



---

**SELF-ESTEEM AND DALITS OF INDIA, A PARADOX****Vijimon I.<sup>1</sup> and Ramachandran<sup>2</sup>****<sup>1</sup>Research Scholar, Center for Study of Social Exclusion and Inclusive Policy,  
Bharathidasan University, Tiruchirappalli.****<sup>2</sup>Research scholar. Centre for Study of Social Exclusion and Inclusive Policy. Bharathidasan University  
Tiruchirappalli.****ABSTRACT:**

*This paper intends to unearth the intricacies conjoined with the self-esteem of dalits through theoretical analytical method. Studies in this particular area are hardly any to mention as the psychosocial aspects of dalits seem to be an alienated area of interest. This is a novel attempt to connect the scientific methods used to assess self-esteem with the dalits particularly. A number of researches can be cited for example to show the indifference found in the lives of dalits as a whole as compared to their fellow beings which explicitly prove the unworthy life of many downtrodden families who belong to dalits. Thus, the question of assessing self-esteem is challenging for the community as the scientific parameters used to measure self-esteem among the people scarcely match with the real life experiences of dalits which are devoid of mental health inputs rather filled with challenges.*

**KEYWORDS** – psychosocial aspects of dalits , scientific parameters , theoretical analytical method.

**INTRODUCTION**

Self-esteem in its simple form denotes the way we feel about ourselves in terms of worth. According to Rosenberg it is the sum total of an individual's self evaluation (Rosenberg 1990. The reflection of one's own image or self description positively or negatively makes the base of self-esteem. The respect and acceptance, on the grounds when one feels worthy or be acquainted with the shortcomings, an individual possesses decides the base of self esteem of that individual. (Trzesniewski et.al. 2006). Sociological model of self-esteem assesses the people who are highly regarded and valued by the society would possess high self-esteem and others may not. Race, religion, gender, social status, economic status and education influence the esteem of an individual.

Gecas & Schwalbe, explain that self-esteem comprises of competence and worth dimensions in which the people perceive them as capable and efficient are referred to as competence and the other is the way by which people value themselves exclusively (Gecas & Schwalbe 1983). A number of other studies and scholars believe that the psychosocial development of the self of any individual happens through the interactions based on the shared understanding of one's roles supposed to be played or playing according to the social rules, symbols and categories (Cooley, 1902). The shared understanding of people on self, rules, symbols and categories is sophisticatedly complicated in general and downright dialectical in particular.

**The Dalit Life & Self Esteem - A Paradox**

Dalits of India constitutes 25% of the total population, both Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, according to the 2011 senses by the Government of India were the untouchables in Indian culture

and the humans experienced the harshest or most unjust restrictions of life. (Deasi & Kulkarni. 2008). The contaminated social interactions designed dalit-living as the rules, customs, norms etc; were apparently denied a way of living. Expected to have self-esteem from socially constructed/polluted non-humans is an irony and paradoxical, as many western researches opine that people with difficult situations have self motivation and esteem better to their counterparts. The situation in India is unique with caste specific vulnerabilities discriminate although the groups that are scheduled as lower castes and are better humans as they have never been oppressive than oppressed.

The 'varna system'<sup>1</sup> that adversely promoted or imposed socially constructed restrictions on dalits beyond doubt impair psychologically and paradoxically the reign of terror persists with oblivion and undiluted potential. People across the societies have an underlying affinity with the mainstreaming of traditional social rules by which the suppression or oppression would also become a custom to be practiced. This social construction of human-self hazardously scripts the lives of dalits strained with low self-esteem. Living a life nil of complexities uploaded with marginalization is a fortune unimaginable when being born in India among the group below the 'shudras' or out of the 'varna system'. Challenging the stigmatized or pathological societal stereotypes needs infallible conviction with high self-esteem.

Low self-esteem is a risk factor and most of the time associated with a number of mental health problems beginning to light up during childhood or adolescence and may results in depression, anxiety, eating disorders, poor social functioning, school drop-out and high risk behaviour. At the same time the positive self-esteem would negotiate effectively with the testing times of difficulties and shoot up mental well-being, happiness, adjustment, success, academic achievements, and satisfaction.<sup>2</sup>

The factors design one's self esteem surely connect with the psychosocial changes either constructively or destructively. First, considering the opinion of Rosenberg i.e. self-esteem as an *outcome* that would either produce or inhibit self-esteem. Second, many have focused to study self esteem as a *self-motive* by which individuals tempt to manage or improve positive feedbacks through specific behaviour (Kaplan 1975). Third is an extensively discussed notion of self esteem which act as a *buffer* protects the self from the experiences that are destructive. (Longmore & DeMaris 1997)

The trajectory here, swindles the life of dalits by framing the factors that supposedly be associated with the boosters of self esteem together bindingly fall in line with the specifics mentioned earlier i.e. self esteem as an outcome, a self-motive and a buffer more or less pessimistically. Self esteem of adolescents either high or low would have been decided by a number of factors such as family, school, peer groups, media, the social groups and class they belong etc. DuBois and others support this argument by stating the relations of variables such as gender, race and social status as determiners of individual background that would influence self-esteem of a person (DuBois, Burk-Braxton, Swenson, Tevendale, & Hardesty, 2002). This argument has been also seen in a study conducted by Demo & Savin-Williams, stating that the social-economic status has been positively associated with self-esteem (Demo & Savin1983). Spencer, Fegley & Harpalani, extend it by describing the discriminatory practices that are capable of producing or inflicting trivialities for the lower humans constructed by the society. It is important to note that they supplement a solution to the malady by reducing the risk through the moderation of cultural resources to develop coping methods.(Spencer, Fegley & Harpalani, 2003).

Group affinity and the perceptions of individuals take shape perfectly when an equitable social organism performs its discourses without meting out its paramourcy to avoid the group members falling prey for long-lasting psychological impacts that would hamper hassle free social life. Jose & Maheaswari explains the same in their study saying non-dominant and inequitable social positions and perceptions would generate disabling effects on psychological and social life. (Jose & Maheshwari, 2012). Crocker et.al, opine that the self image evolves through childhood to adulthood by steadily building the same with the experiences we come across. These experiences include the inputs from different people as and when we

<sup>1</sup> The traditional fourfold system of caste system.

<sup>2</sup> [www.excellenceforchildandyouth.ca](http://www.excellenceforchildandyouth.ca)

encounter success or failures along with the feedbacks of them e.g. teachers, family members, peers, religious leaders, coaches. Self-esteem can be negatively influenced by external forces, but the locus control of the self should be assessed precisely and one should value oneself unconditionally in front of the adversities. (Crocker et. al., 2006). People need to pragmatically recognize the strengths and weaknesses while conceding one as worthwhile. One expresses he/she is valuable, competent, deserving and lovable only when he/she beholds a hale and hearty self-esteem that would care and nurture against the recorded harmful incidents and experiences. (Baumeister et. al., 2005).

### APPRAISALS, COMPARISONS AND SELF-ATTRIBUTIONS – THE PARADOX

Self-esteem is an outcome of successful verification of the self of individuals according to the identity theory that focuses on the ability of an individual to achieve a match between an ideal goal i.e. the identity standard and the actual performance of the self. (Alicia & Peter, 2002). The self identity theory explains the concept by pairing ‘successes’ as ‘self relevant perceptions’ and the ‘standard or goal’ as ‘pretensions’ similar to the ideas of James (1950) where he connotes the same as the ratio of ‘successes’ to ‘pretensions’ means the accomplishment of an individual and his/her goals. Rosenberg extends the connotation stating that the ‘accomplished’ and the ‘actual’ occur through three distinct processes within a group i.e. reflected appraisals, social comparisons, and self-attributions (Rosenberg 1990).

Dalits in India while undergoing the process explained would find caught when they compare themselves socially with others to check their accomplishment as well as goals. Reflective analysis would bring them perceptions muddled with irony and underachievement and thereby minimizing the self-attributions. The first two are closely knitted with the worth-based self-esteem and the other with efficacy-based self esteem. The first one generates positive self-esteem when people are honoured with reflected group appraisals and social comparisons which denote the worth and acceptance of them (Brown & Lohr 1987). The reflective group appraisal is a nightmare for the dalits of India as the system never acknowledged the community with accepted norms or customs. The worth and efficacy were ceremonially attributed to the upper castes of Indians i.e. Brahmins, Kshatriyas and Vyasyas, whether learned or not is immaterial. Self-attributions are the base of efficacy-based self-esteem where behaviour caused for the success and achievements would be maintained reflectively to match between the meanings and standard. (Bandura 1977).

### CONCLUSION

The key terms i.e. Appraisals, Comparisons and Self-attributions under discussion adversely and inversely attribute to the lives of dalits in India. Appraisal needs standards to measure the success or failure. When we appraise the status of dalits in socio-economic, political and cultural arenas we would freeze at a decimating point where the communities other than the dalits would unimaginably be ahead of the standards. As we discussed above the comparisons would categorically ascertain that the race started 2000 years ago by other communities should be chased down by the dalits who were given a chance to show their face in the mainstream social spheres through reservations 30 years ago. The societal interactions always have the gap denied by the upper class to the dalits by which the required capitals<sup>3</sup> supposedly placed with them were driven away through untouchability and other inhuman practices. Collective identity of the group by which we expected to have from the shared social, cultural, symbolic and economic capitals too zeroed down by the affinity of the society with traditional customs and beliefs. The self-verification of one person is not just an appraisal that depends only on the actions of one but one’s actions in relation to others activity. Dalits associations would spin an identity pattern among themselves but the mutual verification between the socio-cultural groups would alter and may redesign the pattern in tune with mainstream traditional pattern, thereby the group of dalits stays astray always. Therefore, it is obvious that the social structure of dalits is a biased construct according to the elitist ideology. Self-esteem is a self-attribution that would

---

<sup>3</sup> Social, economic, symbolic and cultural capitals- concept of Pierre Bourdieu.

behold the social construct to its maximum whereby the beholder nourishes or perishes with his/her esteem needs.

## REFERENCES

1. Baumeister, Roy F., Campbell, J.D., Krueger, J.I., and Vohs, K.D. (2005). "Exploding the Self-Esteem Myth" *Scientific American*, January 2005.
2. Brown, B. Bradford, and Mary J. Lohr. (1987). "Peer-Group Affiliation and Adolescent Self-esteem: An Integration of Ego-Identity and Symbolic-Interaction Theories." *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 52:47–55.
3. Bandura, Albert. (1977). "Self-Efficacy: Toward a Unifying Theory of Behavioral Change." *Psychological Review* 84:191–215.
4. Crocker, J., Brook, A. T., & Niiya, Y. (2006). The pursuit of self-esteem: Contingencies of self-worth and self-regulation. *Journal of Personality*, 74(6), 1749-1771.
5. Cast Alicia D. Burke, Peter J. (2002) A Theory of Self-Esteem, *Social Forces*, 80(3):1041-1068, The University of North Carolina Press
6. Cooley, Charles.(1902). *Human Nature and the Social Order*. New York: Scribner's.
7. Desai, Sonalde, and Veena Kulkarni.(2008). "Changing Educational Inequalities in India in the Context of Affirmative Action".
8. DuBois, D. L., Burk-Braxton, C., Swenson, L. P., Tevendale, H. D., & Hardesty, J. L. (2002). Race and gender influences on adjustment in early adolescence: Investigation of an integrative model. *Child Development*, 73,1573– 1592.
9. Demo, R. M., & Savin-Williams, R. C. (1983). Early adolescent self-esteem as a function of social class: Rosenberg and Pearlin revisited. *American Journal of Sociology*, 88, 763– 774.
10. Gecas, Viktor, and Michael L. Schwalbe. (1983). "Beyond the Looking-glass Self: Social Structure and Efficacy-Based Self-Esteem." *Social Psychology Quarterly* 46:77–88.
11. Jose, J.P. & Maheshwari, V. (2012b). *Identity Representations and Social Exclusion of Women in India.*, Lambert Academic Publishing: Germany.
12. James, William. [1890] (1950). *The Principles of Psychology*. Dover.
13. Kaplan, Howard. (1975). "The Self-Esteem Motive." Pp. 10–31 in *Self-Attitudes and Deviant Behavior*, edited by Howard B. Kaplan. Goodyear.
14. Longmore, Monica A., and Alfred DeMaris. (1997). "Perceived Inequity and Depression in Intimate Relationships: The Moderating Effect of Self-Esteem." *Social Psychology Quarterly* 60:172–84.
15. Rosenberg, Morris. (1990). "The Self-Concept: Social Product and Social Force." Pp. 593–624 in *Social Psychology: Sociological Perspectives*, edited by Morris Rosenberg and Ralph H. Turner.
16. Spencer, M.B., Fegley, S.G. & Harpalani, V. (2003). A theoretical and empirical examination of identity coping: Linking coping resources to the self process of African American Youth. *Journal of Applied Developmental Science*, 7(3), 181-188.
17. Trzesniewski, K.H., M. Brent Donnellan, Terrie E. Moffitt, Richard W. Robins, Richie Poulton, Avshalom Caspi. (2006) Low self-esteem during adolescence predicts poor health, criminal behavior, and limited economic prospects during adulthood. *Developmental Psychology* 42:2, 381.



**Ramachandran**

Research scholar. Centre for Study of Social Exclusion and Inclusive Policy. Bharathidasan University Tiruchirappalli.