



# CREATIVE DYNAMICS OF CASTE INEQUALITY IN LIVING TRADITION: A CONCEPTUAL INQUIRY

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**Abstract.** The structure and functions of caste have been deeply rooted in Indian villages and urban societies. The discussions, on caste, have been a highly significant and contentious topic of academic inquiry for numerous years. The objective of this paper is to offer a theoretical and practical understanding of caste inequality in living tradition in India, emphasizing its dynamic character and the intricate challenges it poses in Indian society. In present-day India, there exists a dynamic interplay between traditional caste identities and the influences of globalization, urbanization and modernization. The present study employs the library research methodology. Utilizing library research is an essential tool for scholars seeking to have a deeper comprehension of a specific topic matter. The method presents a systematic and structured approach to gathering and analysing information. It assists academics in uncovering innovative paths for their inquiries or promoting new ideas or theories in their field. The present study finds that the creative dynamics of the caste system continues to exert significant social influence and impact the lives of individuals as well as affecting their opportunities for education, gender, identity, employment and political participation. Notwithstanding the implementation of legal frameworks aimed at eliminating caste-based discrimination, there are still prevailing social and economic inequalities that result in ongoing marginalization.

**Keywords:** caste, development, education, gender, policy.

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## 1. Introduction

The institution of caste has been instrumental in shaping the social, economic, and political fabric of the country for many centuries (Chakravarti, 2018; Deshpande, 2017; Dirks, 2001; Jodhka, 2016). It is a complex social construct deeply ingrained in the Indian subcontinent. The societal structure in question is a multifaceted arrangement that classifies persons into discrete stratified factions, referred to as castes, predicated on factors such as lineage, profession, and societal standing. The caste system, historically rooted in Hindu social and religious traditions and subsequently institutionalized through complex social and political processes, has profoundly shaped social relations, life chances, and identities in India (Dumont, 1980; Dirks, 2001). The caste system's inception can be traced back to ancient India, where the society was categorized into four primary varnas or broad social classes: the *Brahmins* (priests), *Kshatriyas* (warriors), *Vaishyas* (merchants), and *Shudras* (servants or labourers) (Bhagat, 2022). Furthermore, a section of people who are nowadays called Dalits<sup>1</sup>, a fifth social group, who are excluded from the varna system and assigned to carry out duties that were regarded as

<sup>1</sup> A person who belongs to the lowest class in the traditional Hindu social order and who, according to the traditional Hindu belief system, is capable of defiling a person who belongs to a higher caste through interaction with them.

unclean or defiling (Noronha, 2021). Over time, the inflexible system underwent creativeness into a complex and intricate network of numerous castes and sub-castes, each possessing distinct customs, rituals, and professions.

Throughout history, caste has been associated with concepts of purity and pollution, whereby individuals are allocated to particular castes based on their perceived level of purity or impurity (Dumont, 1980). The outcome of this phenomenon has led to the segregation of individuals based on their social status and the adoption of endogamous practices, which entail marrying within one's caste to uphold caste-based hierarchies and ensure purity. Chakravarti (2018) posits in *'Gendering caste: Through a feminist lens'* that the notion of regulating sexuality has emerged as a significant facet within caste-based hegemonic structures in Indian society. The creativeness of the caste system has exerted a significant impact not only on social interactions and matrimonial decisions but also on economic prospects, given that particular occupations have historically been linked to particular castes.

The ramifications of the caste system transcend beyond mere social stratification. The influence of caste on political representation has been significant, as political factions in India have acknowledged the importance of caste-oriented identities and mobilization for electoral advantages. The political landscape has been significantly influenced by the practice of caste-based politics, which has impacted the establishment of coalitions, the allocation of resources, and the power dynamics across multiple tiers of governance (Auerbach et al., 2021). In addition, despite the implementation of legal measures and affirmative action policies with the objective of eliminating caste-based discrimination and untouchability<sup>2</sup> practices, these injustices have continued to endure. It is noteworthy that the creativeness, comprehension and elucidation of caste have transformed over time. Social activists and Academics for social change have conducted thorough analyses of the caste system as a mechanism of subjugation, promoting the ideals of fairness and impartiality within society. There have been endeavours to contest and surpass caste-oriented affiliations, cultivate matrimonial alliances between different castes, and encourage educational and financial prospects for underprivileged groups.

The creative dynamics of caste remains a highly contested issue in modern times, garnering significant attention and discussion both domestically within India and internationally (Alam, 2025a). Despite the implementation of legal measures aimed at tackling discrimination and fostering social integration, the intricacies of caste dynamics and its impact on diverse facets of society endure (Perween & Alam, 2023). A comprehensive comprehension of the caste system necessitates an examination of its historical origins, its current manifestations in modern society, and the obstacles it presents to social advancement and unity. Therefore, library research is used applied for the studying the caste in everyday life. It employs a systematic, interdisciplinary approach to critically explore the creative dynamics of caste inequality in living tradition. By synthesizing diverse scholarly sources, it aims to construct a nuanced framework that deepens understanding of this complex interplay.

The theoretical models of Durkheim's structural functionalism, Conflict Theory, Intersectionality, and the Ambedkarite perspective collectively offer a robust analytical framework for

<sup>2</sup> <https://thediplotmat.com/2022/08/seven-decades-after-it-was-abolished-untouchability-continues-to-be-practiced-in-india/> retrieved on August 26, 2024.

this study. These models are applied to analyse various sections, including *Caste and General Perceptions*, where Durkheim's perspective can reveal how caste perceptions sustain social order; *Caste, Village, and Labour Force*, using Conflict Theory to examine power dynamics in rural labour structures; and *Caste and Gender*, with Intersectionality exploring how caste intersects with gender in shaping social roles. *Caste and Education* has been analysed to understand how educational inequalities are both products and perpetuators of caste stratification, while *Caste and Identity* draw on the Ambedkarite perspective to assess the role of caste in identity formation and resistance. *Caste and Stratification* explore the hierarchical nature of caste systems, and *Caste and Policy* assess how government policies impact caste structures.

## 2. Methodology

Library research is employed, a methodical process of systematically gathering, critically evaluating, and synthesizing information, from a diverse array of sources within academic libraries and digital repositories, aimed at comprehensively exploring a particular subject (Mann, 2015). The efficacy of this research approach hinges on adherence to foundational principles that ensure the investigation is both exhaustive and intellectually robust. In the context of examining the research process commences with a systematic inquiry, delineating key themes such as caste inequality, living traditions, and the intersection of creativity with social hierarchies. This approach necessitates an interdisciplinary exploration, drawing from fields such as sociology, anthropology, cultural studies, and history, to procure a wide-ranging spectrum of perspectives (Mann, 2015). The researcher critically evaluates the credibility, relevance, and scholarly merit of the sources, selectively incorporating only those that adhere to rigorous academic standards. The synthesis of this information enables the construction of a comprehensive and nuanced conceptual framework, elucidating the ways in which creative expressions are both shaped and shaped by caste dynamics within living traditions. The research also prioritizes contemporaneous and contextually relevant sources to reflect the most current scholarly debates and societal developments, recognizing that library research is an iterative process, often requiring refinement of search strategies to achieve a more precise and comprehensive collection of literature (Alam, 2023). By rigorously adhering to these principles, library research serves as a critical tool for developing a profound and well-substantiated understanding of the creative dynamics underpinning caste inequality within living traditions, contributing to the advancement of knowledge in this field.

## 3. Theoretical and practical perspectives to understand the concept of "Caste"

A thorough theoretical framework is necessary for the examination of caste, which encompasses various dimensions and their interactions in society. The subsequent theoretical frameworks furnish a basis for examining the concept of caste and comprehending its intricacies:

The sociological perspective of structural functionalism, which has its origins in the scholarship of Durkheim (2014), posits that caste is a social institution that performs distinct functions within the larger framework of society. This approach highlights the role of caste

divisions in shaping social organization, promoting stability, and facilitating the allocation of labour. The text delves into the functions and obligations linked to each caste, the interconnectedness among castes, and the mechanisms by which caste systems foster communal harmony and sustain social stability.

The Conflict Theory, which draws inspiration from the works of Marx and Engels (1967), scrutinizes the economic inequalities in generating social discord and disparity. The text sheds light on the power dynamics and exploitative nature that are intrinsic to indirectly to the caste system, revealing its correlation with economic inequalities. It centres on the conflicts that arise between the dominant and subordinate castes. The present framework aims to examine the creativeness and perpetuation of social stratification and the creation of socioeconomic disparities through caste divisions. This literature explores the analysis of the intersectionality between caste and other forms of inequality, such as religion, gender, and class. It examines how these interconnected factors shape the experiences of individuals from different castes.

Intersectionality is a conceptual framework that recognizes the presence of several social identities possessed by individuals and the interdependence of systems of discrimination. Feminist scholars, including Crenshaw (2013), the adoption of an intersectional approach in the study of caste recognizes the interconnections between caste and other facets of identity and power, including but not limited to gender, socioeconomic status, and religious affiliation. The study investigates the impact of caste-oriented bias on individuals, taking into account their intersecting identities, which results in distinct experiences and obstacles.

The Ambedkarite perspective, which derives its name from Ambedkar (2014; 2022), a renowned social reformer and champion of Dalit rights, offers a distinct framework for examining the caste system in India. This viewpoint prioritizes the encounters and challenges faced by socially disadvantaged castes, specifically Dalits, with the objective of contesting the system of caste-based subjugation. This study delves into the historical milieu surrounding the caste system, the ramifications of untouchability practices, and the imperative for the establishment of social justice and parity. Ambedkar's viewpoint centres on the self-determination and capacity for action of historically disadvantaged castes and their endeavours to confront caste-oriented prejudice and attain societal metamorphosis.

Through the adoption of these theoretical frameworks that incorporate various approaches, scholars can attain a comprehensive comprehension and creativeness of caste as a multifaceted social institution. The utilization of library research methodology facilitates a comprehensive examination of the historical, structural, cultural, and political facets of caste, thereby enabling a refined evaluation of its influence on both individuals and society.

## **4. Diverse viewpoints on the concept of 'Caste' across various spheres of everyday life**

### **4.1. Caste and general perceptions**

There can be multiple beneficial social functions for religious beliefs and caste systems, including fostering a sense of belonging and providing a framework for social safety and inclusion. Nevertheless, religious identity is deeply rooted in society and is vigilant in its maintenance (Héliot et al., 2020). Religious conversion, while not usually an act of cultural

or social revolution, reflects pre-existing structural imbalances, especially among vulnerable people (Juergensmeyer, 1982). Castes, or local sub-caste classifications, were chains of interest groups focused on kin in specific locations that formed shifting alliances based on current goals. Dynamic and creative connections exist between numerous shifting group categories. Each religion, tribe, caste, group, language, and geography will provide a foundation for unity and mobilization (Jaffrelot, 2010).

India's caste system limits social autonomy and creates hierarchical statuses based on inherited social positions, including occupation (Zumbyte, 2021). Implicit caste property might increase community-caste ties. Strong groups, such as high caste systems, will protect group integrity when values are infringed. In *"The Elementary Forms of Religious Life"* (1995), Durkheim suggests that religions can promote societal cohesion and togetherness. In environments where self-interest correlates with emotionally charged social markers like caste and faith, collective support behaviours or violent social mobilizations are more likely. The contention that creativeness of caste is relevant to the discussion around the policy framework calls for some clarification due to the fact that caste is ingrained in Indian society and allows for the continuation of practices of caste prejudice and discrimination. Caste categories were removed from post-Independence national censuses because the government of independent India did not want to use caste to explain poverty and inequality, and social classifications used in colonial administration were inappropriate (Dirks, 2001; Jaffrelot, 2006).

#### 4.2. Caste, village and labour force

The erosion of caste dominance in recent decades can be attributed to changes in land ownership and agricultural practices. The upper-caste village elites in India are being supplanted in the village economics and politics (Alam, 2024) by fragmented power centres or brokerage networks. These networks offer access to limited but crucial resources such as finance, government initiatives, marketplaces, and employment opportunities (Gupta, 1998; Witsoe, 2013). Following its transition from a mixed economy, the liberalization period has witnessed a significant increase in the presence of various non-farm workers in agro-based regions, coinciding with a gradual decline in the primary sector. The recent reports on the *Palanpur* study, which spans over seven decades in Uttar Pradesh, indicate a nationwide pattern of decreasing rural poverty and increasing incomes from higher-paying jobs. However, these reports also highlight a growing inequality, as the poorest individuals are limited to uncertain casual employment in industries such as railways, cloth mills, bakeries, liquor bottling, and brick-kilns (Himanshu et al., 2013). Carswell and De Neve (2014) conducted an ethnography of economically diversified communities near the prominent textile cluster of *Tiruppur* in Tamil Nadu. Their study reveals contrasting effects, even among neighbouring villages. One scenario involves the reduction of caste exclusion in labour markets that are driven by demand. In contrast, the second scenario involves the reinforcement of caste power, inequality, and untouchability through the industrialization of power looms within the village.

Recent researches on caste, village, and the labour force in Indian society highlights the persistent influence of caste on economic outcomes in rural areas. Studies reveal that caste-based discrimination continues to limit employment opportunities and fair wages for lower-caste individuals, particularly in rural labour markets like Bihar, where social norms and

stereotypes perpetuate inequality (Neubauer, 2024). Additionally, caste-based networks, while providing crucial economic support through mutual insurance, also reinforce traditional occupational roles, thereby restricting economic mobility and contributing to labour market inefficiencies (Emory Economics Review, 2023). Furthermore, reports indicate that despite some improvements in labour force participation, a significant portion of the workforce, especially youth from marginalized communities, remains trapped in informal and low-paying jobs, reflecting ongoing challenges in achieving equitable employment outcomes across caste lines (International Labour Organisation & Institute for Human Development, 2024).

Studies have shown that there is a strong tendency for occupational status to be passed down from one generation to the next, particularly among Dalits and Adivasis (also known as “Scheduled Tribes”). This trend is most pronounced in urban areas where there is greater mobility between generations. However, it is important to note that upward mobility in terms of occupation is more precarious for Dalits and Adivasis, as they are more likely to experience downward mobility, particularly in rural areas (Iversen et al., 2016; Deshpande, 2017, p. xiv–xv). The rural ethnographic study examines the subtle ways in which caste identification impacts current opportunities, focusing on the less obvious components. Individuals who abandon unchanging agricultural practices to seek employment in metropolitan areas are systematically divided into several types of jobs based on their abilities, susceptibility to harm, exposure to danger, lack of stability, or social standing. For example, Dalit workers in the Tiruppur textile industry are more susceptible to being allocated to the low-skilled and unsanitary dyeing units, whereas non-Dalits are more inclined to be assigned to the skilled tailoring sections (Béteille, 2012; Carswell et al., 2017). A recent surge in rural industrialization has resulted in the creation of skilled and managerial positions for individuals from higher castes who are not originally from the area. However, despite legal disputes over the rights to these permanent positions, which sometimes escalate to the international level when multinational companies are involved, those who have lost their land to new industrial complexes are only able to secure temporary employment as security guards, loaders, or janitors (Bommier, 2016; Donegan, 2018).

Shah et al. (2018) demonstrates how the process of neoliberal industrialization in India is influenced by the inequities that have been passed down from the caste system in rural villages. They support their argument by presenting various case studies from different regions of India. The study conducted by Thorat et al. (2015) highlights the impact of caste-based urban rental markets on residential segregation in Indian cities (Singh & Vithayathil, 2012). Roberts (2016) discusses that this segregation not only affects interactions and networks but also leads to the formation of city slums, specifically the spatially designated “Dalit colony”. Employees are categorized according to their caste through a labour recruitment process that relies on referrals. This process is overseen by group leaders and supervisors who take on the responsibility of managing the risks involved. They utilize caste-based networks to effectively and efficiently connect businesses with loyal employees in a dynamic market context. The manifestation of caste-based labour markets can be observed in various sectors such as colonial mills, docks, railways, factories, mines, and plantations, including their modern counterparts. These labour markets are often characterized by the dominance of a single caste group, which can be traced back to particular ancestral regions or even the influence of a specific recruiter or foreman (Iversen et al., 2009).

### 4.3. Caste and gender

Caste and gender are two aspects of society that connect (Alam, 2025b). The hierarchical system known as the caste system is assimilated by religion, and religion also imposes certain rules and limits on gender. Religion strives to establish rigid categories within which gender roles can be controlled within a society. Maintaining the integrity of the caste system depends heavily on maintaining control over the sexuality of women. Chakravarti (2018) writes that the dominance over women's sexual autonomy in the process of social reproduction highlights the fundamental role of gender in the functioning of caste. Women's actions are regulated by religious scriptures, which are interpreted based on motives. The prescribed gender roles aim to maintain caste purity within the group. However, "gender" is a socially constructed concept that is widely accepted and integrated into everyday life. It is built using a safeguarded historical procedure. Nevertheless, the majority of society likewise embraces it. "One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman" Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* (1949) (Marcus, 2020). Having less power and authority over women assumed a severe discriminatory form by religious traditions in Indian society. Religious traditions have influenced and moulded social customs in daily life. An evident characteristic of Hindu civilization is its legislative endorsement of a severe kind of social hierarchy, in which women and the lower castes have been subjected to degrading living conditions (Deshpande, 2017).

Scriptures from the Hindu religion's traditional canon demonstrate that the Brahmanical social order in India is responsible for instituting gender roles and caste hierarchies in everyday life (Chakravarti, 2018). Further, she analyses that the purity of caste can be preserved through restricting women. In order to maintain the purity of the upper caste, it is necessary to establish institutional measures that restrict lower caste males, whose sexuality is perceived as a threat, from engaging in sexual relationships with women of higher castes. Consequently, it becomes imperative to closely monitor and protect women (Chakravarti, 2018; Deshpande, 2017). If there is leakage in the closed structure of marriages then social and moral order will collapse automatically; Families are broken, rites are forgotten, women are defiled, and from this corruption comes the mixing of castes (Belvalkar, 1968; Chakravarti, 2018, pp. 63–75; Charan, 2017).

Several references indicate that women should be disempowered by preventing them from gaining strength and by enforcing their obedience to men, who they should obey (Roy, 1987, pp. 23–30). Female sexuality is perceived as a source of danger, which is why it is controlled by establishing the framework of gender and authority in the name of religious texts. Chakravarti (1993) argues that the mechanisms and institutions that controlled women's sexuality and enforced their subordination were effectively concealed, leading to the naturalization of patriarchy as an ideology. The intersection of caste and gender in India have highlighted the enduring and complex challenges faced by marginalized communities, particularly Dalit women, within the socio-economic and cultural frameworks of Indian society. One of the most significant cases that has drawn attention to these issues is the 2020 *Hathras case*, where a young Dalit woman was brutally assaulted and the subsequent legal proceedings revealed deep-seated biases in the criminal justice system (Jain, 2023). This case has been analyzed not only from a legal perspective but also in terms of its implications for human rights, exposing systemic caste and gender discrimination (Jain, 2023). In addition to legal

analyses, recent studies have explored the everyday realities of caste and gender oppression. For instance, the *Feminism in India* (2023) report delves into the lived experiences of Dalit women, illustrating how they navigate a society structured by both patriarchal norms and rigid caste hierarchies (Khatri, 2024). These women often find themselves at the intersection of multiple forms of violence – domestic, social, and economic. The research underscores that the privileges enjoyed by upper-caste women often perpetuate these inequalities, as they are insulated from the harsher realities faced by their Dalit counterparts (Khatri, 2024).

#### 4.4. Caste and education

In India, the connection between one's caste and their educational attainment is tangled and convoluted. A variety of historical, social, and institutional factors impact this connection. Individuals who belonged to different castes were historically limited in the educational options and access they could pursue due to the influence that caste played in the decision-making process.

The underprivileged castes still face many obstacles<sup>3</sup> when it comes to the quality of the education they receive, notwithstanding the efforts that have been made to enhance access (Singh & Alam, 2025). Educational institutions in certain places can have inadequate infrastructure, a lack of resources, and insufficient faculty. This is especially likely to be the case in areas that have a higher proportion of people who are marginalized. This can lead to a disparity in education between privileged castes and underprivileged castes, which in turn has an impact on the overall educational achievements and opportunities for both groups. Students who come from marginalized castes often experience bias, discrimination, and isolation from social networks because of their caste.

However, education and the acquisition of skills are highly regarded as the means to achieve personal advancement and escape from occupational limitations based on caste. This is particularly true for Dalits, whose higher enrolment rates in schools have contributed to a reduction in the educational disparity between castes at the primary and secondary levels in the period after economic reforms (Munshi, 2019). Beyond academic settings, the plight of the Dalit community is deteriorating. The disparity in access to higher education between Dalits and upper-caste individuals increased during the post-reform period until 2004/5, a time when the value of education was rising in the formal sector. Additionally, the financial benefits of education for Dalits, in terms of increased wages, decreased between 1983 and 2000. There is a persistent disparity in incomes based on caste, with greater rates of schooling in the private sector compared to the public sector. This discrepancy is further worsened by gender disparities, particularly for lower caste women. The earnings gap has increased from 15% (Deshpande, 2017). More than salary disparities, discrimination in hiring and job assignment (and hence occupational segregation) is at the root of the Dalits' lower earnings relative to other groups (Deshpande, 2017, p. 152).

Discrimination operates exclusively based on individual identities. Discrimination is prevalent mostly in private enterprises, particularly in certain areas such as call centers rather than

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/over-135k-sc-st-obic-students-dropped-out-of-central-universities-iits-iims-in-past-5-years-education-ministry/article67605388.ece> retrieved on December 10, 2023.

software industry positions. It is more likely to occur when recruiters are male and adhere to the Hindu faith (Upadhyay, 2007). The effects of caste are perpetuated by the unequal expectations placed on graduates. Upper-caste/class candidates benefit from their privileged cultural capital and are seen as having merit, while Dalit individuals with limited financial resources and weaker networks are consistently associated with their caste background. As a result, they tend to prefer public sector jobs, which are in high demand (Deshpande, 2013; Jodhka & Newman, 2007).

Recent researches on caste and education in India has revealed persistent inequalities that continue to affect marginalized communities, particularly in higher education. One significant study from 2023 investigated the role of caste and gender in the choice of academic streams at the higher secondary level. The study found that students from Scheduled Castes (SC), Scheduled Tribes (ST), and Other Backward Classes (OBC) are significantly less likely to choose science streams compared to their upper-caste counterparts (Kumar & Sahoo, 2024). This disparity persists even after accounting for socioeconomic factors, indicating that caste identity plays a crucial role in educational outcomes. Furthermore, the study highlighted that the intersection of caste and gender compounds these disadvantages, with female students from marginalized castes facing additional barriers due to both caste and gender biases (Kumar & Sahoo, 2024). Another study highlighted the subtle but pervasive nature of caste discrimination in higher education institutions. Despite affirmative action policies aimed at increasing access for lower-caste students, many continue to face stigma, social exclusion, and limited support, leading to higher dropout rates (Raj, 2023). The underrepresentation of marginalized castes among faculty and administration exacerbates these challenges, as these students often lack mentors who understand their unique struggles. This research calls for more inclusive policies and practices within educational institutions to address these deep-rooted inequalities (Raj, 2023).

#### **4.5. Caste and identity**

The relationship between caste and identity is closely intertwined, as caste frequently constitutes a substantial element of an individual's social identity. The caste system holds significant influence in shaping an individual's perception of their sense of community, social engagements, and resource accessibility. Surinder Singh Jodhka's research aimed to conceal their caste affiliation, particularly in situations when competitors exploit consumer prejudice to question the quality of services provided to Dalits, such as food, healthcare, education, or other personalized services (Prakash, 2015, p. 72). According to Jodhka (2010, p. 46), a person in Uttar Pradesh states that unlike other local businesses, their establishments are identified by their caste designations rather than the services or items they offer. In their study, Deshpande and Sharma (2016) analyzed and discussed the differences in earnings between different castes, which are most pronounced among those with lower incomes. This disparity is attributed to discrimination, which creates a persistent barrier to upward mobility, commonly referred to as the 'sticky floor' effect (Deshpande, 2017, p. xxiv). The caste system does not indicate a particular mechanism or influence in the post-liberalization economic system. As defined by Harriss-White,

"Caste has a perplexing capacity to dissolve, as ascriptive characteristics give way to acquired ones (such as skills, compliance and trust, experience and creative competence), and as capital becomes mobile. But at the same time, it persists and transforms itself as a regulative structure of the economy – sometimes in the same site' (Harriss-White & Vidyarthi, 2010, p. 318)."

As a result, the creative dynamics of caste functions not just as a structure of disadvantage or discrimination, but also as a structure of advantage or accumulation, operating in conjunction with gender, religion, and the disadvantages and advantages of education, occupation, and relationships that are "closed" through endogamy (Harriss-White, 2003, p. 239). Both "categorical exclusion" and "opportunity hoarding" are mechanisms that are involved in caste, just as they are in Tilly's (1998) notion of "durable inequality." Pew Research Center (2021) highlights how caste and identity remain deeply ingrained in the social fabric, with significant differences in self-identification across religious and caste groups. The study found that 25% of Indians identify as Scheduled Caste (SC), 9% as Scheduled Tribe (ST), and 35% as Other Backward Class (OBC). This self-identification not only influences social interactions but also impacts access to resources and opportunities, reinforcing socio-economic hierarchies. Another study by Goraya (2023a; 2023b) delves into the economic implications of caste and identity, illustrating how lower-ranked castes face substantial financial constraints, limiting their entrepreneurial opportunities and reinforcing economic disparities. Firms owned by lower-ranked castes, despite being more productive, receive significantly less credit compared to those owned by higher-ranked castes. This disparity in access to finance exacerbates wealth inequality and limits social mobility, thereby reinforcing caste-based identities and their associated economic outcomes.

Although, in India, the concepts of caste and identity are deeply ingrained<sup>4</sup> in the country's social, cultural, and historical contexts. Despite the fact that there have been efforts made to challenge and transcend identities that are based on caste, the significance of caste in the process of forming individual and collective identities continues to be a complicated and ever-evolving component of Indian culture. Recognizing and comprehending the connection between identity and caste is necessary in order to combat discrimination that is based on caste and to strive toward creating a society that is more welcoming and equal for all.

#### 4.6. Caste and stratification

The construction of graded inequality was not accomplished in a short period but rather through a protracted historical method. The intersectionality of caste and gender reveals that women belonging to lower castes have a disproportionate limitation in their ability to move freely in their family and at work (Pew Research Center, 2022). Despite a decline in these numbers, caste still exhibits greater employment rates in labour participation. Lower caste women endure very oppressive labour conditions, despite occasional depictions suggesting a semblance of gender equality in comparison to higher caste women within Indian society (Deshpande, 2017). According to a nationwide survey, around one-third of the participants reported instances of physical abuse (Deshpande, 2017, pp. 138–39). Increased prosperity has a dual effect on violence against

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fpsyg.2017.00487/full> retrieved on December 10, 2023.

women. On one hand, it reduces the occurrence of violence or the reporting of such incidents. On the other hand, it imposes limitations on women's freedom of movement and their ability to make decisions, which are aimed at boosting their social position (Deshpande, 2017, pp. 137–38). The existence and perpetuation of caste inequality are influenced by and rely on gender inequality, sometimes known as 'graded patriarchies' (Chakravarti, 2018). Lower caste women encounter labour unfreedom and market discrimination that is shaped by patriarchy, such as work being controlled by male relatives, adherence to gendered social norms, and experiencing sexual harassment (e.g., Kapadia, 1999).

Dalit women endure domination and aggression due to the repercussions of the unsuccessful expression of masculinity by marginalized Dalit men (Anandhi & Kapadia, 2017). The significance of caste affiliation is demonstrated by the low and consistent incidence of intermarriage, which stands at only five percent in rural India. Additionally, there are severe consequences, including violence, enforced by the upper-caste community to prevent elopements beyond the 'untouchability line' (Chowdhry, 2009). Within the educated middle-class Indian population, approximately 70 percent choose to marry someone from the same caste. This information is supported by studies conducted by Banerjee, Duflo, Ghatak, and Lafortune in 2013, as well as Munshi in 2019. The analysis of caste processes involves the examination of social phenomena such as the hierarchical assignment of status based on birth, discrimination based on identification, exclusion based on categories, the monopolization of opportunities, and the seizure of power by the elite. These processes can be likened to race, ethnicity, and other manifestations of inequality based on identification. Dalit activists advocate for the inclusion of caste in UN conventions against racism, highlighting the similarities between caste-based discrimination and other forms of inequality (Desai & Dubey, 2011; Tilly, 1998; Nagaraj & Greenough, 2009).

The creativeness of the caste system is commonly perceived as a type of stratificational social structure. By means of this network operation, the exercise of power by dominant castes is facilitated. As evidenced by the regional networks of predominant castes, the manifestation of control is demonstrated through the capacity to effectively communicate and establish connections within their respective network of dominant castes at the regional level. A modern source of control over Dalits is the caste's making salient and all its social decisions, e.g., Hathras gang rape,<sup>5</sup> (U.P), Balrampur rape case<sup>6</sup>. According to a recent study, caste is considered an internal experience that involves cognitive and emotional characteristics. The study suggests that feelings of pride, fear, or anxiety linked with caste are a result of prejudice and the fear of violence (Jadhav et al., 2016). Their efforts are focused on mitigating the source of prejudice directed towards them, which stems from any opportunity for the advancement and progress of the Dalit community. This includes endeavours such as establishing businesses, pursuing professional careers, and accessing educational pathways that lead

<sup>5</sup> Hathras Victim Was Gang Raped, Murdered By Accused: CBI Chargesheet. (2021, January 08). *Outlook*. Retrieved from <https://www.outlookindia.com/website/story/india-news-hathras-case-all-4-accused-charged-for-gang-rape-murder/367624>

<sup>6</sup> Key witness surfaces in Balrampur gang-rape case, two arrested. (2021, January 08). *Hindustan Times*. Retrieved from <https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/key-witness-surfaces-in-balrampur-gang-rape-case-two-arrested/story-7qu6MJ4Us6wjK3Tr3brWwO.html>

to upward mobility within the Indian social hierarchy. Within a caste-based economic system, discrimination is manifested through the tangible 'glass-ceiling' phenomenon in formal sector employment and the intangible 'sticky-floor' phenomenon in informal sector professions. This discrimination is further perpetuated across generations through the enforcement of caste endogamy by religious authorities and wider societal acceptance. The "glass ceiling" effect of discrimination means that the caste wage gap is greatest at the top of the income distribution (Deshpande, 2017, p. xv; Thorat & Madheswaran, 2018).

#### 4.7. Caste and policy

The eradication of the oppressive caste was anticipated to occur through the advancement of ideas rooted in Gandhian reformism and proletarian universalism. The policy pertaining to a caste within the social framework centres on the limitations of distinct societal strata, whereby caste is viewed as a fixed or enduring predicament that necessitates corrective measures, safeguards, directives, and conflict resolution mechanisms. This approach fails to recognize the intricate contextual nature of caste, which ought to be addressed by the state's overarching responsibility to mitigate economic and social inequality and bias (Mosse, 2018). Due to its religious and historical origins, caste is not included within the scope of economic planning (Jodhka, 2016, p. 232). The confinement of caste within the realms of religion/culture, history, and the nation (Mosse, 2020) creates a distinction between caste and development. This process of 'culturalization' of caste (Natrajan, 2011) suggests a reduction of poverty to its economic and material aspects, emphasizing the 'interests' related to development as highlighted by Hirschman (1997). The intricate interplay of caste politics has been observed to wield a significant influence in determining the outcome of electoral contests in India. Political parties' alignment with caste-based entitlements marked a significant phase in the reciprocal integration of caste and politics in India. Caste plays a crucial role in shaping democratic politics, while electoral politics serves as a means to rejuvenate caste dynamics. This process involves the emergence of higher-level caste clusters, the formation of new mythologies, and the articulation of perceived interests through caste identities by influential leaders (Gupta, 2005; Jodhka & Newman, 2007). The creativity of caste is commonly perceived as a fundamental aspect of cultural identity. Within the context of Indian democracy, the enduring significance of caste presents opportunities for cultivating trust and fostering business relationships.

Mosse's (2018) research challenges the view of caste as an archaic system, presenting it instead as a dynamic aspect of modern economies. He argues that market-led development, while intended to modernize and democratize economic systems, often both weakens and reproduces caste inequalities. This is because caste identities and networks persist due to their inherent advantages in accessing resources and opportunities. Mosse highlights that caste-based discrimination remains a pervasive feature of Indian labour markets, policy making, and business economies, demonstrating how deeply entrenched these biases are within economic structures. To address these issues effectively, he advocates for targeted policy innovations that are tailored to the realities of caste, ensuring that reforms are responsive to the ongoing impact of caste dynamics on economic and social outcomes. As the Indian state undergoes a restructuring process that favours industrial capital, it is concurrently compelled

to address democratic pressure from a voting constituency of lower-caste individuals who are economically disadvantaged. This is achieved by channelling tax revenue from the burgeoning industrial sector towards substantial enhancements in state welfare programs while simultaneously espousing a discourse of growth that is inclusive. Additionally, the state has implemented a range of social and economic rights, such as the right to education, food, and rural employment, as a means of mitigating class and caste-based disparities (Gupta, 2012; Jayal, 2015). In either scenario, the matter of caste would pertain to an individual's private and household affairs. The paradigmatic construct of caste has undergone a gradual shift throughout history. The manifestation of caste-based abuse in the media and on television can be perceived as an aberration of the traditionally benevolent caste system.

## 5. Conclusions

The institution of caste and its creative dynamics of inequality, deeply rooted in Indian society, has exerted a profound influence on the nation's social, economic, and political milieu. Across the annals of time, the concept of caste has functioned as a mechanism of societal differentiation, apportioning persons into distinct strata of hierarchy predicated upon factors such as lineage, profession, and standing within the community. The multifaceted impact of this phenomenon extends to diverse facets of human existence, ranging from the domains of education, occupation, and identity to the arenas of interpersonal communication and matrimony. The caste system, with its roots in antiquity, has undergone a metamorphosis in response to the forces of globalization, urbanization, and modernization. The enduring impact of caste on Indian society persists, albeit with altered dynamics, presenting novel prospects and predicaments. In the present day, India is experiencing a dynamic interplay between long-established caste identities and the transformative influences of societal evolution. The persistence of caste-based discrimination and social disparities is a matter of concern despite the implementation of legal measures and affirmative action policies that were intended to tackle these problems. The persistent impediments encountered by marginalized castes in their pursuit of gender, education, employment, and political participation remain a pressing concern. Notwithstanding, there have been occurrences of mobilization and political empowerment based on caste, whereby historically marginalized castes assert their identities and advocate for social justice and parity.

To comprehend the intricacies of caste in present-day India, one must acknowledge the interplay between caste, socioeconomic status, gender, and religious identity. The intersectionality of caste identities with other social identities serves to exacerbate the difficulties encountered by individuals situated at these intersections. The endeavour to combat caste-based prejudice demands all-encompassing and integrative methodologies that cater to the distinctive challenges and susceptibilities encountered by persons belonging to underprivileged castes. Continuous endeavours to contest and surpass caste stratifications persist. Caste and its creative dynamics of inequality with living tradition, as a construct of power and social injustice, has been subjected to critical examination by scholars, activists, and social reformers. The endeavours towards social parity, matrimonial alliances across castes, and access to education for underprivileged groups have endeavoured to deconstruct caste-centric

stratifications and foster communal harmony. The caste system continues to be a prominent social establishment in modern-day India, exerting a notable impact on various aspects of society. The comprehension and living tradition of caste at a conceptual level elucidates its creative dynamic effects, and underscores the persistent obligation to combat caste-based prejudice, enhance the agency of underprivileged groups, and cultivate a society that is more comprehensive and equitable. Through a nuanced understanding of the intricacies of caste and a concerted effort towards effecting societal transformation, India can aspire towards a future wherein individuals are not circumscribed or delineated by their caste affiliations.

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