

ABSTRACT

Caste has been a system of oppression, violence, and inequality for thousands of years. Last two centuries have witnessed the mounting challenges to caste inequities by many leaders, social movements, government, and civil society. Yet, caste continues to be a prominent system of oppression in Indian society. The nature and implications of this oppression have been extensively studied in social sciences, such as sociology, political science, and economics. However, caste whether defined as a system of power, ideology, belief, or identity has an irrefutable psychological existence. Yet, psychology as a discipline has not given enough attention to caste context. While much of the extant social scientific research has examined the victim experiences and perspectives to approach caste-based victimisation, this thesis goes further to approach caste-based victimisation through the perspectives of the historically advantaged groups. Building on a social psychological perspective, the thesis seeks to fill this gap and offer insights into the persistence of caste-based violence, discrimination, and other forms of injustices.

Using interview ($N=32$) and survey data ($N=677$) and employing range of quantitative (multivariate regression, indirect effect analysis, structural equation modelling) and qualitative analyses (thematic analysis, discursive-rhetorical analysis), this thesis showcases the belief systems, psychological processes, and attitudes critical to legitimating and reproducing caste-based asymmetries. The thesis also identifies the dynamic content and ideological processes underlying caste prejudice and its implications for caste relations. Overall, this thesis contributes to understanding of caste-based victimisation, legitimation and prejudice in the contemporary Indian society.