in and through systematic violence, the misogyny of which could be plainly seen "in

the 'three typically Indian institutions,' namely, hypergamy, child-marriage and *sati* (burning of widows)". The Brahminic world order needed such "extravagant means" to break "the resistance of matriarchy" (254) because "the largest proportion of the Indian population remained predominantly agricultural", which is "the material basis of the female principle" (258).

The systematic violence of Brahminic patriarchy has an additional element to it when it comes to subduing the non-Brahminic earlier population of Kerala. They created a system of marriage and concubinage, which is not to be seen anywhere in the world. As per the system, only the eldest son in the Brahminic household is allowed to marry; other brothers are allowed to engage in a non-marital sexual alliance with the women from the ancient population. Since the body of these women were seeable and touchable, they could not be treated like the rest of the population but had to be given the Varna status; they had to be incorporated into the Brahminic Varna system as the fourth Varna, as the Sudra, the menial class whose duty is to serve the other three classes. This was the birth of the caste known as Nair from a stock of people whom B.R. Ambedkar has identified as Nagas or in today's more popular parlance known as Dravidians (Dr. B.R. Ambedkar. Who Were Shudras. 296). In other words, Nairs are the Nagas with a difference; unlike other Nagas, they are the Nagas who have been assimilated into the Brahminic order as seeable, servile, and touchable; they are the Nagas who have put up the least resistance to patriarchal Brahminism. Barring the Brahminized population of the Nairs, the rest of the Naga population were treated as panchamas, the fifth class, the absolute other of the Varna system, by the Brahminic order and had been given the status of the untouchable and unseeable. It was two religions from without, beyond the shores of the Arabian Sea, Christianity and Islam, that finally gave some of the unseeable and untouchable people, the Brahminized Nairs and even some Brahmins an idea of a life outside the fold of Hinduism once they embraced it through marriage or conversion.

The Nagas who refused to be coopted to the Varna order had, as Ambedkar had shrewdly understood and made explicit, a philosophical reason for doing so: their ethos was conditioned by Buddhism. They had already imbibed the value of non-violence (*karuna* and *maitri*) and the collective ownership of land and resources as a superior mode of being in the world, a sense which is most vividly articulated in the Onam song written by Sahodaran Ayyappan recalling the golden period of pre-Brahminic Kerala of Maha Bali as a time "when people were all alike and joyous in a world where there were no lies, deceits, diseases; where everybody happily worked together; where women were equal to men" (Shekher, Puthan Keralam: Kerala Samskarathinte Bauddha Adithara). The emphatic reminder in the song that it was a time when women enjoyed equality clearly underscores that the time in question was not that of Brahminical patriarchy! Into this world of joyous camaraderie did enter the Brahminic god Vishnu, in the incarnate forms of two Brahmin carpetbaggers from the north: Parasurama with his axe and Vamana with his deceitful feet which measured away all the land and life Maha Bali possessed, including his own life.

The Onam myth, in other words, and the birth of the caste system and the untouchable population in Kerala is a striking case, which attests to the veracity of Ambedkar's thesis that the untouchables were once Buddhists (Dr. B.R. Ambedkar. The Untouchables. 315). It was the moral and political resistance they put up against Brahminism that caused their fall. But this aspect of Kerala history, the Buddhist past and the conflict between Buddhism and Brahminism, has never been a concern of the mainstream historiographers of Kerala. There is a built-in tendency not to engage the period in question. This period has been relegated as a dark period because of the non-availability of textual evidence. This is, in fact, a result of a particular kind of imagination that structures mainstream historiography. How do we account for that imagination?

In mainstream historiography, Kerala is imagined as a space lying from the north to the south, which is clearly a reproduction, in the imagination, of the migratory movement of Brahmins. The myth of Parasurama, documented in the Sanskrit text *Kerala Mahatmyam* and the Malayalam text *Keralolpathi* attests to this point. The myth forced into the popular psyche, officially and unofficially, celebrates the story that "Kerala was formed by Parashurama, one of the incarnations of Lord Vishnu, by throwing his bloodstained axe into the sea from Gokarna. The axe landed at Kanyakumari and the land between Gokarna and Kanyakumari was raised up as Kerala" (Naha). In short, the axe, on which imprinted a past of violence and murder, narrates, like in the Western movies of Hollywood, a bloodstained event that spread from the north to the south. To a great extent, the historiography of Kerala has been built on this spatial configuration of Kerala and the mythical events narrated in *Keralolpathi*, minus the ideological content embedded in the bloodstained axe.

As we mentioned earlier via the Kannaki myth, in contrast to the mainstream cartographic imagination, another imagination already existed. But, unfortunately, this way of imagining Kerala was totally obfuscated by mainstream historiography. This imagination follows the movement of the sun and the many rivers that abound in Kerala: from the east to the west. Here Kerala is perceived as a landscape that stretches from the east to the west, from the mountains on the east to the Arabian Sea on the west, with the sea envisaged as the natural terminus of the journeys that both the sun and the rivers undertake. This journey that a civilization has undertaken along this direction, in parallel with the course of the sun and rivers; this journey of a people who were outside the fold of Hinduism, was brutally erased or ignored by the mainstream historiography of Kerala, the refusal resulting in a distorted understanding of the material and historical conditions and forces that had acted behind the creation of modern Kerala.

The erasure, on the one hand, has a historical continuity: it smoothly repeats and enacts the doctrine of exclusion that has historically been the built-in feature of the Hindu world order. In other words, the mainstream historiography of Kerala systematically erases the Dalit and other lower caste populations from the purview of history. They are rendered invisible and untouchable by modern historiography, continuing the historical and political project of the Hindu Dharma of making some people untouchable or unseeable! On the other, the mainstream historiography enacts

another form of erasure: not only has it erased a people and rendered them invisible but it also has ensured that certain topographies in Kerala remained invisible as well, namely, the mountains and sea.

Though much of the mainstream historiography casts doubt upon the historical exactness of the details given in *Keralolpathi*, they all have something in common with the latter, which is, as pointed out earlier, nothing but methodological flirting with the doctrine of exclusion. What was later identified as the trademark feature of the Kerala historiography, the over-representation of and the obsession with the Hindu varna order passing as the history of Kerala and the omission of the life-world of the adivasis, untouchables, backward communities, Muslims and Christians, had its beginning in *Keralolpathi*. We see in *Keralolpathi* a straightforward narrative aligning itself, thematically, with the hierarchical organization of life established by the varna system. A Brahmin carves out a geographical space from the sea; brings a group of Arya Brahmins from the north, settles them there ensuring their separate identity from other Brahmins, and teaches them the necessary martial skills needed for survival; brings from elsewhere another group of people to rule the place by being subservient to the Brahmins and calls them the Kshatriyas; and finally brings the Sudras, again from elsewhere, to ensure that there are people to serve the Brahmins.

But at the same time, we must, by evoking the distinction the filmmaker Sergei Eisenstein makes between representation and image (Eisenstein 12-17), be sensitive to a missing representation in the *Keralolpathi,* which is crucial and makes the varna image present in the text a bit interesting. In the varna image, the Vaishya representation is missing! Though the text, as just mentioned, follows the logic of the varna system, it is surprisingly silent about the third varna, the Vaishyas, the merchant class. The absence of the Vaishyas has a strategic role to play. In fact, one could even say that it is precisely to erase the contributions of the Vaishayas in the creation of this land that *Keralolpathi* omitted the mountains and the sea from its discursive domain. Even before the advent of the Brahmins to Kerala from the north, this geographic location, under various names, was known all over the world as one of the main centers of international trade.

Apropos of the structural role that *Keralolpathi* played in setting the methodological terrain for later-day historiography, we must also pay attention to a point raised by Abbas Panakkal, namely, the fact that the name Kerala is Sanskritic in origin and that before the advent of Brahmins to Kerala this land had been known all over as Malayalam. He writes, "The name for the place that is seen in *Keralolpathi* before Brahmins were created (by Parashurama) is 'Malayalam'. In other words, at the time of the drafting of *Keralolpathi* the name 'Malayalam' was well-known. It was after Brahminical ascendancy that for the first time the name Kerala is used in *Keralopathi*" (Panakkal). Noting the name 'Malai Nadu' that is inscribed on a stone in the temple of Tanjavoor and dating back to CE 6th century, the Urdu scholar Shamsullah Qadiri reminds us that it stands for erstwhile Malabar, literally meaning the land of the mountains (21).

Further,

> The language of Malabar is very different from Tamil. Yet it is a branch of the Dravidian language. Because it is the language of a land where mountains (mala) abound that it got the name Malayalam. Because of the same reason the country also got the name Malayalam and the people who speak the language became Malayalee.

> When the word mala is compounded with bar, you get the word Malabar. Bar is a Persian word. It means both country and excess. So, when the word bar is added to mala, it either means a mountain country or a place where mountains are seen in excess. (Qadiri 21)

When the Dalit-bahujan population is expunged from historiography; when the name of their land is altered so shrewdly to ensure that they won't claim their rightful share in it; when their cooperative mother-rights world is fragmented to make them zombies in a patriarchally ordained Brahminical world as caste entities, where do the Dalit-bahujans attempt a reconstruction of their Buddhist past that has been fragmented beyond recognition? Despite all the strategies of concealment, fragmentation, and distortion of historical memory and evidence by the Brahminic system, luckily, there survive many traces, which a highly trained mind alert to the iconography and ritualistic embodiment of Dalit-bahujan population and the Brahminic systemic strategies of erasure, can work through, much like a Keats imagines a history from the pictures on an urn. The only trouble is that unlike Keats we are not dealing with an urn that is fully *present*, but with a few pieces of an urn that is broken, with most of the pieces lost, an urn that evokes absence rather than presence! From the unclear images and broken lines on the surviving urn pieces, we have to first work toward the complete picture, the picture that was and is not. From there to the full weight and presence of history. From the broken to the impossibly complete, engaging in a process Ambedkar always engaged: of endlessly attempting the unattainable, of creating a complete man from the broken men!

One instance for that painful exercise is the poem *Poothapattu*, by Idasseri Govindan Nair. He wrote the poem based on the folk art of the poothan prevalent in the Valluvanadan region of Kerala and its myth. The poem, though very complex and paradoxical as befits poetry of the highest class, has nonetheless achieved a surpassing simplicity in its signification in the popular psyche of Malayalam readers. The popular explication of the poem unequivocally states that the poem is the victory of motherhood and truth over the evil force that resorts to lies and treachery. What is celebrated here is the struggle, steadfastness, and perseverance a mother has shown in her attempt to find and save her boy who was abducted by the Pootham with deceitful tactics.

Naturally, there would arise a question: why engage a poetic image of the Pootham created by the Savarnnas? Why not simply dismiss it as "the exaggerated creations of a morbid and hostile imagination"? (Oppert 88) No! This is, on the contrary, the perfect artifact formed by the sedimentation of history. Or, in other words, in the Pootham image of the Savarnna fantasy one can, if you pay close attention, decipher

the sedimentation of a host of histories. It is also an artifact that must be understood in the sense in which Fanon placed 'black soul' as an artefact ("What is called the black soul is white man's artefact.") (Fanon XV), where blackness is "overdetermined from without" (Fanon 116). That is to say, in the Pootham image created by the Savarnnas and circulated among themselves, a vivid picture of the mind that is engaged in the process of overdetermining the other is discernable.

What is thrilling is that the condensation of history and the projection of self-legitimizing fantasies onto the other is achieved through the creation of one of the finest poems written in the Malayalam language, a poem that is on par with the best in world literature. In the *Poothapattu* we have a poet fully immersed in the Sangham poetic devices and techniques, totally avoiding the favorite forte of most Malayalee poets, the Sanskritized Malayalam. The events in the poem take place in the three Thinais, the Kurinji Thinai (mountain), the Marutham Thinai (the cultivable land), and the Palai Thinai (which is conceptually more like a desert, an arid place, but in the geographic context of South India it could be both the Kurinji Thinai and Marutham Thinai during the summer when everything dries up (Anjumoorthi 42), with the rhythm and music of the poem, undergoes immediate change as the setting changes from one Thinai to the other. The poet encapsulates a journey quite akin to the one Kannaki had undertaken, from the east to the west, much like Illanko Adikal did when he wrote *Chilappathikaram*. There is also a remarkable similarity between the poetic vision of both Idasseri Govindan Nair and the poet of *Chilappathikaram*. Both of them wrote their work from the Neithal Thinai (the low land full of water bodies), looking up eastwards from the shores of the Arabian Sea: while Illanko Adikal did it from a few miles north of Kodungalloor, Idasseri Govindan Nair did it from Ponnani, both places, surprisingly, share another similarity as the foci of Muslim enlightenment in Kerala!

The simplicity we mentioned becomes very problematic the moment we pay closer attention to the structure of the poem. The poem unfolds in the form of a conversation between an elderly woman and the young kids in a Savarnna family, the latter having just finished their evening prayer and is awaiting dinner, where in the very beginning itself, it is stated that the narrator is going to tell them a folk tale about the Pootham. In other words, for the narrator, it is a myth about the Pootham; the contemporary popular explication of the poem as the victory of motherhood is absent in the narrator's scheme of things. The narrator's story evolves through distinct stages. First, a description of the Pootham, a scene quite familiar to the audience in question, is given. The body presented in the description is not an ordinary body, it is an embellished body, a larger-than-life image of a body that demands a look from its audience, a look verging on awe and fear. Alas! Before the over-embellished body makes its presence visible to the audience, they have already envisaged it through the sound its walking creates: the cacophony ("kalambalukal") of the drum (thudi) and the brass anklets has already made it clear to the Savarnna audience that the body approaching them is not an ordinary body but a body to be worshipped, or a body that has become a deity. The people immersed in the history of the caste praxis in Kerala, at this point, can discern two things already: (1) the bare body hiding under the spectacle

of bright red and white, of garland, and of the decorated crown, is the body of an untouchable and unseeable. The drum-beat has already announced his caste status: he is a Pariah. But even though he is a Pariah, his body whose movement is accompanied by the sound of drums cannot be treated merely as the body of an unseeable thing as they are wont of doing because the moment the drum-beat is mixed with the cacophony of the anklets, it heralds divinity: he must be worshipped, through the cacophony of the drum and anklets and the spectacle of an embellished body, the unseeable body of the Pariah has transformed into a seeable divine, the polluted become the sacred, the temporal the infinite. (2) The sound of the anklet heralding female divinity does not need much explication. It takes us to the heart of the Kottavai-Kannaki myth, the journey of the Goddess of chastity from Madurai to Kodungallur with an anklet, and her merging with Kottavai, the already worshipped Goddess of war, the Goddess representing the Palai Thinai, carrying the weapon, is a metaphoric capture of the emergence of a society, which had struck a balance between the differing pulls of expansion and domesticity. But, in the Pootham, the sickle is remarkably missing! In other words, in the Pootham there is something of Kottavai-Kannaki that remains but at the same time, something of the same Kottavai-Kannaki is missing! How do we account for this curious presence/absence? This is the moment at which one is forced to engage the question: Is the word Pootham a colloquial variant of the Brahminic word Bauddham, by which the Brahminic logic has essentialized the philosophy of Buddhism in some eternal truth statements? Or in other words, in the Pootham do we encounter a philosophic/historic moment in the non-Brahminic indigenous population of Kerala, who under the influence of Buddhist non-violence decided to lay down their arms, just as the emperor Asoka did after he turned to Buddhism? After all, the sickle is not just a tool of the anthropologist to reap insights from our agricultural past but a metaphor for bloodletting, which it is plainly in Kottavai. I don't want to dwell on the answer to the rhetorical question just asked. Instead, I will just point out a remarkable interjection that appears between the auditory and the ocular aspects of the Pootham. Immediately after the sounds of the approaching Pootham are heard and just before the narrator describes the visual aspects of the Pootham, the narrator exclaims: ayyayya! The interjection Ayya is repeated twice!

> Who is this Ayyan, Ayyo?... Ayyan is none other than the Avalokiteswara Bodhisattva, who comes to your aid in all your great troubles. In an article titled "Thiyyar" written in Mithavadi in 1916, CV Kunjiraman pointed out that in Tamil the word ayyan means Buddha or Putharu. For more than thousand and six hundred years or, as the recent Pattanam excavation indicates, ever since the Buddhist missionaries of Asoka had reached South India, Kerala, and Sri Lanka in BC 3rd century and up to a period of AD 13th century, ayya was the abhayapadam and saranamantram that had got imprinted in the conscious/ unconscious sensorium and in the collective memory of the Bahujans. That is why it has become the natural interjection of kids, who have no formal training in the language. Not only in extreme danger but also in situations involving

excitement and happiness, we scream 'ayyo'. It is a relic of the language, which
has got solidified in the unconscious through thousands of years. (Shekhar,
Puthan Keralam: Kerala Samskarathinte Bauddha Adithara 07)

The second stage, as an answer to the question asked by the kids regarding the
whereabouts of the Pootham, recounts in detail the locus of the Pootham's caste and
the history of its transformations. The kids are told that "it spends its daytime in the
rocks (para-kettu) on the other slope of the hillock of the Pariah, sending wide-open
eyes outside through the tiny door." The strategy of demonization effected through the
lines is so perfect that the kids would invariably get the image of a treacherous creature,
waiting to pounce on its prey the moment the latter lands within the Pootham's field
of vision. But the obverse is the historical truth. In the wide-open eyes of the Pootham
is imprinted the unbearable anxiety of an unseeable life, whose movement during the
course of daytime was terribly restricted, forcing the Pariah to wander through the
fringes and wastelands of Savarnna society. Every violation of the caste embargo, of the
traveling restriction, would involve severe punishment, which could even culminate in
death. The demonization, which begins to terrorize the minds of the kids, effectively
hides another powerful historical insight bed rocked on the *para* and mountain on
which the Pariah resides. In his remarkably original work on Indian history titled *On
the Original Inhabitants of Bharatavarsa or India*, the German philologist Gustav
Oppert wrote more than a century ago about the Pariah community

> That their name, in spite of its usual derivation from para or parai, should
> rather be connected with the original Dravidian population, seems to me to
> admit of no question. The supposition that the Pariahs are the drummer-caste
> and have obtained their name from that instrument appears to rest on a weaker
> foundation. It is most probably an afterthought, the more easily explicable
> since the lower classes delighted in the noise of the drum, and the name of the
> drum-beating class was transferred to the instrument by which the Pariah made
> his presence known. The lute of the Candala (the candela-vallaki, candalika,
> candalika, kandoli, kandoli-vina) is similarly named after the Candala, and
> not the Candala after the lute. Moreover, the word para or parai is, except
> in Malayalam and Tamil, not found in the other Dravidian languages in the
> sense of drum and at the same time as the name of the Pariahs; for the Pariah
> is called Holeya in Kanarese in spite of para signifying a drum, and in Telugu
> he is known as Malavadu, which word originally signifies mountaineer. If the
> Pariahs were the caste of drummers, they would most probably be called so,
> wherever they are found in India.
>
> I regard the Pariah as the representative of the ancient Dravidian population,
> and as having been condemned to supply his name to the lowest layers of the
> society, as the ancient Sudras after their subjugation gave their name to the
> Sudra caste. It will be subsequently shown that the Candalas are among the

> Gaudians, what the Pariahs are among the Dravidians. This connection is even indicated by the name of the Candalas, which resembles those of the Kandaloi, Khands and Gounds.
>
> I think the word Pariah, the Paravari of the Maratha country, is intimately connected with the names of Paratas, Paradas, Paravar, Pardhis, Parheyas, Paharias, or Maler, Bars (Bhars), Brahuis, Mars (Mhars), &c, &c, and that it designates originally a mountaineer, from the Dravidian root para, preserved in the Malayalam para, in the Tamil par and parai, and the Telugu paru. (Oppert, Gustav. *On the Original Inhabitants of Bharatavarsa or India.*) (Oppert 32-33)

Only when things are understood from the vantage point provided by Gustav Oppert can we make explicit the logic behind another accusation leveled against the Pootham: namely, it milks the cows and drinks it while the shepherds who accompany the cows take a siesta under the shades of leaves. At first, this seems to be an exact replica of the contemporary battle between the beef-eating Dalits-bahujans and the Brahmized savarnnas who worship the cow as a holy animal. Before jumping into such easy generalizations, we must understand that the refusal to eat the meat of the cow was a practice that had existed among Dalit communities themselves. This accusation, thus, could be understood, as Marvin Harris does, by locating its potential emergence in the pre-Brahminic history of the indigenous populations, when the mountaineers came down from the rocks and settled down on the banks of the river, or, in other words, when Pariahs became Pulayas (owners of the land, where pula means, as opposed to jala (water), the land), both names indicating the geographic locations of the dwellers in the Sangham Thina fashion rather than carrying any Brahminical caste associations. For the settled-down people, the cow became an economic necessity for agricultural production. When the Brahmins appropriated this agricultural wisdom and made it a holy principle in absolute terms, the Pariah's beef-eating habit was posited as the root of their absolute otherness, thus hiding the very principle by which we can trace the influence of Buddhist thinking in the food habit of Pariah community. The meat of a dead cow is edible as far as Buddhist teaching is concerned, provided it is not intentionally killed for human consumption. What is denied in Buddhism is not the meat of the cow, but rather the meat of any animal killed specifically for human consumption. If the death of the animal is natural, that is, unintentional, unmediated by human agency, then the meat is consumable.

From here onwards the demonization gets intensified. Now the treacherous and violent past of the Pootham is readily recalled. She was once a seductress and a goddess who accepted the sacrificial offering, including human sacrifice. Initially, we see her as a girl who has just attained puberty, whose presence in fertility rites has been very well recorded by anthropologists. This is adduced as a logical explanation for an event that had already taken place: her role as the killer of the sacrificial victim and as the Goddess who consumed the offering. The killer and the Goddess merged into one. Making an uncanny observation, Rene Girard, the French philosopher, writes:

> In fact, there is nothing incomprehensible about the viewpoint that sees
> menstrual blood as a physical representation of sexual violence. We ought,
> however, to go further: to inquire whether this process of symbolization does
> not respond to some half-suppressed desire to place the blame for all forms of
> violence on women. By means of this taboo a transfer of violence has been
> effected and a monopoly established that is clearly detrimental to the female
> sex. (Girard 39)

In other words, she bleeds, and the shedding of blood is always already associated with
death. The blood, the letting of which causes death, is, thus, impure, and the blood she
lets every month is impure. Hence, she is the primordial blood letter, the primordial
cause of death. The mother Goddess Kottaiva, the earliest of the Dravidian goddesses,
mingles the sexual and the sacrificial in its most violent aspect.

In the context of Kerala, the transfer of violence onto the female body had an
additional role to play. It was not just a transfer of violence to a female body of violence,
as it happened elsewhere, but also a transfer of violence from one set of people to
the other, from Brahminized people to the indigenous population of the Pariahs and
Pulayas and other untouchable castes, which very subtly hid the extreme form of
violence typical of patriarchal Brahminism. What got transferred (and disfigured) onto
the female Dalit body is the violence of the great sacrifice, the Maha Bali, enacted by
Vishnu's incarnation, the Vamana, the short-statured Brahmin. In other words, in the
Onam myth, we see the violent manipulation of the Brahmin class who grabbed the
entire land belonging to the toiling mass and made them unseeable in their own land.
As compensation for pushing him down to the nether world, of making him invisible
in a world made and cultivated by his people, he is given a blessing by Vishnu/Vamana
that Bali will be allowed to visit his land once a year. Unlike the Pootham, whose past
human sacrifice evokes fear, the Maha Bali, the great sacrifice by the Brahmin male
evokes no fear at all! No one even registers the fact that it was a sacrifice, a *bali*! This
is the myth, which has culminated in the celebratory ritual purification of Onam, the
tricking of violence "into spending itself on victims whose death will provoke no
response."

We must also mention another Brahminical human sacrifice that transfers the
impurity of blood onto the woman and Dalit body at one stroke. The myth of Mari
Amma (the transformed mother) is equivocal about how Parasurama, the patriarchal
son par excellence, has achieved these dual aspects of the transfer of violence. When
demanded by his father, Parasurama killed his mother with clinical perfection, in great
style: he axed her head. But in the process, he killed an untouchable woman as well!

> According to a version of the tale, Renuka fled to the locale of a lower-caste
> community, hoping that her Brahmin son would not consent to follow her and
> execute her due to his high caste. However, the obedient Parashurama cast aside
> his discomfort and swung his axe, beheading both his mother and a lower-caste
> woman who had risen to obstruct his matricide. When Parashurama asked his

boon of restoring his mother, Jamadagni offered him a magical pot of water that had to be sprinkled upon the head attached to the body of his mother. In his excitement, Parashurama accidentally fused the head of the lower-caste woman he had slain with the body of his mother, which both his father and he had to accept. The head of the high-caste Renuka was left behind in the community, retained as a shrine for the veneration of Renuka-Yellamma. (Wikipedia. "Renuka")

Both these instances of patriarchal violence born out of an encounter between the original Dravidian population and the migrant people are subtly hidden. Instead, the myth of the impure woman/lower caste blood is projected as the absolute vice, a vice that existed before Brahminic violence, an impurity, unless trapped in the holy structure of a ritual, will generate unending cycles of retributive violence. Thus, she becomes the seductress, who snatches away those youngsters who travel through her way having lost their way (more literally, people who do not care about time and social status) and kills them atop the palm tree that resembles a high scraper with seven stories. Even though it is the upper caste men, defying the caste interdictions, who venture into the way of the Pootham and are thus made outcastes and proclaimed dead by their own people, she is blamed for having sucked out the last drop of blood from their vital bodies. She is the one who does the offering and receives it.

The subtle evoking of the figure of the betel-chewing Yakshi (the Thamboola Yakshi) in the image of Pootham unravels the Jaina interim period of Kerala that occupies between Buddhism and Brahminism. It is an accepted fact that all the Buddhist centers of learning in Kerala were not directly snatched from the ancient Dalit population and immediately, at a stroke as it were, converted to Brahminic temples. Rather, the process was slow and structural, stretching over centuries and leaving a traceable pattern. Before the full takeover of the learning centers and their conversion to Brahminic temples, there was an interim Jaina transformation period in the history of most of the present-day temples, by which the iconography and belief system of the erstwhile Dalit-bahujans were slowly distorted, fragmented, and erased beyond recognition. The many myths and stories of the nocturnal Yakshis doing rounds even now capture the fundamental conflicts: the Yakshi invariably tries to lure away a Brahmin (mostly a Brahmin youth), to whose assistance come Brahminic texts/hymns. When the troubles created by the Yakshi reach an unbearable proportion, she is nailed, like the crucified Christ, on a Pala tree, putting an end to all her seductive charms and moves (Haridas 191-99). At first, this would seem very symbolic of a human sacrifice, where, as Rene Girard observes, "the function of sacrifice is to quell violence within the community and to prevent conflicts from erupting" (Girard 15), the conflict being the incommensurability between the surviving Buddhism and emerging Brahminism. Thus, Yakshi being "either outside or on the fringes of society" (13) becomes the proper material for resolving the conflict. But why would she be invariably nailed onto a Pala tree? Why not other trees? Why not other methods of torture and killing? With

the question, we arrive at the root of the Pala tree problem: Pala is not just a tree, it is, in Sangham literature, the tree representing the Palai Thina, the arid, uninhabitable land far away from the cultivable land! In the arrest of Yakshi on a Pala tree, in other reads, one reads painfully the history of the driving away of an entire population from their cultivable land to an arid, uninhabitable space on the fringes of civilization, forcing brutally on them, sickness, malnutrition, and worst of all illiteracy.

Like the Greek tragedies of the classical past, the poem *Poothapattu* is also structured on the sacrificial myth, which is not yet perceivable at the narrative level. The moment the frightened kids ask the ethical question "Why do we give such an 'asat' Pootham rice and mundu?", we begin to perceive the reason behind the ritualistic appearance of the Pootham in the Savarnna world. Grandmother immediately tells them that not giving rice and mundu is an act of papam, because the evil things narrated by her were done by the Pootham in the past. These days the Pootham is always sad.

At this moment, all of a sudden, we are immediately at a heightened awareness of the philosophy of Buddhism. We already know that in opposition to the sat-chit-ananda triad of the Upanishadic essentialism, Buddhism was concerned with a life-world centered around anicca (impermanence), anatta (non-soul), and dukkha (sorrow), a world around nothing, sunya. The Pootham could never be the ever constant sat, the atman, of the Brahminic thought. No wonder, the kids identified the Pootham as such, as asat, in its blank immediacy, as nothing, as lacking an essential mode of being (Omvedt 59).

In other words, the Pootham's discarding of its violent past of bloody sacrifice could be attributed to the message of non-violence spread by Buddhist monks. Rather, the poem appears to engage in a philosophical operation that aims at the sat, the essence of the Pootham. The next stage of the poem is precisely that. In the next stage, we temporarily leave the para, the rocks, and enter the fertile Valluvanadan region around the aaru (river), probably Bharatha puzha. We are in a different Thinai. A child is born in the bungalow situated on the bank of the river. The intensity of the mother-child relationship, its infinite joy, is captured in poetry that is captivating. But once the child turns seven, there appears a separation: the reality principle, as in Freud, takes over the pleasure principle. The child desires to go to pallikkoodam (learning centre), the child wants to become a man and take over his father's duty. From here we gather that the child wears kuduma (knitted hair worn by Brahmins). On his way to pallikkoodam (learning centre), the child first traverses the long stretch of paddy field, carrying the ezhuthani (stylus) and ola (papyrus). Once he leaves behind the field, his travel up to that point anxiously watched by his mother, he enters a new landscape, the two lands separated by the presence of a huge arrayal tree, the peepal tree under which the Buddha is said to have attained the Enlightenment. Here the mother completely loses sight of her child. Suddenly we realize that the land just entered by the child is the same land that is surveyed by the Pootham from its rocky abode all through the day.

On seeing the child commuting, the journey of which is depicted through the sheer musicality of the non-Sanskritized Malayalam, the Pootham is enthralled.

Something inside the Pootham is awakened. But the next line gives us a hint that it is the mother inside her that is awakened! The breasts are alive (like, probably, the breast of a lactating mother when she sees her kid). She turns into a girl-child and stands before the child with the kuduma, enticing him not to go to the pallikkoodam with the ezhuthani and ola. Rather, she offers, she will teach him the scripts, by teaching him to write letters on tender mango leaves using the bud of jasmine as the pen. Initially, he refuses her offer, citing the potential angry reaction of his male teacher who is awaiting him but then succumbs to her lovely enticements. He throws away the ezhuthani (stylus), which is iron, along with the ola (papyrus). Immediately after he loses his grip over the iron, she takes him away.

At the awaited hour, the child does not turn up at home. Mother gets panicky and goes in search of the child, her anxiety partaken by the fish in the river (who become standstill), the newly-plowed soil, in the totally desolate field, sending a heave of sigh, and the owls who have just come out of their diurnal furrows in tree trunks, asking the reason for her fright. While making floral garlands with the kid under a poomaram (Gul Mohar tree), the Pootham overheard the desperate sighs of the mother but did not give a damn about it. But the troubles would not end there! Now the Pootham tries to frighten her away by taking different forms varying from a whirlwind, rain, and forest fire, to tiger and leopard. The mother would still not yield. Now the strategy changes to temptation: the Pootham opens the rock which acts as the lid on the crest of the mountain, showing the richness of uncountable gold and diamonds lying underground. Not even glancing once at the treasure, she plucks her eyes out, and like the red lotus of dawn (the sun), she places them before the Pootham, saying that her child is for her more important than her eye-sight. Unmoved still, the Pootham finds a new opportunity. The mother is blind! Making the jungle flame its magic wand, the Pootham chants a mantra, forms an exact replica of the child and gives it to the blind mother. As the mother, infinitely joyous, touches the crown and hugs the replica, the mother, even with her blindness, realizes that she has been duped by the Pootham. Reaching the limit of her patience, she raises her hand to curse the Pootham! The Pootham is down on the ground, frightened, giving back the mother her child and sight. The mother has traveled, as in the Upanishadic wisdom, from darkness to light:

> Before the eyes that the mother opens
>
> There shines forth the bright moon from Being. (Nair)

Thus, the mother has her child! But what about the Pootham? Poor creature. Infinite sorrow engulfs it, and as the mother and child are about to return, the Pootham kisses the forehead of the child, weeping loudly and uncontrollably. On seeing this, smiling and with a tender heart, the mother allows the Pootham to visit their household and see the kid once a year, just after the harvest in the month of Makara is over, like the blessing Maha Bali got. The Pootham agrees. But wait! It is a tragedy: the Pootham has forgotten to ask where their house is located. The mother did not reveal it either. Maybe she just forgot it. Or she was afraid that if the Pootham saw her kid again, it

would take away her child once more. Who knows! Exclaims the poet. Now, every year after harvest, the poor creature visits every house asking the refrain: which is that household where the little one was born? Laughing at its desperate gesture and inviting it to their house on the pretext that it is the little one's house, they make it dance. In the loud beat of its drum, its heartbeat goes unheard.

For the trained eye, the conflict between the mother and the Pootham encapsulates Ambedkar's famous enunciation about Indian history: "The history of India is a history of mortal conflict between Buddhism and Brahmanism" (Dr. B.R. Ambedkar. Revolution and Counter Revolution in Ancient India. 267) The Pootham's insistence to throw away the stylus made of iron and the papyrus, and her enticements to use tender leaves and the bud of jasmine give us the first clue about the conflict between a philosophy oriented towards producing sanatan truths (Hinduism) and the Buddhist philosophy oriented towards the dependent co-origination (*paṭiccasamuppāda*). Unlike the marks on the papyrus, which could be, surpassing the immediate, the here and now, potential lies unto infinity, the scripts on the tender leaves would not outlast the day on which it is written. In other words, to use Marshal McLuhan in a reductionist way, the medium is the message: the tender mango leaves, by its very appearance and tenderness and in contrast to the papyrus, inscribes a philosophy that proclaims that there is no permanence, fixity, or stability to the things around. The metaphor of the stylus does not stop at this epistemological level. The assertion by the poet that the stylus is iron emphatically proclaims its metamorphosis in situations of "mortal conflicts" mentioned by Ambedkar as the defining feature of Indian history: as weapon. The stylus can not only mark history but, as iron, also can remove people from history, by chopping their head off. Or phrased differently, what is at stake is the conflict between violence and non-violence. To the young kid, to the to-be-initiated into the philosophy of violence, the Pootham's advice is categorical: throw away your weapon; that is not the way!

But it is not the iron that posits the greatest difficulty to the reader but gold. The gold concealed by the Pootham can, as we did a moment ago, easily be explained away as the material richness and diversity of the earth, for which the mother turns a blind eye. But if we ask: 'is that all, does the metaphor explain everything, does the concealed gold, with its brightness, conceal something, like the letter in Alan Poe's *Purloined Letter* did, concealing its own existence in the open?' In other words, can we maintain that apart from being a metaphor for the material richness of nature, gold stands for itself as plain gold, as the most cherished object of international trade? This is an important question. The moment we ask if the forerunners of the Dalit-bahujan population of Kerala had engaged in international trade since the 10th century BC, even the most celebrated official historians of Kerala will turn a blind eye to the question, just as the mother did! Their answer would be: yes, Kerala had robust trade relations with West Asia, the Mediterranean, Africa, and China, but they would never say who they were! The strategy is similar to the one by which the narrator introduced the Pootham to the kids. The narrator would not directly state that the Pootham is a

Pariah, rather she would convolutedly put it that the Pootham comes from the hillock of Pariah, creating an image that Pootham is a deadly creature concealed among rocks.

Ever since the details of the Pattanam excavation emerged, Dalit Bandu N.K. Jose, the unorthodox and one of the most insightful of historians, has finetuned and repeatedly hammered home the hard-hitting question he had been asking right from the 1990s onwards:

> In old Tamil pepper is known as curry, and plantation as padappai. In many places in Sangham poetry, there are references to curry-padappai; pepper plantations. Scholars who have studied Sangham literature maintain that Sangham poetry was written during the first few centuries of AD. From foreign sources, it is evident that even before that period pepper had been exported from here. Hence one can conjecture that even before the Sangham period, the people here had started agriculture of various spices like pepper. Who were those people who did it?... At that point in history, there were people in Kerala who had the power and courage to bargain with foreign traders and sell the spices that had been reaped from the mountains and brought to distant ports in the Arabian sea. As for the price of the spices, they collected gold coins from them. Pliny complained that though the Romans tried to pay the price in silver or other coins, Malayalees did not accept it. (Bandu 14)

Official historians may keep a safe distance from the question asked by Dalit Bandu N.K. Jose, but the experience of the Pulaya chieftain Ayyan Chirukandan in the 13th century, perhaps that original blood-shedding event that left a strong impression on the mind of the Dalit population as to produce the myth of Maha Bali, is quite clear about the story of gold. There may be many accounts as to how Ayyan Chirukandan was killed: but the motive was always the same, jealousy, and it had to do with gold that Ayyan possessed (Meloth).

In her search for the most intimate of her being, the mother of the Brahminic world (but also could be the erstwhile mother of the Pariah world, as the Renuka-Yellamma myth or the Pariahi-Vararuchi myth, or the evidence of the mitochondrial DNA studies suggest), encounters the full force of a destructive nature all around her, from the whirlwind to the tiger, from the natural to the animal, which is a typical experience of a society expanding through difficult terrains and forests, during summer and rainy seasons. But the terrifying phenomenon of nature has no longer the power to stupefy her as to produce what the German philosopher Hermann Usener has famously called "the momentary deities", which as the philosopher Ernest Cassirer has observed, "do not personify any force of nature, nor do they represent some special aspect of human life; no recurrent trait or value is retained in them and transformed into a mythico-religious image; it is something purely instantaneous, a fleeting, emerging, and vanishing mental content" (Cassirer 17-18). She has left behind that stage to engage in a neti, neti, neti (not this) kind of logical operation, to pierce into something beyond

the immediate, into the unity behind all the diversity. It is precisely at this point the material richness of matter, of the here and now, of prakriti, of the unconscious, concealing behind every conscious metaphysical swerving away typical of Vedanta philosophy is made bare by the Pootham, by showing the material wealth it possesses.

To the unconvinced mother, the Pootham, repeating what the Pottan Theyyam did in the North Malabar, made a mocking gesture that directly pierces through the hypocrisy of the simultaneous worship of the ideal and idol! Pottan Pulayan (the idiotic male Pulaya) asked Adi Sankara the question: Is it not the same blood that rushes through your vein and mine? Then why engage in discrimination? The Potti Pariahi (the idiotic female Pariah) goes a step further and shows the *Isavasyopanishad*: "That is Whole, this is Whole" (Purnamadah Purnamidam). Why bother? And laughs at the mother. Like a teacher whose ignorance is caught red-handed by the students, unable to answer the question, the mother plunges into that final tactic most reverent saints were fond of: cursing the other! Saying, "This is different." And then run away with what you have got! No more encounters!

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Endnote

Note: All translations from Malayalam are by the author of this article.

मेरी क़लम - मेरे अल्फ़ाज़

Gaurav J. Pathania[*]

जूठन खा रहे थे जब तक, तो सब चुप थे, सब ठीक था
"जूठन"[1] लिख दिया तो बवाल हो गया
वो कहते हैं अक्सर मुझसे
कि ये तुमने साहित्य का क्या मज़ाक बना रखा है
तुम साहित्य का मतलब बिगाड़ रहे हो
बताओ! साहित्य भी कभी दलित होता है?
मैं चुटकी लेता हूँ ...
कि यार! जब इस देश में क़ुदरत की श्रेष्ठतम रचना
'मनुष्य' जब नीच, शुद्र, अछूत, मलेच्छ, और दलित हो सकता है
तो ये साहित्य कौन बड़ी बात है?

असल में तुम्हारे दरवाजे पे तो कबसे उजियारा है सत्ता का, साहित्य का,
मेरे पास तो एक खौफनाक, ठिठुरती लम्बी काली रात है
..... पर अब मुझे फक्र है, नाज़ है
क्योंकि अब मेरे पास कलम है, अल्फ़ाज़ हैं।
और तुम्हे डर है, क्योंकि ..
... ए.सी. कमरों में मखमली बिस्तर पे बैठकर कॉफ़ी पीते हुए
गरीबी, लाचारी और शोषण का जो सौंदर्यात्मक वर्णन तुमने किया है
वो मेरे जीवन की एक छोटी सी दास्ताँ के सामने फीका दिखाई पड़ता है
सारी पवित्रता और धार्मिकता को अपने भीतर समा लेने वाली
जिस गाए का दूध पीकर तुम्हारी बनभौंटी ने सिर्फ कर्मकांड रचे हैं
मरने के बाद तुम्हारी उसी गाय को
चाचा की छुरी से भी तेज गिद्धों की चोंच से बचाते हुए
उसी के मांस की सड़ांध में हमारे 'मुर्दहिया' ने न जाने कितने 'तुलसी'[2] और 'वाल्मीकि' उपजे हैं।

... अब तुम्हे डर है,
क्योंकि मेरी कलम इतिहास के पन्नो को चीरती हुई
तुम्हारे सारे कारनामों को इंसानियत के तराज़ू में तौलती है
मेरे अल्फाजों में लय है, धार है, तीखापन है एकलव्य के तीरों की तरह
मेरी क़लम तुम्हारी थोथी गरुता के सारे राज़ खोलती है
और तुम अब बौखलाकर कहते हो, कि मेरी कलम बहुत बोलती है।।

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[1] ओमप्रकाश वाल्मीकि की लिखी "जूठन" हिंदी दलित साहित्य की पहली आत्मकथा है जिसने नब्बे के दशक में साहित्यिक जगत में एक नया विमर्श शुरू किया था।
[2] तुलसी (प्रोफेसर तुलसी राॅम जिनकी आत्मकथा "मुर्दहिया" है।") यहाँ तुलसी और वाल्मीकि उन दलित साहित्यकारों का प्रतीक है जिनकी लेखनी जाति प्रथा और उससे उपजी अमानवीयता को पूर्णतः नकारती है।

My Pen, My Words

All was right
And all was quiet
As long as we ate your leftovers.
But all hell broke loose
The moment we wrote "*Leftovers*".

They often say to me
That I have degraded literature
To a travesty, a mockery
"Can literature ever be Dalit?"
I snapped back:
In this country, if nature's most beautiful creations, human beings
Can be "lower", "outcaste, "shudra" and "untouchable"
Then why the big fuss about literature?

The truth is, the golden hour of literature
Has been shining in your courtyard for centuries
While my lot is a fearful, shivering, long, dark night.
But now
I am proud, I am happy
For now I have a pen and I have words.
And you
Seated in your plush chair
In your air-conditioned room
Sipping your coffee
Are afraid
Because the poverty, helplessness, and exploitation
That you transformed into beautiful prose
Falls flat in front of even a small incident from my life.

You, having drunk the milk of the cow
That you say manifests purity
Have produced only meaningless rituals in your conceit
Once dead, the same cow becomes untouchable for you
We bring it to our graveyard (*Murdahiya*[3])
Saving it from the vultures' claws
That are sharper than a knife
In its stench of rotten meat

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[3]"*Murdahiya*," the autobiography of Professor Tulsi Ram, was hailed as a masterpiece of Dalit literature when it was published in 2010.

Our *Murdahiya*, the home of animal carcasses
Have sprouted innumerable *Tulsis* and *Valmikis*[4].

Now, you fear that
My pen
Tearing through the pages of your history
Will weigh your deeds on the scales of humanity.
My words have rhythm, edge and the sharpness
Of Eklavya's[5] arrows

My pen rips the veil of sanctity
And rejects your vacuous teaching
And now, you say, furiously
That my pen talks far too much!

हिंदी की पहली दलित आत्मकथा "जूठन" से प्रेरित यह कविता आदरणीय ओम प्रकाश वाल्मीकि जी को श्रद्धांजलि है। ये कविता मूल रूप से 2009 में लिखी गई और इसे जवाहरलाल नेहरू विश्वविद्यालय के कार्यक्रम के दौरान सुनाया गया था जिसकी अध्यक्षता श्री वाल्मीकि जी कर रहे थे। कविता का दूसरा भाग 2011 में जोड़ा गया जो कि प्रोफेसर तुलसी राम की दलित आत्मकथा "मुर्दहिया" से प्रेरित है।

This poem is a tribute to the esteemed Om Prakash Valmiki, the author of the first Dalit autobiography in Hindi, "*Joothan*" (Leftovers), published in 1997. Originally penned in 2009, it was recited during an event presided over by Mr. Valmiki. In 2011, it underwent revision to incorporate "*Murdahiya*," another Dalit autobiography authored by Professor Tulsi Ram.

The poem is originally written in Hindi. The English translation is by **Richa Dube** (a Seattle based writer); **Anurag** (popularly known for his podcast *Anurag Minus Verma*); and **Annika Taneja** (a Delhi-based editor and translator).

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[4]Here *Tulsi and Valmiki* symbolize Dalit writers whose literary works unequivocally denounce the caste system and the inhumanity it fosters.

[5]Eklavya (a character in Hindu epic, *The Mahabharata*) was said to be the greatest archer in the world. Rejected as a student by Dronacharya (revered as one of the greatest gurus in Hindu mythology), the guru to the Pandava royal princes because Eklavya was an Adivasi (tribal) and considered outcaste, Eklavya learned archery through self-study by practicing in front of a clay idol of Dronacharya. After he came to the attention of the Pandavas and Dronacharya through his skill, Dronacharya, who had promised the Pandava prince, Arjuna, that he would make him the greatest archer in the world, demanded Eklavya's right thumb as his *guru-dakshina*, the traditional payment to a teacher by a student. Eklavya cut off his thumb to oblige his guru. This act made the royal prince Arjuna the greatest archer in Indian mythology.
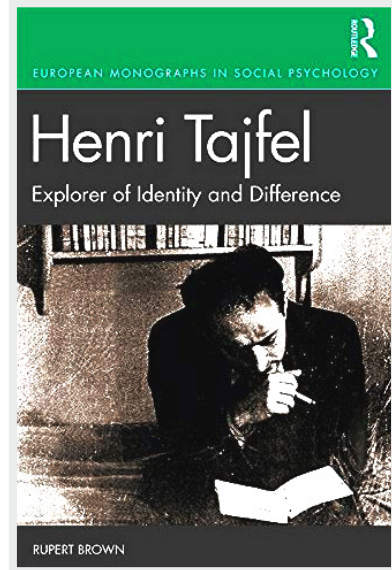
'Henri Tajfel: Explorer of Identity and Difference'

Author: *Rupert Brown*
Publisher: *Routledge*
Year: *2019*
Reviewer: *Maria Zafar*[1]

Abstract

The year 2019 marked the birth centenary of Henri Tajfel, a social psychologist known most widely for the social identity theory, which he developed with his doctoral student John Turner. Over the years, social identity theory has found relevance in many academic fields beyond social psychology. Coupled with this academic legacy are recently surfaced claims of sexual harassment, particularly during Tajfel's tenure at the University of Bristol. The 100th anniversary provided an opportunity to visit the man beyond his academic contributions and take stock of where his intellectual legacy stands today. In *Henri Tajfel: Explorer of Identity and Difference*, Rupert Brown, Emeritus Professor of Social Psychology at the University of Sussex and one of Tajfel's early PhD students, brings to life not only the scientist but the man himself, warts and all. From Tajfel's birth and early life in an environment ripe with interethnic conflicts to his later intellectual achievements (possibly) guided by his own experiences, Brown vividly portrays Tajfel's life. He traces Tajfel's experiences of anti-Semitism and war, post-war work educating and rehabilitating Jewish children and displaced people, unconventional academic journey, and the nagging sense of being an outsider that clung to him for most of his life. Focusing on Tajfel's intellectual contributions, Brown details their emergence and impact on then-dominant social psychology approaches. An

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engaging and insightful read, the book will interest social scientists engaged in intergroup relations research and help them think critically and creatively about their work. To social psychologists, the book also serves as a reminder to do social psychology that truly is social.

Keywords

Henri Tajfel, social psychology, social identity theory, intergroup relations

Henri Tajfel at 100: Revisiting the Life and Impact

Social issues like prejudice, inequality, exclusion, and oppression have long interested social scientists across disciplines. Indeed, any discipline by itself will fail to do justice to the vast complexity of such phenomena. Sociologists, historians, political scientists, economists and psychologists alike have used different lenses to contribute to our understanding of these issues. Social psychology, with its emphasis on the various contextual influences operating upon individuals, offers a unique vantage point for examining these issues: individual personalities and predispositions are considered important predictors of prejudice towards another group, but the variability in the expression of that prejudice is studied as contingent on many other situational and contextual factors.

A key framework in contemporary social psychological work on intergroup behaviours is the social identity approach. Comprising the social identity theory (Tajfel 1974; Tajfel & Turner 1979) and the self-categorization theory (Turner et al. 1987, 1994) (e.g., Reicher et al. 2010), the approach emerged out of the work initiated by Henri Tajfel and colleagues in the 1970s. Since its inception about 50 years ago, the social identity theory has significantly influenced many areas of social scientific research, including intergroup relations, prejudice, stereotyping, discrimination, and social change. Its central concepts such as *social identity* (contrasted with one's personal identity) have found resonance in fields beyond social psychology. Political scientists, business and management researchers, and health psychologists draw upon its core premises and find creative ways of expanding its relevance to different domains of the social world. These ideas have made Tajfel and the social identity theory popular among different academic disciplines.

With such a legacy, Henri Tajfel has been one of social psychology's most influential theorists. The year 2019 marked his birth centenary and provided an opportunity for a more in-depth look at the man beyond his academic contributions. In *Henri Tajfel: Explorer of Identity and Difference*, Rupert Brown, one of Tajfel's early PhD students and an acclaimed social psychologist in his own right, does just this: Brown paints a vivid portrayal of Tajfel's life, his triumphs and tribulations, successes and failures, strengths and limitations as an academic but most of all, as a human.

Published as part of the European Monographs in Social Psychology, the book can broadly be considered to have two sections. A longer, in-depth section (comprising

seven out of eight chapters) traces the life—personal and academic—of Henri Tajfel from birth to death. A shorter but equally well-researched section (the last chapter) critically evaluates two of Tajfel's contributions to social psychology: the European Association of Social Psychology (EASP), of which Tajfel was one of the founding members, and the Social Identity Theory (SIT), a theory aiming to explain intergroup behaviour. Adopting a chronological order for the former section and drawing upon a myriad of sources, Brown weaves a tale of hardships, creative endurance, intellectual rise, and untimely demise. He does so in a manner suitable to readers from different backgrounds: psychologists and non-psychologists alike can easily follow the book as Brown avoids jargon and, when necessary, goes to great lengths to explain technical concepts, phenomena, and often entire experiments. Those familiar with SIT, however, like Brown himself, may often find themselves pondering over the potential impact of these experiences on Tajfel's ultimate development of the SIT and its key concepts.

Tajfel was born a Jew in Poland in 1919. That was a time of political turmoil in the country and rising anti-Semitism there and elsewhere. World War II and its devastation were to follow soon after. Owing to a lack of official and personal documents, correspondence, and records from the time, Tajfel's experiences of these events would perhaps have been the most difficult to bring to life in a book. Brown, however, does an admirable job of piecing together Tajfel's experiences and thoughts in the early years of his life and during the war. Often, this is done by describing the general political climate of the time, experiences of Jews in general or of Tajfel's other family members, and extrapolating to how Tajfel himself might have lived and experienced, for example, any conflicts pertaining to his identities as a Jew and a Pole. His years spent as a prisoner of war in Germany, too, are mainly described drawing upon what we know about the workings of German prison camps in general. While a needed strategy for when little is known about the particulars of Tajfel's life, such descriptions sometimes feel impersonal and as background information. Wherever possible, however, these general descriptions are sprinkled with personal documents and photographs or anecdotes that give the story some personal touch.

This reliance on the general is no longer a concern in the later, post-war chapters, which focus primarily on Tajfel's various academic engagements: his pursuit of degrees, employment experiences, venture into academia, evolving research interests, and research outputs, among others. An important strength of these chapters is the accessibility to non-expert audiences. Brown explains in detail all psychological phenomena or concepts that Tajfel worked on, providing layperson explanations with real-world examples and detailed descriptions of the empirical studies conducted, thus catering to different kinds of audiences. More informatively, these research undertakings are juxtaposed with the research trends and debates of the time: we understand what dominant approaches to doing social psychology were back then and how Tajfel's work added to the field's advancement. At the same time, only little information about his personal (family) life is strewn in; few sentences about his relationship with his wife and sons find mention.

To cover the chapters in a little more detail, chapters 1 through 7 cover Tajfel's life from birth to death. They are differentiated by different 'transition points' in his life. They follow developments in his personal and academic life while highlighting his intellectual and scientific contributions to the field. The early chapters poignantly describe years spent in a context marred by interethnic conflicts and anti-Semitism and yet calls for assimilation in a nation that also treated its Jewish minority unkindly. Henri's five-year stay at a German stalag as a prisoner of war is a highlight of these early chapters. The shifting nature of identities (from a Polish Jew to a French Jew to a prisoner of war) is beautifully captured in the way Brown refers to Henri at certain points in the story: he starts with Heniek, which later becomes Henri, and during the war, merely "prisoner 14988". In these early years and those of the war, Brown also makes interesting attempts, albeit conjectures, at linking Henri's life experiences to his later work, such as the emphasis he placed on the categorization process or the decision to focus on stigmatized groups. For example, Henri's pervasive sense of being a 'foreigner' or an 'outsider', even after achieving significant academic success, is often highlighted, and its implications for his life's work are ruminated upon.

The book picks up pace with the chapters focusing on Henri's academic career—his stints at Durham, Oxford, Palo Alto, and Bristol, with fellowships and shorter visits to other places. Henri is painted as a visionary interested in a "radical new vision of psychology" that brought the field and its researchers out of their highly controlled labs and into people's everyday lives. Even in his initial work on perceptual overestimation, Henri was attuned to the implications the findings could have for the perception of groups. His propensity for ingenuity in research methodology, theory building, and rejecting reductionism in favour of studying people's environment is evident early in his career. With a later narrowing of interest to more applied or social action-based social psychology, Henri begins to foray into central social psychology areas like conformity, prejudice, and stereotypes. His academic engagements throughout his career portray an almost frenetic man: running to conferences, securing various grants, publishing numerous papers, and engaging in science communication.

A key strength of these chapters lies in the attention they pay to Henri's intellectual contributions before the widely known social identity theory. For example, his work on categorical accentuation is well discussed; Brown traces the path from Henri's early work on visual perception of physical objects to his later theorising on prejudice and stereotyping following the same principles. The *New Look* approach to perception understood perception as going beyond mere objective properties of the stimulus object. Rather, proponents of the approach considered equally important what the stimulus object is, who the perceiver is, and what the perceiver's expectations, social background, values and motivations are. Henri was intrigued by this new vision of psychological theorising—one that was more reflective and cognizant of the real world and that took psychological experiments and research questions out of the constraints of a laboratory setting. A consistent finding in visual perception was that people overestimate physical properties such as size and weight of valuable and culturally significant objects. In his work in this area, Henri proposed and empirically

demonstrated that people do not just overestimate physical properties but also accentuate differences at both ends of the weight/size continuum—that is, among the valued objects, not only are heavy (big) objects perceived as heavier (bigger) than they are, but light (small) objects are also perceived as lighter (smaller) than they are. The *range* of size (weight) estimates is wider in the condition with valued objects. Henri took these findings and theorising outside the lab to the external world and foraying into the areas of prejudice and stereotyping, examined how people make judgements about groups. Viewing categorization as a process that provides the basis for one's social identity and stereotyping as inevitably accompanying categorization, his early work provided emerging evidence for many influential findings, such as people's tendency to accentuate differences *between* groups while minimizing differences between individuals *within* a group.

At the same time, Brown does not soft-pedal Henri's limitations, providing an overall balanced and honest description of his subject. Without any whitewashing, we are made privy to Henri's neglect of his teaching and supervision duties, his proclivity for making unwanted advances towards female colleagues, and his bitter academic rivalries. We are presented with the story of a man at once ambitious and remarkable but not without shortcomings. Interestingly, the idea that Henri is widely credited for—the minimal group experiments—is revealed to have come from prior work of Jaap Rabbie following a similar paradigm and seeking to answer the same question (what are the minimal conditions under which ingroup and outgroup differentiation occurs?). Rabbie's work and findings ignited in Henri a curiosity about the effects of mere categorization. Devising multiple minimal experiments of his own, Henri demonstrated ingroup favouritism due to mere categorization as a robust phenomenon. More than the experimental design that only differed from Rabbie's in some respects, the interpretation of these findings reflected true ingenuity: ingroup favouritism was posited to arise out of reliance on one's social identity to differentiate oneself (and their group) from another in an intergroup situation (Billig & Tajfel 1973). This work marked one of the first allusions to the concept of social identity.

The allegations regarding sexual harassment of women students (see also Young & Hegarty 2019, 2020), in particular, have had implications for how Henri Tajfel's legacy is seen today (e.g., Brown 2020). In light of these claims, the European Association of Social Psychology, which Henri had helped establish and which used to give out the Henri Tajfel medal for lifetime achievement, announced their decision to rename the award (Keil 2019). Opposed by some and lauded by others, the decision generated much discussion in the academic community (for example, on academic Twitter (now called X) and via open letters to the EASP). As a culture, we are still far from resolving the debate about separating the art from the artist (recall the furore over J.K. Rowling's transphobic statements). In the case of Henri, thinking of his life and legacy in light of these allegations proves even more challenging as the man has been dead for decades, and the allegations have come out long after the fact. Due care needs to be taken in applying contemporary social norms to judge academic interactions in the 1960s

and 1970s. Brown makes a valiant attempt at giving due consideration to both the scientist's achievements and the man's failings; neither overshadows the other. He argues that Tajfel's failings do not diminish the value of his scientific contributions; it is still possible to engage with Tajfel as a scientist.

In the book's final chapter, Brown evaluates Henri's contributions to social psychology, including the social identity theory. Social identity theory has its origins in the minimal group experiments Henri had conducted. But it involved him going beyond minimal groups and thinking about how natural groups interact given the realities of power, status, and resources. Here, too, Brown does a laudable job, especially of tracing how the theory evolved between the two publications often cited for it (Tajfel 1974; Tajfel & Turner 1979) and how it has found applicability in originally unintended contexts and fields. Different approaches to the theory are explored and critically examined—SIT as a theory of intergroup conflicts or a theory of identity, for example. Its limitations, the questions it fails to answer, and conceptual and theoretical additions to/extensions of the theory also receive adequate attention. In contemporary social psychology, SIT, along with its 'cognitive extension', the Self-Categorization Theory (Turner et al. 1987, 1994), has evolved into more of an approach or meta-theory than a theory (e.g., Reicher et al. 2010). Some discussion on SCT, then, would have added to the last chapter.

Overall, the book is a praiseworthy and candid attempt at bringing Henri Tajfel to life. As has happened (entirely unintentionally) with this review, readers start by getting to know Tajfel and come out knowing Henri—a man as inspiring in his personal struggles as in his intellectual contributions. After World War II, Henri returned to France an orphan, "homeless, jobless, and stateless" (p. 44). He spent the early years of his career working different jobs and balancing his studies, work and family. His unconventional (yet ultimately successful) academic journey—one marked by hurdles both personal and political—is testimony to his grit and resolve. Perhaps most striking is the man's response to one of the most harrowing experiences one can imagine— Henri survived the Holocaust not with any bitterness or hatred but with a determination to *understand* such atrocities. In one of his correspondences referred to in the book, Henri notes: "… all or nearly all of my academic work has been based on a simple question: how could people have done that to other people?" (p. 195). In many such ways, Brown weaves a tale of Henri's fortitude and determination. Appreciating these struggles and achievements in no way implies condoning Henri's behaviour towards women. On the contrary, it is rather indicative of people's remarkable ability to see and resist oppression in some cases while ironically playing into the same power dynamics in others.

The book is also a significant contribution in terms of its usefulness to intergroup relations researchers. Regardless of their discipline, such researchers may find Henri's ideas and academic contributions of use to their work. One critical idea captured in the book is Henri's emphasis on social change (e.g., Tajfel 1972) and his view of humankind as agentic and active as opposed to passive recipients of the fate of their group. Social identity theory addresses questions such as: Under what conditions do

disadvantaged groups resist their oppression? What are the various ways in which they do so? The theory, thus, also functions (partially) as a theory of power and provides an avenue for exploring collective action for social change among minority group members. Furthermore, Henri was a keen advocate for interdisciplinarity in studying intergroup behaviour: he did not believe that psychology alone could explain prejudice, for example. Brown touches upon an unwillingness in Henri to draw boundaries between disciplines. In today's time of specializations in niche disciplines, often at the cost of even cursory knowledge of related ones, it will perhaps not be a bad thing to (sometimes) experience a "crisis of identity" like Henri and consider just how far psychology (or sociology or political science) alone will take us in understanding the social world.

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