



Caste atrocities: analysis of their continuous existence

Caste atrocities are strictly prohibited legally, yet why do they keep on occurring even in modern India?

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Caste atrocities are still a lived reality for many Indians. The statement in itself should be embarrassing for all of us and should require no justification that India has laws for protection, people are changing, and so on. Last month, a 33-year-old Dalit man was beaten to death by upper-caste men after he refused to massage their feet ([India Today, 14/06/2026](#)). Dr BR Ambedkar said, “The people of this country have been looking only at caste for generations; they neither have the habit nor the concern to look at a person's character.” Unfortunately, this is the lived reality even today. According to the National Campaign on Dalit Human Rights, 1 crime is committed against a Dalit every 18 minutes, 6 Dalit kids are kidnapped or abducted every week, 3 Dalit women are raped every day, 13 Dalits are murdered every week, and 27 atrocities against Dalits are committed every day.

Now that it is settled that caste -based atrocities still exist, an important question should be, why does this abuse occur? One cannot control where they are born, and why was it unanimously decided that a set of people would be abused throughout generations, all because they were born in a specific caste?

History of caste-based atrocities

The Rig Veda classified society into four different varnas: Brahmanas, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas, and Shudras. These classifications were based on a person's occupation, not on the family or caste they were born into. However, Manusmriti made this system rigid, and classifications became based on the person's caste. The Shastras held that different laws applied to different people, depending on the communities to which they belonged. The Dharma Shastras were manuals put together by Brahmins that explained how people should live their lives. They segregated society into four major categories. ([How to Look At Manusmriti and the Caste System, Devdutt Patnaik](#)). These atrocities were religiously backed and were enforced by the state. If a Shudra was caught insulting upper-caste people, his tongue was cut. In the 18th century, when Peshwas ruled Pune, Dalits were mandated to carry pots tied to their necks to collect the spit of others.

Psychology behind these acts

The psychology of atrocities and why they happen even after the Constitution. Caste-based atrocities don't have just an emotional basis of hatred and personal bias. They have the underlying human desire to defend privileged



status and entrenched social systems. Psychology gives us an insight as to why, even with equality legally mandated through the Indian Constitution, members of marginal communities continue to face violence. For instance, there's this phenomenon called status threat.

People are strongly identified with social identities and group memberships.

As disadvantaged and marginalised castes begin gaining access to education, land ownership, access to power and claiming basic rights ensured by the constitution, members of upper castes may feel their status is being undermined. And this threat, even if misplaced (as they are just claiming their basic rights) is translated into resentment and further, often violent action. Another angle is zero-sum thinking-the psychology that one group's gain necessarily means another group's loss. While many may consider equality and development a win-win for everyone, some perceive equality as a threat.

This fear may further result in discriminatory behaviour and, in some extreme cases, even violence.

Psychologists suggest that people tend to defend existing social structures as they're comfortable with what's known. If a group has lived believing that a specific caste-based hierarchy is the 'natural order,' any challenge to that belief, through demands for equality and dignity made by a marginalised community, could induce discomfort. To manage that discomfort, some people may seek to maintain the hierarchy through discrimination and violence.

That's precisely why we often see increases in caste-based atrocities as a marginalised community begins to rise above their disadvantaged circumstances-whether through education, economic development, or political engagement. The violence doesn't occur because of their rising above; it happens because of the fear that those who have been empowered for a long time now fear loss. Understanding the psychology behind these atrocious acts helps us realise that it's ultimately about defending systems that maintain inequality.

This psychological and historical explanation directly contradicts the basis of criminal law. Criminal law is based on the assumption that punishments will discourage crime, but here, these atrocities are based on an internalised and normalised sense of entitlement, which significantly weakens the criminal law deterrence

Judicial/Structural/procedural delays.

The report [The Elusive Search for Justice: 30-Year Review of the SCs & STs \(PoA\) Act](#) also discusses that delay in the justice system often facilitates these atrocities because it lets the plaintiffs coerce, manipulate, or even tamper with the evidence. Also, conviction rates in atrocity cases have remained alarmingly low while pendency rates have hovered around 80 per cent

Judicial delay itself is caused by a wide range of issues, such as delays or refusals to accept FIRs, poor investigations, false cases, institutional bias, hostile witnesses, and inadequate legal support for survivors.

There is no doubt that a comprehensive mechanism to prevent caste abuse is available, but these mechanisms have not manifested into reality. The committees do not meet regularly, compensation is denied or delayed, and the investigation often exceeds the given time limit.

In a nutshell, the already existing inter-caste prejudice and hatred often shape our bureaucracy and judiciary, which prevent the implementation of the policies. Basically, the efforts to prevent these atrocities remain on paper and people responsible for preventing this abuse fail to do so because of red tapism and individual prejudice, as discussed above.

A Tamil Nadu-based organisation published a report that documented caste discrimination and atrocities, 30 years after the Prevention of Atrocities Act was implemented. The paper argued that the act has been amended multiple times in 2015, 2016, and 2018, broadening the list of offences, increasing compensation amounts,



imposing stricter timelines, and even removing procedural barriers; however, little impact has been observed. Drawing on National Crime Records Bureau data, the review notes that registered atrocities against Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes continued to rise throughout the decade. The report cites figures showing 44,946 cases in 2015, 48,679 in 2016, 51,712 in 2017, and 50,749 in 2018. Far from indicating a decline in caste violence, these figures suggest that atrocities remain widespread across the country. ([The Elusive Search for Justice: 30-Year Review of the SCs & STs \(PoA\) Act](#))

Ideological Hegemony and Resource Control

Narratives are set against the so-called “lower caste” people, such as stereotyping and then terming them as “natural” and “ideal social order”. Up until a few years ago, Indian prisons had an arrangement that prisoners would be doing their jobs according to their caste. For instance, a Dalit man, irrespective of his crime, would clean toilets, and upper-caste prisoners would do other jobs like cooking or other non-cleaning jobs.

Dominant groups control resources, property, and labour. Historically, submissive communities often rely on these systems for basic survival, forcing them to prioritise immediate needs over the long-term risks of revolution.

Conclusion

What started as a mere societal arrangement based on occupation paved the way for these heinous atrocities that have no moral, legal or natural justification. It became a tool for asserting dominance and obstructing an entire Indian society from developing for ages.

The root cause is the psychological design of Indians, which is today omnipresent in the legal, executive, and other bureaucratic spheres. The challenge, therefore, is not merely to strengthen laws but to transform the social attitudes that sustain inequality. Criminal law can punish offenders, but it cannot by itself eradicate beliefs that have been normalised across generations. Lasting change requires effective enforcement of existing laws, institutional accountability, education that challenges caste prejudice, and an unwavering commitment to constitutional morality.