



Bapu Trust for Research
on Mind & Discourse

A Round Table on Caste, Stigma and Well-being,

17th February, 2013, Pune, India

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Dr Bhargavi Davar, Bapu Trust, India,
Dr. Sumeet Jain, University of Edinburgh, UK

We invite you to consider that there is a surprising absence of research examining cultural and psychological dimensions of caste identity in India. Untouchables ('Dalits') are largely excluded from full participation in everyday social life, have poorer health outcomes compared to the general population, and are subject to cruel, inhuman and degrading acts of violence and atrocities. The stigma of being an untouchable (Dalit) remains unexplored in the social sciences.

University College London and Bapu Trust, Pune, has been conducting research in the area of "Caste, stigma and well being" since 2010, with support from the British Academy. Our research explores three linked questions:

- 1) What is the nature of stigma associated with being an untouchable?
- 2) How does this change following religious conversion?
- 3) How does stigma of being an untouchable differ from stigma of severe mental illness?

Ethnographic observation, focus groups, and a quantitative questionnaire were deployed to study a select sample of Dalits & Dalit Buddhists in Maharashtra State, India. Analysis aimed at unpacking the relationship between untouchability, stigma, and cultural, psychological identity.

The emerging data from this study has revealed complex responses to Dalit identity, and mental well-being in the local context of daily living. Dalits continue to experience denial of full participation in everyday life and have developed a range of psychological, cultural and political strategies to resist discrimination. Dalit cultural identities are dynamic, multiple, malleable, porous in their boundaries, and may be deployed to leverage returns that maximize their social and cultural status. We hypothesise that the experienced stigma of Dalit caste identity, while not explicit, may include non-cognitive, embodied components relating to purity and pollution. The ousting of traditional knowledge and practice (for example, possession) in the emerging data is also an interesting finding.

This study provides a vital theoretical contribution to the study of well being of socially excluded populations, with potential for psychological and social intervention on caste related stigma in India.

This seminar will aim to disseminate findings from this project, and stimulate further discussion on

the topic.

To share and dialogue on these early findings, we are holding a round table on **“Caste, Stigma and Well being”** in Pune on the 17th of February, 2013, between 2.00 PM – 6.00 PM. We are happy to invite you to this round table. Please do confirm your participation.

Contact Dr. Bhargavi Davar at +91-9823291989 or write to camhpune@gmail.com for further details or clarifications.

Looking forward to hearing from you at the earliest,

Warm regards,

Dr. Sushrut Jadhav, University College London, UK (Principal Investigator)
Dr. Bhargavi Davar, Bapu Trust, India (co-Principal Investigator)
Dr. Sumeet Jain, University of Edinburgh, UK (Research Collaborator)