The Political is the Personal: The Social Psychology of Inclusion & Exclusion around Reservation in India

Sudha Shashwati[1]

PhD Research Scholar, Department of Psychology, University of Delhi, India

Abstract: *Reservation in India is a form of positive discrimination designed to improve the well-being of backward and under-represented communities defined primarily by their 'caste'. Accepting the numerous benefits of reservation in promoting the causes of the historically disadvantaged groups based on caste system in India, a question worth asking is if this 'positive discrimination' against the historically mainstream groups i.e. the general category, is not alienating the historically disadvantaged or the present reserved category psychologically, thus further escalating 'us' versus 'them' attitude and stereotyping. This study aims to understand inclusion and exclusion at different levels of explanation and as involving different aspects of social psychological processes with reservation as the frame of reference. Also under investigation in this study is the self-evaluation of one's social identity and the degree to which people are willing to accept and associate with those having different social characteristics. Mixed method approach was used to collect data and towards this end, both qualitative and quantitative methods were employed. Collective Self Esteem (CSE) scale (Luhtanen & Crocker, 1992) and the Inclusion of Others in the Self (IOS) scale (Aron, Aron, & Smollan, 1992) was administered on all 44 participants and semi-structured interview was conducted on 24 of them (general category participants). Results show that general category participants have a statistically significant higher Collective Self Esteem than the reserved category participants and psychological distance between the reserved category and general category participants is variable based on the kind of interaction in question. A number of themes emerged having to do with modes and dynamics of exclusion, social comparison and anticipation of loss, shift in views giving way to inclusion etc'. Questioning merit of reserved category students emerged as one of the most obvious manifestations of the exclusionary practices engaged in by the general category participants. The study has implications for intergroup relations, counselling and social policy formation.*

Keywords: *Reservation, Quota, Caste, Identity*

In order to make sense of who we are, we often need a frame of reference that clearly tells us who we are not. For instance, what a Hindu is supposed to be like is often made clear by citing what makes him different from a non-Hindu. Thus inclusion and exclusion are inherent in the very existence of social categories, making them a necessary evil and by definition powerful agents of exclusion. "Much of social life is anyways about whom we exclude, whom we include and how we all feel about it. The human passion for walls, ditches and fences is no accident- it is a manifestation of our need to manage inclusion and exclusion" (Abrams, Hogg & Marques, 2005; p.2).The need to belong is fundamental to human life. Hence, undoubtedly exclusion brings with it uneasiness.

To a great extent exclusion is determined by the dynamics of identity in its negotiation from personal identity to social identity- the conditions in which people come to see themselves more as the interchangeable exemplars of a social category than as unique personalities defined by their differences from others. A social identity is the portion of an individual's self-concept derived from perceived membership in a relevant social group (Hogg & Vaughn, 2002) as against personal identity which refers to the idiosyncratic things that make a person unique.

Kakar (1996) affirms that in early childhood the social identity of every Indian is grounded in traditional religious identifications. Caste being a religious handout, it is not difficult to guess why the persistence of the caste mind is a reality even in the 21st century. Furthermore, one of the aspects of "Indian-ness" Kakar (2007) examines in his book 'The Indians: Portrait of a People' is the subsuming of individual identity to group interests. This has implications in responses to social exclusion of the group, even when personally one has not been discriminated against.

1. RESEARCH AND PRACTICES IN INCLUSION AND EXCLUSION

Interest in patterns of social representation and strategies for social inclusion has exploded both in India and around the world. Amartya Sen (2000) draws attention to various dimensions of social exclusion. He distinguishes between situations where some people are kept out (unfavorable exclusion) and others where they are included on

unfavorable terms (unfavorable inclusion). He further differentiates between active and passive exclusion; the former works by fostering exclusion through deliberate discriminatory policy intervention; the latter works through social processes like the caste system. Exclusion leads to the denial of economic opportunities and consequent powerlessness. Importantly, low income, low merit, or low productivity are not the causes but the consequences of such exclusion (Hasan, 2009).

"Affirmative action policies to increase access to education and employment have been at the core of public policies towards historically disadvantaged or non-dominant groups in both developed and developing countries (Mcharg& Nicolson, 2006; Weisskopf, 2004; Yuill, 2006). According to Revankar (1971), among developing countries, India has had perhaps the longest histories of affirmative action to counter caste and ethnic discrimination" (Gang, Sen & Yun, 2008; p.1). Importantly, Article 46 of the 1950 Constitution pronounces "*The State shall promote with special care the educational and economic interests of the weaker sections of the people, and, in particular, of the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes, and shall protect them from social injustice and all forms of exploitation.*"

2. RESERVATION

Legal aspects. The Supreme Court of India (1984) has ruled that the fundamental right to equality is compatible with special benefits for the disadvantaged, even if they are defined in caste terms. According to Pandey (2008) "reservation and equality are two sides of the same coin and if equality is the aim then reservation is the best possible way to reach that aim" (p.75). Yet there is significant disenchantment in the mainstream population i.e. the general category and a perception of disadvantage and deprivation at their cost. Many citizens belonging to the perceived upper classes find the reservation policy of the government biased and oppose it, because they feel that it infringes their right to equality. More so, not everyone who comes from the underprivileged communities supports the system, the main argument being that it makes one feel disadvantaged. This makes the reservation system a controversial subject matter.

The main objective of the Indian reservation system is to increase the opportunities for enhanced social and educational status (in the sense better than the previous—until it becomes equal to that enjoyed by an average member of other communities) of the underprivileged communities and, thus, enable them to take their rightful place in the mainstream of Indian society.

A number of studies have been conducted on positive discrimination and in particular on reservation policies in India. Weiskopff(2004) conducted a review of the performance of SCs and STs in higher education and concluded that reservations tend to benefit a 'creamy layer' of SC and ST students. Mehta (2004) contended that the consequences of reservation- in terms of merit being diluted- are not as catastrophic as its critics fear. Deshpande (2006), in the other direction, ruled that reservations in institutes of higher education may not ideally ensure the production of high quality research and knowledge. Raina (2006) described the protests against reservation under the banner of "youth for equality" as a continuance of entrenched social privilege cloaked as merit and a denial of equality to the communities that comprise some 80 per cent of India's population. Gang, Sen and Yun (2008) examined why Other Backward Classes (OBCs) have lower living standards, as measured by per capita household consumption expenditures, relative to the mainstream population, and whether those reasons are similar to those observed for SC and ST. They found that while the causes of the living standard gap for the OBC are broadly similar to those for the SC and ST, the role of educational attainment in explaining the gap is higher in importance for the OBCs.

Heyer and Jalal (2009) reviewed the achievements of reservation in India, both political and economic, and highlighted their limited nature. Given these outcomes, however limited, they concluded that programmes of positive discrimination cannot be considered redundant, even six decades after their inception, as many had hoped they would be. Bertrand et al. (2010) studied the labour market outcomes of low castes that benefited from positive discrimination to enter universities and found that low castes improve their income by going to the university but less than high castes student. Cassan (2011), using a quasi-natural experiment, found that positive discrimination in education did not have an impact on the education level of scheduled castes. Howard and Prakash (2012), studying reservation in public jobs, found that employment quotas change the occupational choices of SCs and STs. Deshpande (2013) has argued that "the result of caste based reservation in India is that the privileged upper castes

are enabled to think of themselves as casteless, while the non-privileged lower castes are forced to intensify their caste identities. This asymmetrical division has truncated the effective meaning of caste to lower caste, thus leaving the upper castes free to monopolise the general category by posing as casteless citizens" (p.32).

3. PSYCHOLOGICAL COSTS OF RESERVATION

Todman (2004) suggests that social exclusion refers to processes in which individuals and entire communities of people are systematically blocked from rights, opportunities and resources (e.g. housing, employment, healthcare, civic engagement, democratic participation) that are normally available to members of society and which are key to social integration.

As agents of creating exclusion and maintaining the status quo, we have stereotypes, prejudice and discrimination. These are understood as related but different concepts (Fiske, 1998).Early studies believed that stereotypes were only used by rigid, repressed, and authoritarian people. This idea has been overturned by more recent studies that suggested that stereotypes are commonplace. Stereotypes are said to be collective group beliefs, meaning that people who belong to the same social group share the same set of stereotypes (Tajfel, 1981). In this tripartite view of intergroup attitudes, Denmark (2010) and Fiske (1998) argue, stereotypes reflect expectations and beliefs about the characteristics of members of groups perceived as different from one's own, prejudice represents the emotional response, and discrimination refers to actions. Being recipient of reservation carries with it a certain stigma and a set of stereotypes related to competence which may result in discrimination or more specifically exclusion, exploring which is one of the chief objectives of the present study. In this context, stigma can be defined as "the disutility arising from the participation in a welfare program per se (Moffitt, 1983). According to Besley & Coate (1992) this disutility comes from a psychological cost which is due to negative self-images because of the participation, or from negative social attitudes towards welfare claimants" (Gille, 2012; p.2).

There is a positive correlation between an individual's self-esteem and their ascribed status; for this purpose, self-esteem is defined as a liking and respect for oneself which has its basis in reality. A negative image of oneself among individuals with lower ascribed statuses is the result of the internalization of the expectations that others have of them and the treatment that they receive based on those statuses. The juxtaposition of their own value systems against the larger society's view often leaves individuals of a lower status with low self-esteem without regard to the individual's actual capabilities. A negative self-image may stifle an individual's efforts to acquire a certain achieved status; this illustrates how a low ascribed status can result in a low achieved status (Jacques &Chason, 1977).

Social exclusion robs people of their confidence and this loss adversely affects their capacity to function effectively. One can think of a person's achievement as depending on his effort ability and confidence. So, given a level of effort and ability, higher levels of confidence will be associated with higher levels of achievement. Furthermore, one can think of a confidence-achievement spiral: increased confidence lead to greater achievement and greater achievement also leads to increased confidence (Booroah & Iyer, 2005). "Confidence in oneself, through one's interaction with the social environment, is central to achievement. We may not be able to define confidence precisely but we know it when we have it and also when we lack it. In a 'just' society, no group should unfairly suffer from a 'confidence deficit' or enjoy a 'confidence surplus'' (Booroah, 2010, p.13). While we can negotiate economic and political marginalization through the distribution of tangible resources, issues of cultural marginalization are more difficult to deal with, which require the revaluation of devalued identities.

People have a certain view of themselves and the kind of minimum treatment that is due to them. "When this is denied and others' treatment of them falls below their expectations, their self-respect is violated. When an individual's self-respect is violated, he feels hurt or pained. The pain is not narrowly psychological in nature as in the case of frustrated desires but moral in nature in the sense that it arises from the violation of what is due to him/her and diminishes him/her as a person" (Parekh, 2009; p.29).

Organized or institutionalized humiliation exists when social institutions and practices embody disrespect for, and systematically violate the self-respect of groups of individuals. Societies where it could be said to exist are ones in which inequalities are ascriptive i.e. based on colour of skin, race, birth, ethnicity etc. and hence unalterable or

quasi-ascriptive i.e. based on religion, language etc. and alterable only by the greatest of efforts or even at the cost of one's pride and self-respect. Inequalities in such societies are interlocked and no amount of superior achievement in one area overcomes or compensates for basic inequality; humiliation is built into their very structure (Parekh, 2009). Caste based reservation being one such practice that makes caste identity important, could also be said to be an example of institutionalized humiliation for some, which is one of the issues the present study endeavours to explore.

In a country like India, the problem is double pronged due to both its deeply entrenched inequality and vertical collectivism, which are institutionalized by the caste system. India is undeniably one of the world's most unequal societies- a hierarchical society characterized by unprecedented social inequality, deprivation and oppression (Hasan, 2009).All these issues make up an interesting concoction in the Indian setting, quite unlike in any other place in the world, primarily due to its unique social plurality and also due to its history of perpetuating discrimination based on the social category of caste. This makes for a good area to explore in the metropolitan youth. Also keeping in mind that the whole caste structure has been challenged socially, legally and politically in the last two decades and new sparks of revolt have been fanned by various social forces, politically motivated or otherwise, it would be interesting to find out how far this simmering has spread into the deep recesses of the psyche. Caste per se, however, is not the focus of the study; rather it is caste based reservation which is the focus of the study. Thus, this study aims to gather narratives around reservation from youth in order to understand inclusion and exclusion at different levels of explanation and as involving different aspects of social psychological processes. Also under investigation in this study is the self-evaluation of one's social identity and the degree to which people are willing to accept and associate with those having a different social identity, in this case one's category with respect to reservation.

4. METHOD

To obtain an appropriate range of participants, quota sampling was done with the sample being stratified by 'category' and gender. Criteria for selection of the sample were based upon guidelines set by the Indian government. Sampling was guided by the proportion of seats which are reserved, by the Government of India, in central government funded higher education institutions – namely, 27% for Other Backward classes (OBCs), 15% for Scheduled Castes (SCs) and 7 for Scheduled Tribes (STs), out of the 49% seats reserved in total (Heyer & Jalal, 2009).

44 participants were selected on the basis of this categorization, all belonging to the age group 18-25 years, across both the genders. The sample consisted of students studying in the University of Delhi. The number of 44 participants was arrived at by keeping the minimum number of participants in each sub-group or stratum as 2 and adhering to the proportions decreed by the constitutional amendment in 1982 for SCs and STs and that in 2006 for OBCs, as outlined above. Males and females were accorded equal representation. It is to be noted that 61 participants were approached and the final sample consisted of 44 in number.

Demographic Profile of the Participants

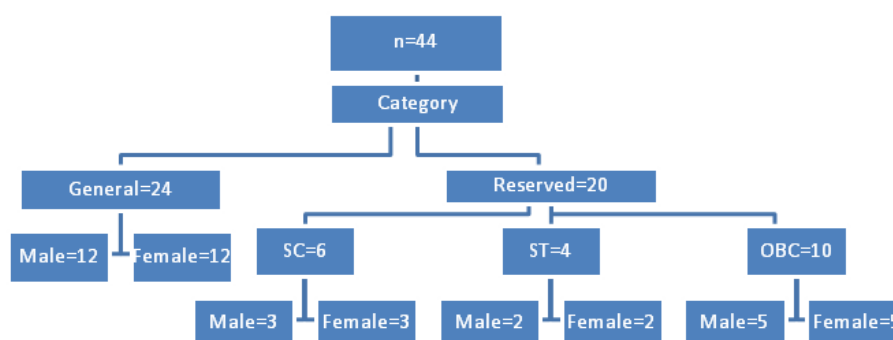The distribution of sample as per this design is presented in Fig. 1.

Figure.1. *Distribution of sample according to General and Reserved category as per Government regulations*

Reservation being an issue that has a direct impact on students' getting admission in colleges and their further career prospects, the age group was kept 18-25 years which took into its fold under-graduate, graduate and post graduate students. Mean age of male participants was 20.3 years and that of females was 20.1 years.Reported socio-economic status (SES) by the participants ranged from 1, 20,000-2,40,000 per annum (27% of the sample) to 7,20,000 and above per annum (14% of the sample). The average annual income was found to be Rs. 4, 35,790.

Delhi University being a conglomeration of students from all over India, sufficient heterogeneity was ensured in the sample as shown in Fig. 2; there were participants from rural, semi-urban and urban areas from different states of the country namely, Andhra Pradesh, Assam, Bihar, Chattisgarh, Delhi, Gujarat, Haryana, Jammu & Kashmir, Jharkhand, Manipur, Odisha, Rajasthan, TamilNadu, Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal..
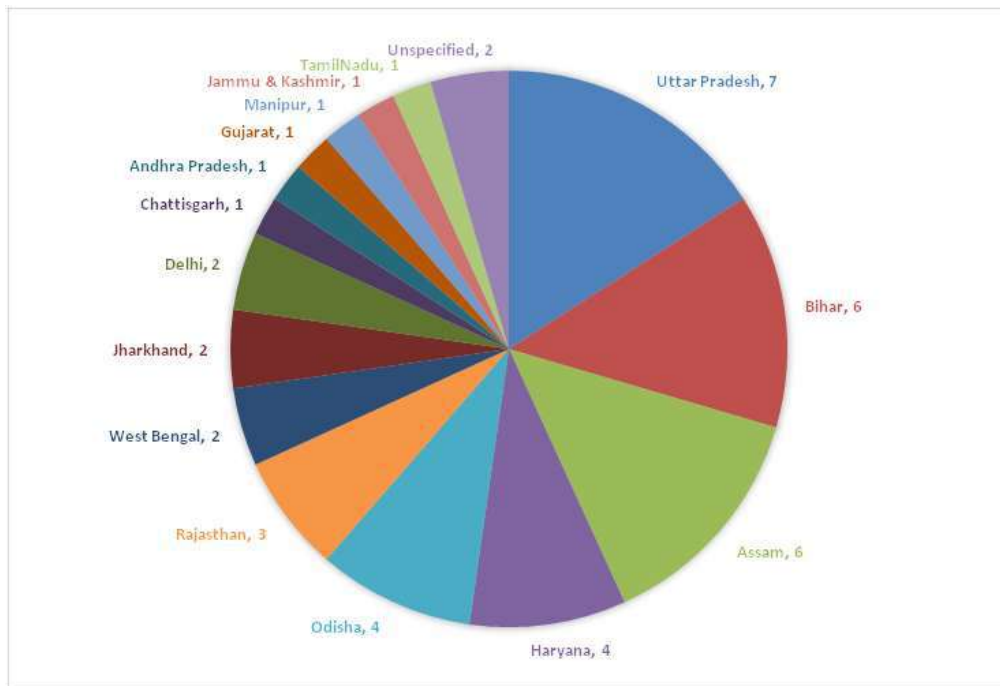

Figure.2. *Distribution of sample according to state of domicile*

Measures

Mixed method approach was used to collect data. Making use of both quantitative and qualitative data leads to methodological pluralism which results in richer data. The following measures were utilised:

1. Collective Self Esteem scale:The measure of collective self-esteem was important in order to discover how the participants felt about their group memberships. For this, the Collective Self Esteem (CSE) scale byLuhtanen and Crocker (1992) was selected. This 7 point scale has 16 items- 4 items each for 4 sub-scales: Membership self-esteem (judgement of personal worthiness as a member of one's social group), Private collective self-esteem (personal judgement of how good one's social group is), Public collective self-esteem (judgement of how other people evaluate one's social group) and Importance to identity (importance of one's social group membership to one's self concept).

2. Inclusion of Others in the Self (IOS) scale:Measuring the psychological distance amongst the participants from various categories was one of the research concerns. The Inclusion of Others in the Self (IOS) scale (Aron, Aron, & Smollan, 1992) allows measurement of the social and psychological distance. It is designed to tap the extent to which the participant is interconnected with the other person of interest. The IOS scale has seven Venn diagrams of two same size circles, one circle indicating the self and the other circle representing the other. In the first picture, the two circles are adjacent to each other. From the second picture to the seventh picture, the degree of overlap progresses linearly. The IOS scale had four questions asking participants to select, among seven diagrams of same size circles, a picture which best describes a) the participant's relationship with his/her category b) the

participant's relationship with categories mentioned c) the relationship of the participant's category with the categories mentioned d) behaviour/actions with people from the other category viz. General and Reserved (e.g. eating, marriage, room sharing, being close friends, participating in a peaceful demonstration for their category's cause, participating in an agitation against authorities for their category's cause). These aspects were taken up after these emerged from a pilot study comprising of a few semi-structured interviews with participants.

3. Semi Structured Interview schedule:The nature of the study demanded rich descriptive data which could be best obtained through an interview. A semi structured interview schedule was prepared to obtain information about the participant's experiences that had occurred by virtue of belonging to their 'category' in the context of reservation.Rapport formation was given due importance and the participants were given time to open up before the sensitive questions followed. Interviews were held with the general category students only (24), whereas the previous two measures were employed with all the participants irrespective of their category.

Procedure

Data was collected in three phases:

a) *Instructions and Precautions*: First, a consent form was filled along with a demographic profile sheet. Age, educational qualification of self and parents, profession of parents, native place, language spoken at home, medium of instruction in school, annual income of family, religion and category were the details asked in the demographics profile. It was made clear that this information would be kept confidential. The participants were given clear instructions with respect to all three measures one by one. It was made sure that all their doubts and queries were cleared. They were requested to give free and frank responses and it was made clear that no response was right or wrong. Total confidentiality was assured and instead of name, only the initials of each participant were recorded.

b) *Semi-structured Interview*: The participants were interviewed about their family background, how reservation had affected them and their experiences with people from the 'other' category. Each interview, on an average, took 25-30 minutes, which was recorded for accuracy, future coding and detailed analysis.

c) *CSE and Inclusion of Other in Self tests*- Both the questionnaires were given to the participants to be answered. It was made sure that each question was answered by the participant. Any queries put forth by the participants were resolved and maximum care was taken that no items were left out. It took 10-12 minutes on an average to fill both the questionnaires.

5. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results show that general category participants have a statistically significant higher Collective Self Esteem than the reserved category participants (Table 1 and Figure 1). The general category participants also evaluated in-group members as fairer and more competent in the interviews. Be it because of their judgement of their personal worthiness as a member of their group (Membership self-esteem), their personal judgement of how good their group is (Private collective self-esteem), judgement of how other people evaluate their group (Public collective self-esteem) or importance of their social group membership to their self-concept (Importance to identity), the general category participants seem to be more confident about their esteemed social identity (Table 1) which would make them search for more opportunities to enhance their collective self-esteem.

Table 1: *Mean and Standard Deviation Scores of Men (M) and Women (W) Participants for the Four Sub-scales in Collective Self Esteem scale*

Indices	Mean						Standard Deviation					
	General			Reserved			General			Reserved		
	M	W	Total	M	W	Total	M	W	Total	M	W	Total
MSE	5.66	5.62	5.54	5.13	5.02	4.83	0.34	0.43	0.27	0.38	0.38	0.31
Private CSE	5.64	5.72	5.68	4.92	5.13	5.02	0.11	0.18	0.05	0.14	0.57	0.10
Public CSE	5.58	5.22	5.37	4.15	3.96	4.07	0.46	0.19	0.21	0.24	0.47	0.34
Imp. to Id.	4.78	4.08	4.43	3.31	3.44	3.37	0.53	0.33	0.42	0.43	0.59	0.42

MSE= Membership Self Esteem; Private CSE= Private Collective Self Esteem; Public CSE= Public Collective Self Esteem; Imp. to Id.= Importance to Identity
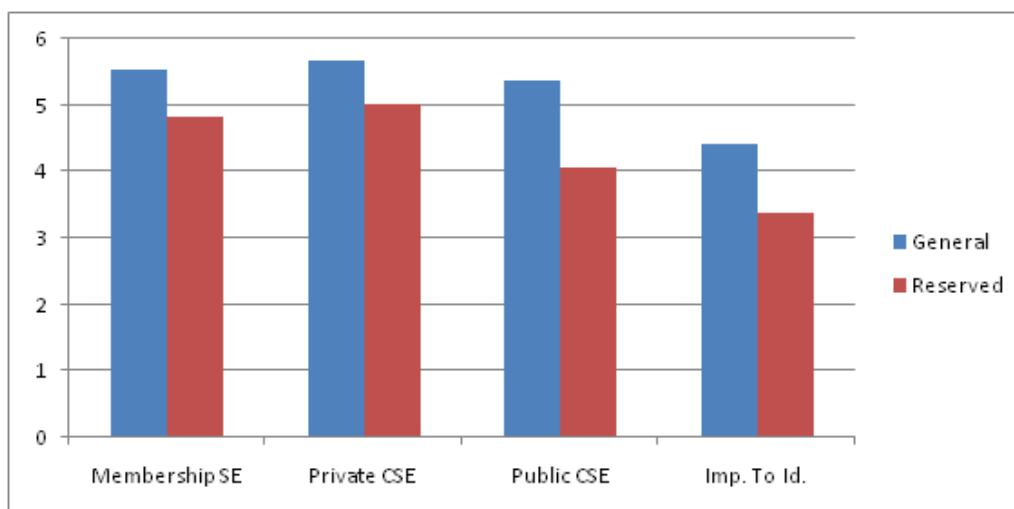
Figure. 3. *Mean Scores of the Four Sub-scales of Collective Self Esteem Scale*

It can be observed that the mean scores are higher for the general category than that for the reserved category sample in all four sub-scales of CSE scale.The relationship of the four sub-scales of the CSE with gender and category was analyzed using two-way analysis of variance. Result of the analysis is presented in Table 2. In the general category, women participants scored higher on 'Private CSE' than the men participants; for the rest of the subscales, the scores of men participants were higher. In the reserved category, women participants scored higher than men participants on 'Private CSE' and 'Importance to Identity'.

Table 2. *The Relationship of the Four Subscales of the Collective Self Esteem Scale with Gender and Category*

Source of Variation	Subscale of CSE scale	df	F	P
	Membership SE	1	0.13	>0.05
	Private CSE	1	0.04	>0.05
Gender	Public CSE	1	0.19	>0.05
	Importance to Identity	1	0.27	>0.05
	Membership SE	1	3.41	>0.05
	Private CSE	1	4.14*	<0.05
Category	Public CSE	1	15.40**	<0.05
	Importance to Identity	1	4.81*	<0.05
	Membership SE	1	0.05	>0.05
	Private CSE	1	0.00	>0.05
Gender*Category	Public CSE	1	0.19	>0.05
	Importance to Identity	1	0.88	>0.05

*p< .05; **p< .01

Table 2 shows that the main effects of category are statistically significant on Private CSE {F (1, 42) = 4.14; p>0.05}, Public CSE {F (1, 42) = 15.40} and Importance to Identity {F (1, 42) = 0.88}.

The relationship of the five indices under dimensions of the IOS scale with gender and category was analyzed using one-way ANOVA. The main effect of category {F (1, 42) = 14.07; p<0.5, p<0.1} was found to be statistically significant on the index 'Your category with General Category' of Inclusion of Other in Self (IOS) scale. The effects of category were not significant on any other index; nor were the effects of gender and that of the interaction between gender and category. This means that the general and the reserved category differ in terms of a sense of interconnectedness between their category and the general category.

Table 5 presents the Mean and Standard Deviation scores of men (M) and women (W) participants for 6 indices under 'behaviour/ actions with people from the other category' in the IOS scale. As mentioned earlier, social distance was attempted to be captured by measuring interconnectedness between the two categories i.e. general and reserved. "Within diverse societies, people from different groups experience connection and solidarity in some

social situations, and distance and alienation from members of different groups in other situations. The concept of social distance was developed to advance understanding of processes of acceptance and estrangement between groups of people in cities where people who belong to different groups come into regular contact with one another" (Hodgets & Stolte, 2013). Social distance refers to the extent to which people experience a sense of familiarity (nearness and intimacy) or unfamiliarity (farness and difference) between themselves and people belonging to different social, ethnic, occupational and religious groups from their own. Social distance is not a static cognitive attribute of acceptance. People can shift and change their sense of affinity or dissonance with particular groups across different contexts (Hodgets&Stolte, 2013) as can be seen in Table 5, which documents social distance variations with respect to actions/behaviours one engages in.In behaviours like 'eating together', 'sharing a room' and 'being close friends', the social distance was found to be far less than in activities like 'marriage', 'participating in a peaceful demonstration for their category's cause' and 'participating in an agitation against authorities for their category's cause'.

Table 5: *Mean and Standard Deviation Scores of Men and Women Participants for Six Indices under the Fourth Dimension in the Inclusion of Others in Self (IOS) Scale i.e. Behaviour/ Actionswith People from the Other Category.*

Indices	Mean						Standard Deviation					
	General			Reserved			General			Reserved		
	M	W	Total	M	W	Total	M	W	Total	M	W	Total
Eating together	4.91	5.75	5.33	5	5.55	5.25	1.59	1.23	1.52	1.95	1.01	1.64
Marriage	4.50	2.5	3.5	4	4	4	1.69	1.94	2.10	1.70	2.05	1.92
Sharing a Room	4.50	5.5	5	4.45	5.44	4.90	1.20	0.76	1.15	2.19	1.79	2.12
Being close Friends	5	5.83	5.41	5.54	5.55	5.55	1.41	0.80	1.25	1.62	1.74	1.72
Peaceful demonstration	4	4.25	4.12	3.63	4.33	3.95	1.41	1.53	1.51	1.82	1.73	1.86
Agitation against the authorities	3.58	2.91	3.25	3.72	3.44	3.60	1.33	1.32	1.39	2.13	1.62	1.96

The interview method was used to gather narratives on general category participants' contact/experience with reservation.Upon thematic analysis, a number of themes emerged.

Emotions, almost all reported as strong and negative, seemed to run high for the participants whenever the salience of 'reservation' was in some way, high in the environment. Social comparison with the 'other' was pre-dominant. There was seen to be high insecurity among the participants due to the fear of the general category being overthrown and reduced to a minority as well as a sense of superiority because of not needing the 'crutches' of quota to progress. A sense of perceived deprivation was also pre-dominant in the narratives of the general category participants. This deprivation was seen to have a temporal component as it was experienced only after having been exposed to discussions expressing fear of being at a loss in future due to reservation, and not before, say during school days, when this exposure was lacking. Also, the participants were very sure that someday they were going to experience some loss due to reservation even though they had not missed out on a seat by then- the anticipation of loss was certain.

Another theme was exclusion which had various reasons, channels and layers. In reasons of exclusion i.e. 'the cognitive/ motivational underpinnings of excluding', lack of merit figured as the ultimate barrier. The subthemes identified under this were 'personal experience' and 'disenchantment with the present system'. Channels of exclusion were seen to be as either overt or covert. Covert exclusion was expressed as 'discounting of merit'. Overt exclusion was expressed as firstly 'career related and behaviour wise' and secondly as 'not considering them as prospective marriage partners'. As layers of exclusion were explored, exclusion was seen to be consensual by the general category. The subthemes identified were 'inferiority complex on part of the reserved category' participants either 'due to less percentage of marks' or 'due to being cultural misfits', asperceived by the general category students.

The personal narratives of the participants reflect experiences of having engaged in some form of discriminatory behaviour and having 'excluded' peers from the reserved category in some or the other form though discounting merit was the most prevalent and was manifested in the most extreme form. Many participants underwent shift in views towards the concept of reservation, towards the recognition of merit in the reserved category students and changed their behaviour towards 'them' while others did not. The contradictions that initiated the transition period

occurred in the form of a personal connection or friendship with an out-group member, or through significant social events or information presented in books, media, and formal education ("..having lived here since the last two years my perception seems to have changed. Maybe after interacting, making friends with the North-Eastern girls, getting to know their lifestyle, I realised all those things… you cannot expect everybody or even one person to get marks like this. We have so many facilities- teachers, coaching everything. Financially helping them won't solve it", "In first year there was a lot of disdain towards them. There was a drastic change after coming into second year. I think it's not just me. Everybody's perception I guess eventually changes. It is just that in first year one usually has faced the downside of reservation personally. You can't help but be frustrated. But gradually with being around them all the time in college, you can't be like I'll never talk to anyone from the reserved category. You start giving it a thought and that change in perception comes eventually"- P4.F.GEN)

The last theme was inclusion, which was found to be multilayered. The various subthemes were 'inclusion has to be consensual', 'at peace with reservation' and 'acceptance of merit'. Under acceptance of merit, three sub-themes were identified: 'high level of acceptance', 'accepting only as exceptions' and 'perception of lack of motivation.'

For an overwhelming majority, the shift in views came about largely as a result of two interrelated processes: Education/self-exploration and Contact with the Out-group Members. The latter is supported by the contact hypothesis (Allport, 1954) which proposes that bringing members of different groups into contact with one another will reduce any preexisting prejudice between them and result in more positive intergroup attitudes and change in stereotypes. Having the opportunity to communicate with members of the reserved category, many participants reported being able to understand and appreciate the need for reservation. As a result of this new appreciation and understanding, prejudice gradually diminished (Whitley & Kite, 2010). Such reduction of prejudice through intergroup contact is best explained as the 're-conceptualization of group categories'. Prejudice, be it regarding insufficient justifications for reservation or the lack of merit in the reserved category peers, could be a direct result of generalizations and over-simplifications made about the entire out-group based on incomplete or mistaken information and this was gradually reduced as the participants gain more information about the out-group.

Rothbart and John (1985) describe belief change through contact as "an example of the general cognitive process by which attributes of category members modify category attributes" (p. 82). An individual's beliefs can be modified by that person coming into contact with a culturally distinct category member and subsequently modifying or elaborating the beliefs about the category as a whole. This is exactly what was reported by a number of participants, some of whom however went on to tag those culturally distinct category members as exceptions ("There are a lot of friends in my list, like bestest of friends who are from the reserved category and I never have that kind of feeling towards them. The point is, from my personal experiences, they are fabulous… in terms of education, they are much better than most of the general category people I have ever met"- P11.F.GEN)

Meanwhile, contact with the out-group does not seem to bring about positive attitude change for everyone rather often worsens relations between the groups. All port (1954) proposed a number of conditions that should be met before contact could be expected to affect positive change viz. interactions of equal status participants cooperating over common goals in a social climate in which there is clear institutional support for integration policies. Even for those participants who underwent a shift in views regarding the attributes of reserved category peers and the reservation system in general, a tussle remained which could be best regarded as a discord between seeing a person as a 'person' and as a 'member of the out-group' that reflected in a tussle between accepting merit and discounting merit. Thereby these results indicate that such conflict between interpersonal behavior and intergroup behavior is what makes the inclusion-exclusion process highly dynamic.This was also reflected in differences in interconnectedness across various contexts as explored through measurement of psychological distance.

6. CONCLUSION

The present study highlights how simple categorization can have a deep impact on an individual's psyche. To prevent policies being unsuccessful, in terms of further marginalizing a certain group of individuals instead of integrating them into the mainstream, research needs to be conducted and incorporated into suggestions for policy making. Identity is a valid frame of reference to investigate a social welfare policy like reservation and we need to, as academicians and researchers, look beyond just its pros and cons and how successful it has been in attaining its objectives.

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AUTHOR'S BIOGRAPHY

Miss Sudha Shashwati is a PhD research scholar in the Department of Psychology at University of Delhi. She graduated from University of Delhi, where she was the gold medalist for her batch, and went on to do her Master's from Tata Institute of Social Sciences in Mumbai where she specialised in Clinical Psychology. Her doctoral work is in the area of gender and culture. She conducts workshops for school students, school and college teachers, parents, and organisations, and has her private practice as a counsellor. She is an avid reader and a passionate advocate for issues of gender and mental health. She enjoys conversations on presence, vulnerability and social justice. She can be reached at sudha10092@gmail.com