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CASTE AND GENDER DIVIDE IN HIGHER EDUCATION IN INDIA AND ITS EFFECT ON TEACHER PERFORMANCE

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Abstract
Caste and gender are the two most important defining attributes in Indian society. The identity of a person is considered incomplete without reference to these two attributes. Naturally, both the stigma and esteem associated with the respective gender and caste also percolate in professional life. Indian society for instance has traditionally been a male-dominated society and the upper-castes have had a near unchallenged supremacy for centuries together. This has led to the formation of stereotypes on caste and gender lines, and the present study attempts to explore their effects on teaching performance of college teachers. The sample comprised of 517 teachers and 10256 students from the state of Maharashtra. Teacher performance was measured with the help of the Teacher Assessment Scale (TASC) which is a structured instrument used to generate feedback of teaching performance from students. The present study has found that despite equal academic qualifications and eligibility among all teachers, female teachers and those from the backward castes are seen to underperform. The effect is most pronounced for female teachers from the backward castes who have to deal with both stereotypes of caste and gender. The study discusses the sociocultural as well as psychological perspectives of the caste and gender divide in the Indian society and its subsequent effects on performance.
Keywords: *Gender, caste, teacher performance, teacher assessment, TASC*

For centuries together, India has remained a caste-riddled and male-dominated society where women and lower castes have remained bereft of education. Changes in the social structure have definitely taken place since the country gained independence in 1947 and the constitution removed all gender and caste-based disparities. In fact, the government has introduced free education and scholarships to girls and backward caste individuals in education and reservations in jobs, but centuries of deprivation have not fully erased the academic as well as sociopolitical backwardness among these groups in the country. This has led to the formation of stereotypes of caste and gender in education, especially higher education.

CASTE

Indian society is divided into four castes in a hierarchical order: Brahmins, kshatriyas, vaishyas, and dalits, in accordance with their occupations. Traditionally, brahmins were teachers and religious preachers, kshatriyas were the warrior community of rulers, vaishyas were into business and trade, while dalits were engaged in menial labour and services. This hierarchy has been in existence for centuries, in fact may be over five thousand years old, as references to the caste system are found in epics like the Ramayana and Mahabharata. There have been continuous efforts by social reformers to eradicate the caste-hierarchy, and there are numerous instances of philosopher poets espousing the cause of humanity and equality spread over the centuries, but the caste-based social structure has proved all to resilient.

According to Trautmann [1], the ‘central conundrum of Indian social ideology’ lay in the fact that in the Vedic times, the brahmin had to be dependent on the king for livelihood, and this made him accept physical gifts from the king. However, the gifts embodied the sins of the king and his kingdom which got involuntarily transferred to the Brahmin. This situation was overcome by

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converting the gifts into a mere 'fee' for ritual services, whereby the donor (king) would interiorize the sins and would cleanse them with the help of rituals. The Brahmin supposedly relieved the king of his sins, albeit for a fee, and was no longer burdened with them. Later, it was only natural for all people to follow the king and accept the Brahmin's ascendance in spiritual matters.

Kolff and Van Der Hoek [2] have quoted Heesterman who attributes the genesis of the caste system in India to the segregation of ritual power from the king to the brahmin in post-Vedic period. Heesterman supports Trumann's theory and calls the transition of ritual power from king to brahmin the 'axial-breakthrough' that led to the formation of the caste system. Untouchability, he argues, must have been necessitated by hygiene rather than social ostracism, as people from certain occupations (read lower castes) who were involved in cleaning, scavenging, leather works and the like, were kept at a distance.

Dumont [3], whose seminal work on the caste system in India is widely appreciated, has termed the hierarchical structure of the caste system as the 'essential principle' in Indian society. This principle is pervasive and encompasses all the castes. He has also proposed the concept of 'replication' of the dominant social order by those within the excluded communities at the bottom of the hierarchy as an attempt to gain consensus and acceptability in society.

Parkin [4] agrees with Dumont on the attributional approach to the caste system. Dumont says that the caste system is a system of ideas and values which is a formal comprehensible rational system. His analysis is based on a single principle of the opposition of pure and impure. This opposition underlies hierarchy which implies superiority of the pure and inferiority of impure. This principle also underlies separation, which means pure and impure must be kept separate.

Krishnan [5] explains that the traditional Indian (Hindu) concept of *varna*, initially placed in a religious-spiritual context, was presumably meant to highlight the division of labour within society. Krishnan [6] quotes from several ancient texts that *varna* is also mentioned as a criterion of deservingness in the distribution of ancestral property. In this context, Chousalkar [7] says that soon the *varna* concept got extended into political and social philosophy in the form of a caste hierarchy. This led to the stratification of society along dominant-subordinate societal dimensions, legitimizing the exploitative attitude of the so-called upper castes towards the so-called lower castes.

Many contemporary scholars argue that the 'oppressive' nature of the caste system in India was constructed by the British colonial regime [8]. In his famous address to the British Parliament in 1835, Lord Macaulay, then a member of the Supreme Council in India, declared that Indians are so proud of their culture that it would be impossible to defeat them with military might alone. If India was to be subjugated, it was imperative that Indians be made to feel ashamed of their culture. In propagating the divisive and oppressive view of the caste system, the British were able to create a rift in the society, exemplary of their divide and rule policy.

GENDER

Like backward caste people, women in India too have mostly been left out of the education system. This also includes women from the upper castes who always remained subservient to their fathers, brothers, and husbands. Some of them did enjoy the exposure to religious texts and teachings, but were never seen in the role of preachers. However, one does find acknowledgement of some important scholarly contributions by women in the past. The Rigveda specifically mentions the names of Lopamudra, the princess of Vidarbha, and Ghosha who were known as *brahmavadinis* or the 'expounders of the *Vedas'*. Gargi and Maitreyi were also philosopher poets, whose work in the Upanishads has been greatly appreciated.

Although the contributions of many such women is greatly appreciated by one and all, and some of them have been immortalized by their works, the fact remains that such examples are very far and few to find in the country's history. They do not represent the larger communities to which they belonged to in terms of education. For, barring them, the masses from which they came remained largely disconnected from the virtues of education. The situation worsened in the middle ages which were the darkest for women in India. These were the times when girl education was

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looked down upon, child marriages were a regular feature, girl or widow remarriage was banned, and the notorious system of *sati* – a woman taking to the funeral pyre of her dead husband – could be seen around. Some authors contribute these practices to the Muslim invasions that took place during these times, as women were vulnerable to abduction and rape. Unable to resist the invaders and protect their own women, society turned inwards, imposed heavy restrictions on women, and became more rigid and dogmatic. Whatever the cause, the effect definitely took a heavy toll on the psyche of Indian women.

Times started changing over a century ago when woman education was introduced amid much resistance in Pune in Maharashtra state, as two social reformers, Jyotiba Phule and his wife Savitribai, opened an all-girls school in the city in 1848. Woman education caught up since then and is now hardly resisted but for some rural pockets in the country. Symbolically, a woman has occupied the powerful position of prime minister of the country, and presently a woman is the president, while another woman heads the Lok Sabha which is the apex house of parliament. Indian women have also made their presence felt in business with many young entrepreneurs and managers like Kiran Mujumdar (Biocon) and Indra Nooyi (Pepsico) making their mark at the word stage, but that has not changed the stereotype of woman inferiority in academic and leadership roles. One of the reasons is the cultural impact of male dominance and the reluctance of that gender to let go of the power.

Gender is considered to be a sociocultural construct that is used to describe the characteristics we ascribe to people because of their being male or female. It does not refer to the biological differences between the two sexes, rather gender refers to the way people are socially constructed to behave and experience themselves in a society as ‘men’ or ‘women’. Organizations like colleges and universities are extensions of the larger society, and thus carry reflections of societal attitudes towards gender.

In the Indian context, caste and gender are two defining attributes for identity of the citizenry. There is hardly any space in public life where these two attributes do not govern behaviour. So overbearing is the impact of caste and gender that special ministries and commissions have been set up by the national and state governments to look into the grievances of the two socially deprived groups. But scars left by centuries of deprivation refuse to go away, and though discrimination is constitutionally disallowed, stereotypes of caste and gender persist in all walks of life. If discrimination is a sin, education perhaps is the only remedy. Hence it would be interesting to see if differences on caste and gender lines exist in higher education. The study aims to investigate the differences, if they exist, in teaching performance of college teachers on caste and gender lines. If significant differences persist between two socially backward and deprived groups despite similarity in eligibility and qualification, such differences can be attributed to psychosocial and sociocultural factors. The following hypotheses are formed to investigate the differences in teaching performance of college teachers:

H_1: There is a significant difference in the teaching performance of general caste teachers and backward caste teachers.

H_2: There is a significant difference in the teaching performance of male teachers and female teachers.

H_3: There is a significant interaction effect of caste and gender on the teaching performance of college teachers.

Method

The study was conducted in 9 urban colleges from different universities in Maharashtra state in India. One college from each university was randomly selected from among NAAC (National Assessment and Accreditation Council) accredited and ‘A’ rated colleges. NAAC is an autonomous body that accredits and grades colleges according to various academic parameters.

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DESIGN

A 2×2 factorial design was constituted to study the effect of caste and gender. Teachers were categorized as general and backward castes based on government notifications of caste types in the country. Thus the two caste types were general and backward, while gender classification was male and female.

MATERIAL

The Teacher Assessment Scale (TASC) was used to generate data on student feedback of teacher performance. The TASC is a standardized 20-item Likert-type scale that provides a Total Score as well as scores on 5 factors viz. Knowledge of Subject, Classroom Teaching and Communication, Sincerity, Attitude towards Students, and Facilitating Overall Development of Students. The five factors have been identified by factor analysis, and TASC has shown a very high test-retest reliability (0.96 with a three month interval), Cronbach's Alpha (0.77), and criterion validity based on Heads-of-departments' ratings of teachers on the five factors (between 0.67 to 0.89). TASC is developed by the author of this paper and is formally accepted by the state government of Maharashtra and is applied in various colleges in the state.

SAMPLE

Cluster sampling was employed by selecting 1 college from each of the nine universities in the state and then including all the teachers in each of the colleges. Thus 517 teachers were included in the study. These teachers belonged to the arts, commerce, languages, and science faculties, and each teacher was assessed by his/her final year students. In all, 10,256 students were included in the study. The distribution of the teachers in the sample is presented in the table below.

Table 1: Caste and gender-wise distribution of teachers in the sample

Gender	General caste	Backward caste	Total
Female	146	74	220
Male	170	127	297
Total	316	201	517

RESULTS

Two-way analysis of variance shows a significant main effect of caste on the teaching performance of college teachers from the two caste groups, with general caste teachers (M= 81.77, SD= 11.15) performing better than backward caste teachers (M= 75.19, SD= 12.12), $F(1,10252)= 876.01$, $p<0.01$. A significant main effect of gender on the teaching performance of college teachers is also observed, with male teachers (M=80.20, SD=11.80) performing better than female teachers (M=77.97, SD=12.07), $F(1, 10252)= 172.10$, $p<0.01$. A significant interaction of caste and gender on the teaching performance of college teachers is also observed, with male general caste teachers (M= 82.67, SD= 10.38) receiving the highest performance ratings followed by female general caste teachers (M= 80.66, SD= 11.93), male backward caste teachers (M= 76.72, SD= 12.76) and female backward caste teachers (M= 72.46, SD= 10.34), $F(1, 10252)= 22.22$, $p<0.01$. Results of two-way ANOVA for the five factors included in the TASC are described below.

F1: Knowledge of subject

A significant main effect of caste on the teaching performance of college teachers from the two caste groups is observed, with general caste teachers (M= 16.48, SD= 2.63) performing better than backward caste teachers (M= 15.59, SD= 3.11), $F(1,10252)= 223.62$, $p<0.01$. A significant main effect of gender on the teaching performance of college teachers is also observed, with male teachers (M=16.22, SD=2.81) performing better than female teachers (M=16.04, SD=2.91), $F(1, 10252)= 13.64$, $p<0.01$. A significant interaction of caste and gender on the teaching performance of college teachers is also observed, with male general caste teachers (M= 16.65, SD= 2.50) receiving the highest performance ratings followed by female general caste teachers (M= 16.28, SD= 2.76),

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male backward caste teachers (M= 15.62, SD= 3.09) and female backward caste teachers (M= 15.55, SD= 3.15), F(1, 10252)= 6.19, p<0.05.

F2: Classroom teaching and communication

A significant main effect of caste on the teaching performance of college teachers from the two caste groups is observed, with general caste teachers (M= 15.90, SD= 3.03) performing better than backward caste teachers (M= 13.01, SD= 3.56), F(1,10252)= 2288.57, p<0.01. A significant main effect of gender on the teaching performance of college teachers is also observed, with male teachers (M=15.16, SD=3.37) performing better than female teachers (M=14.30, SD=3.68), F(1, 10252)= 412.60, p<0.01. A significant interaction of caste and gender on the teaching performance of college teachers is also observed, with male general caste teachers (M= 16.13, SD= 2.79) receiving the highest performance ratings followed by female general caste teachers (M= 15.62, SD= 3.27), male backward caste teachers (M= 13.79, SD= 3.63) and female backward caste teachers (M= 11.61, SD= 2.96), F(1, 10252)= 158.79, p<0.01.

F3: Sincerity

A significant main effect of caste on the teaching performance of college teachers from the two caste groups is observed, with general caste teachers (M= 16.23, SD= 2.93) performing better than backward caste teachers (M= 15.41, SD= 3.33), F(1,10252)= 117.97, p<0.01. A significant main effect of gender on the teaching performance of college teachers is also observed, with female teachers (M=16.61, SD=3.10) performing better than male teachers (M=15.43, SD=3.03), F(1, 10252)= 334.53, p<0.01. A significant interaction of caste and gender on the teaching performance of college teachers is also observed, with female general caste teachers (M= 16.79, SD= 2.98) receiving the highest performance ratings followed by female backward caste teachers (M= 16.25, SD= 3.28), male general caste teachers (M= 15.78, SD= 2.81) and male backward caste teachers (M= 14.93, SD= 3.26), F(1, 10252)= 5.87, p<0.05.

F4: Attitude towards students

A significant main effect of caste on the teaching performance of college teachers from the two caste groups is observed, with general caste teachers (M= 16.29, SD= 2.81) performing better than backward caste teachers (M= 16.04, SD= 2.98), F(1,10252)= 26.92, p<0.01. A significant main effect of gender on the teaching performance of college teachers is also observed, with male teachers (M=16.21, SD=2.89) performing better than female teachers (M=16.18, SD=2.86), F(1, 10252)= 5.04, p<0.05. A significant interaction of caste and gender on the teaching performance of college teachers is also observed, with female general caste teachers (M= 16.37, SD= 2.74) receiving the highest performance ratings followed by male general caste teachers (M= 16.23, SD= 2.87), male backward caste teachers (M= 16.19, SD= 2.93) and female backward caste teachers (M= 15.78, SD= 3.05), F(1, 10252)= 20.02, p<0.01.

F5: Facilitating overall development of students

A significant main effect of caste on the teaching performance of college teachers from the two caste groups is observed, with general caste teachers (M= 16.86, SD= 2.96) performing better than backward caste teachers (M= 15.14, SD= 3.47), F(1,10252)= 1107.27, p<0.01. A significant main effect of gender on the teaching performance of college teachers is also observed, with male teachers (M=17.18, SD=2.71) performing better than female teachers (M=14.84, SD=3.49), F(1, 10252)= 1829.37, p<0.01. A significant interaction of caste and gender on the teaching performance of college teachers is also observed, with male general caste teachers (M= 17.89, SD= 2.24) receiving the highest performance ratings followed by male backward caste teachers (M= 16.19, SD= 3.00), female general caste teachers (M= 15.61, SD= 3.23) and female backward caste teachers (M= 13.26, SD= 3.47), F(1, 10252)= 28.29, p<0.01.

Table 2: Summary of analysis of variance of caste and gender for teaching performance of college teachers

Variable	Total score		F1		F2	
	F	Sig.	F	Sig.	F	Sig.
Caste	876.01	0.001**	223.62	0.001**	2288.57	0.001**

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Gender	172.10	0.001**	13.64	0.001**	412.60	0.001**
Caste*Gender	22.22	0.001**	6.19	0.01*	158.79	0.001**

Variable	F3		F4		F5	
	F	Sig.	F	Sig.	F	Sig.
Caste	117.97	0.001**	26.92	0.001**	1107.27	0.001**
Gender	334.53	0.001**	5.04	0.02*	1829.37	0.001**
Caste*Gender	5.87	0.02*	20.02	0.001**	28.29	0.001**

(*Significant at 0.05 level; ** significant at 0.01 level)

Table 3: Mean and SD values of teaching performance of college teachers

CASTE	GENDER	Total score		F1		F2	
		Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Backward	Female	72.46	10.34	15.55	3.15	11.61	2.96
	Male	76.72	12.76	15.62	3.09	13.79	3.63
	Total	75.19	12.12	15.59	3.11	13.01	3.56
General	Female	80.66	11.93	16.28	2.76	15.62	3.27
	Male	82.67	10.38	16.65	2.50	16.13	2.79
	Total	81.77	11.15	16.48	2.63	15.90	3.03
Total	Female	77.97	12.07	16.04	2.91	14.30	3.68
	Male	80.20	11.80	16.22	2.81	15.16	3.37
	Total	79.28	11.96	16.14	2.85	14.80	3.53

CASTE	GENDER	F3		F4		F5	
		Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Backward	F	16.25	3.28	15.78	3.05	13.26	3.47
	M	14.93	3.26	16.19	2.93	16.19	3.00
	Total	15.41	3.33	16.04	2.98	15.14	3.47
General	F	16.79	2.98	16.37	2.74	15.61	3.23
	M	15.78	2.81	16.23	2.87	17.89	2.24
	Total	16.23	2.93	16.29	2.81	16.86	2.96
Total	F	16.61	3.10	16.18	2.86	14.84	3.49
	M	15.43	3.03	16.21	2.89	17.18	2.71
	Total	15.92	3.11	16.20	2.88	16.21	3.27

DISCUSSION

Social scientists today are near unanimous in their position to discard the notion of in-born inferiority on the basis of gender, race, caste, and creed, when it comes to academic performance. Instead, they hold sociocultural factors among deprived sections of society to be responsible for overt differences in performance. There is a vast array of psycho-socio-economic factors that affects different strata of the populace differentially, and in turn plays a vital role in shaping attitudes and

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competencies. For instance, availability of opportunities, resources, and training in the Indian society is highly skewed against females and the backward castes. These, and other factors, are reflected in the lower performance rating of female teachers and those from backward castes.

Steele and Aronson [9] have attributed the lower performance of disadvantaged groups in society to stereotype threat. Although mostly studied in terms of gender, stereotype threat is seen to affect other domains like race, religion, and nationality too [10, 11, 12]. In fact, it affects any individual who sees himself or herself to be categorized as a member of a group that is stereotyped to underperform in a behavioural domain [13]. Like gender, caste is also one such conspicuous categorization in Indian society that has led to a divide on notions of superiority and inferiority. Given the structure and the fluid nature of social interactions in our society, it is not infrequently that females and backward caste teachers are made aware of their group membership, albeit subtly. Shih, Pittinsky, and Ambady [14] have shown that whenever performance in a context highlights one of several stereotype-linked social identities, behavior will tend to confirm the highlighted stereotype.

Some scholars regard stereotype threat to be a subset of social identity threat [15]. Social identity threat represents situations in which individuals feel the collectives to which they belong have been evaluated negatively. According to Tajfel and Turner [16, 17], social identity theory assumes that individuals strive to maintain a positive perception of their groups and collectives. When these positive perceptions are challenged, individuals experience a sense of threat that gets manifested as negative emotions or reinforcing behaviors that are in line with group norms [18]. Derks, Inzlicht, and Kang [19] argue that while stereotype threat evokes concerns of individuals about themselves, social identity threat in contrast evokes concerns in individuals about the perceptions of their groups and collectives.

In recent years, social psychologists have shown renewed interest in group dynamics and group processes that affect individual performance in organizations [20, 21, 22]. More emphasis is given on how the self is defined by group membership, and how group membership shapes social-cognitive processes that lead to group-affirmative behaviour [23, 24]. The social identity theory for instance, proposes that individuals tend to classify themselves and others into various social categories such as gender, race, and organizational membership. This allows people to use categories as schemas that leads to cognitive segregation, and hence brings stability to the self [25, 26, 27, 28].

One fallout of social identity on the basis of group categorization is that perceived weaknesses of the group stand the risk of being internalized by group members who strongly identify with the group. Therefore, while social identity brings stability and continuity to the self, stigmas and stereotypes associated with the group also become an inherent part of the social-cognitive paradigm. The risks of negative cognitive paradigm increase when stigmas, prejudices, and stereotypes associated with the social identity become prominent. Performance in the organization is then adversely affected [29, 30, 31, 32].

It has been demonstrated by Quinn and colleagues [33] that even if membership of a stereotyped group, for example mentally ill, is concealed, performance is immediately affected if a group member is privately reminded of the stereotype. For those groups defined by gender and caste, group membership is abundantly clear. As these groups have been traditionally left out of the education system in Indian society for hundreds of years, very strong stereotypes of females and backward castes exist that would explicitly arouse threat in teaching performance. Results of the study of are seen to confirm this position.

Another factor affecting performance of the disadvantaged groups could be. Domain identification is the degree to which a person values achievement in the domain. More important the level of achievement in the domain is to the person, more is the person bothered by implications of inferiority in that domain [13, 34, 35, 36]. Hence, people who value their performance most also undergo high performance-related stress, which in turn adversely affects performance. It is very easy to conceive that women and individuals from the lower castes have found an opportunity to

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assert themselves by affirming their prowess in knowledge and education by displaying a potent performance in teaching. This would bestow upon them a status and dignity that eluded them for centuries. Hence, they value their performance in the teaching domain, what social psychologists call domain identification, and unintentionally fall prey to stereotype threat.

Steele [37] has come across a paradoxical situation where he has found women and African-Americans facing frustration in identifying with academic success in school due to societal pressures. This is because these groups face resistance and achievement barriers in advanced qualitative areas in schooling due to sociocultural inhibitions. Hence, individuals belonging to these groups are not able to identify with academic success, which in turn led to lowered performance. This leads us to a situation where members of disadvantaged groups who are not able to identify with a domain underperform in the domain, while those who identify highly with the domain also underperform due to stereotype threat. Therefore, individuals at both ends of the spectrum underperform in domains as compared to their peers. Female teachers and those from the backward castes face this 'double-edged sword' situation that leads to their lowered performance.

Pinel [38, 39] mentions stigma consciousness as an important vulnerability factor that lowers performance. Stigma consciousness is the chronic awareness about one's stigmatized status, and constant expectations of lowered performance due to this awareness [40]. Those individuals, who have experienced prejudice and discrimination in the past due to their membership of a group, are seen to be persistently vigilant for biases [41, 42]. Even if discrimination has occurred in one particular situation, their lookout for biases is seen to extend across situations and stable over time. Such tendencies take the form of rigid social-cognitive schemas that induce continuous performance stress leading to underperformance [43, 44]. Given the male-dominated structure of our society, and our obsession with caste-identity, it is almost inevitable that women and individuals from backward castes would have faced discrimination and prejudice in their lives many times over. These experiences arouse stigma consciousness when performing in 'stigmatized' areas like academics, leading to underperformance of group members.

Mendonza-Denton and colleagues [45] have shown that group-based rejection sensitivity is responsible for arousing stereotype threat and diminishing performance. Rejection sensitivity is the heightened alertness of the individual to slightest cues of refutation or denial in context with group membership. When individuals get the slightest hint that their performance may be marginalized due to their group membership, like gender or caste, it sets in an alarm reaction that induces anxiety, thereby adversely affecting performance. Researchers [45] have shown that women and minority groups like Blacks and Latinos have higher rejection sensitivity in academic tasks. Individuals belonging to backward castes face a similar sensitivity as Blacks and Latinos with regard to academic performance, and hence along with women, have a higher risk of underperformance.

Aronson and Inzlicht [46] have shown that when individuals perceive that they will be assessed in line with their group membership and established stereotypes, it affects their knowledge and abilities. This lowers expectations of one's own performance due to an inaccurate judgement of personal abilities, poor preparation of task, setting of inappropriate goals, and fear of embarrassment following failure. This leads to misperceptions of situations that interferes with performance and undermines self-confidence. Individuals who undergo repeated exposure to prejudice and discrimination usually face recurring failures, consequently making them more susceptible underperformance.

Josephs, Newman, Brown and Beer [47] found that individuals who were more concerned about their status being lowered due to failure or inferior performance on a task, had higher performance stress, and consequently showed decreased performance. The researchers found that this effect was most pronounced in women and Back Americans, while the control group did not show significant differences. They attributed this to the fact that members of these two groups had a greater desire to establish themselves as respectable members in society and valued their self-esteem greatly. In the Indian context, women and backward caste individuals who have been kept out of the education system for centuries will have the greatest urge to assert themselves and be

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concerned about their status, as compared to upper caste men who have been traditionally regarded to be authorities in the domain.

The differences in performance for the caste groups are evident in all the sub-factors of teaching viz. knowledge in subject, classroom teaching and communication, sincerity, attitude towards students, and facilitating overall development of students. Teachers from the lower castes are rated significantly lower than those from the upper castes in all the sub-factors. These findings highlight the dominance of caste in day-to-day life and the extent to which it affects individual members in their work. It is worth noting that the educational qualifications of teachers from both the caste groups are equal, but still differences persist. The only lenience granted to teachers from the lower castes is that the cut-off percentage in eligibility tests is lowered by a few percentage points. At the same time it is important to note that many teachers from the backward categories cross the general cut-off line in examinations and are at par with the rest of their peers. Hence, this factor does not explain a broader phenomenon of lowered performance of backward caste teachers observed in a large sample across the state, and points to psycho-socio-cultural factors responsible for the occurrence.

Results obtained for gender differences in the five factors throw light on some interesting findings. Female teachers are seen to perform lower than male teachers in all factors but sincerity. This shows a pattern where female teachers underperform in areas where there is exposure of skills to public scrutiny, while they perform better in the area where performance is mostly self-regulated, that is sincerity. Statements in TASC on the factor sincerity related to issues such as the teacher going on time for the class and the teacher completing the prescribed syllabi. There is no mention of the 'quality' of teaching in this factor. So, a female teacher is probably more sincere in her attempts to reach out to students, but unfortunately falls short in achieving that due to the threat of exposure to public scrutiny. For example, women are rated lower on the factor facilitating overall development of students, as this factor includes topics like extracurricular activities and career guidance and counseling, both 'outgoing' areas that traditionally women are left out of. In most of the colleges, men are seen to occupy positions at the helm of student welfare related committees, that include guidance and placement, students council, NSS (National Service Scheme), sports, and the like that deal with extracurricular development. This also gives male teachers an advantage in terms of opportunity, as compared to female teachers, thus increasing their performance ratings. Another reason why male teachers are rated lower than female teachers on the factor sincerity could be that as male teachers are more involved in extracurricular and administrative responsibilities; it hampers their timely completion of syllabus. Female superiority in this domain can also be explained by the 'stereotype lift' hypothesis, as women are perceived to be more diligent and perseverant than men in general.

A study conducted by researchers at the national Institute of Advanced Studies in Bangalore covering 568 women scientists found that institutional barriers, lack of opportunities, and discriminatory policies are some of the most cited constraining factors responsible for discouraging women from pursuing study and research in science [48]. Women scientists in the study were found to devote the mandatory 8-10 hours on research every day, discarding the popular myth among male colleagues that women cannot give proper time to research after marriage and childbirth due to family responsibilities. Similar results have been reported by other researchers where male dominated attitudes are a constant barrier for women in scientific research and studies [49, 50]. Thus, psychosocial barriers rather than inherent deficiencies are seen to be detrimental to the progress and assertion of women in the work-place.

A significant interaction effect was observed between caste and gender, with male-general caste teachers receiving the highest ratings from students, followed by female-general caste teachers, and male-backward caste teachers. Female teachers from the backward castes received the lowest performance ratings from students. These results show that female teachers from the backward castes have to cope with two strong negative stereotypes of caste and gender, and the resulting emoto-cognitive consequence. On the other hand, male teachers from the general castes

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have a natural advantage over their peers. One obvious advantage is that males from the general castes enjoy dominance over the past many centuries. Culture and tradition has imbibed values of knowledge and leadership in these people. Hence, the stress on accumulation of knowledge as a means of survival provides them with an impetus to learn more, explore more, and to constantly try to maintain an edge over others (F1-Knowledge in Subject). Knowledge and leadership roles have expectedly bestowed them with better communication skills (F2-Classroom Teaching and Communication). Being leaders in knowledge and administration also equips the community with a better foresight, enabling them now to better facilitate the development of students (F5-Facilitating Overall Development of Students). The higher ratings of general category teachers on attitude towards students (F4) could be due to the fact that when students perceive them to be better in knowledge, communication, and in facilitating their development, it is only natural that such teachers would be looked upon with a positive attitude. Higher ratings on sincerity (F3) could also be due to this reason; however a halo effect cannot be ruled out.

A person's social identity also influences his or her behaviour. A caste and gender asked identity that is traditionally associated with knowledge and leadership more or less compels an individual to live up to it. On the other hand, for female teachers from the backward category, the present generation, or the one before, is the first to have made a foray in the field of education. Hence, their social identity as yet does not provide them with the proper framework towards academic excellence. Nevertheless, this anomaly may not exist for future generations.

Conclusion

The present study observed significant caste and gender differences in the teaching performance of college teachers as assessed by the students. In the caste groups, the teaching performance of traditionally backward caste teachers was found to be significantly lower than that of the general caste teachers, while the teaching performance of female teachers has been rated lower than male teachers. Given that all teachers were equally qualified for the job, psychosocial and sociocultural factors seem to be responsible for caste and gender differences in teaching performance. Indian society being traditionally orthodox, people from the backward castes and females have always been subjugated to a lower status. This has led to their virtual exclusion from the teaching-learning process for centuries, creating psychological scars that may take some to heal. There is a significant interaction effect as the impact of caste and gender discrimination is most pronounced for female backward caste teachers whose performance is found to be lowest.

Implications and Suggestions

The findings in the study have been submitted to the directorate of higher education and have been received well. Having identified weaknesses in the system, efforts have been made to reduce the imbalance among the teaching staff caused by psychosocial factors rather than academic merit. Colleges have been asked to set up local bodies that would impart counseling to teachers overall, and especially those who have been found to be weak. Colleges have also been instructed by the directorate to hire professional services like that of psychologists and counselors where necessary.

However, the larger problem of caste and gender divide in Indian society remains to be tackled. Government bodies, non-government organizations, and civil society need to create awareness among the masses through various welfare programs, campaigns, media, and legislation. One has to appreciate that things are moving in the right direction, and although a lot needs to be done, the situation has improved vastly in the last few decades. The government needs to instill confidence among the weaker sections of society through corrective measures. For instance, there is a proposal of reservation for women in the Indian parliament that is pending for many years. A consensus needs to be evolved and intentions need to be transformed into action.

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More than legislation however, it is the change in attitudes that needs to be depicted subtly in art, literature, film, television, and the broader media. It is said that life imitates art, and vice-versa. If people who have the power to influence the masses acknowledge this, and make efforts that are more meaningful than rhetorical, the perception of women and backward castes will change. For instance, films or television serials have the propensity to depict stereotypes more often than not. Newspapers carry more news of atrocities on the weaker citizens than on the achievements by some among them. Popular literature is yet to showcase women as successful leaders in organizations or as entrepreneurs. Attitudes are affected more by what we and hear around us than by legislation and reservations in jobs and education. On the contrary, legislative steps vitiate the atmosphere as deserving candidates believe that their rights are being violated. This is because the government policies are seen as populist measures rather than an effort towards social justice. There has to be an open debate and discussion on public platforms as to why support to the traditionally weaker sections is necessitated. Also, the fruits of corrective actions need to be put in front of the people and the benefits highlighted in the form of success stories that are seen as inspiring rather than an encroachment upon rights of others.

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