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RESEARCH ARTICLE

SOCIAL PERCEPTION TOWARDS CASTE IDENTITY AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT: AN ANALYTICAL STUDY OF DELHI

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Abstract

Environmental pollution is known as one of the biggest challenges for human development. That's why the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) have also focused on reducing environmental pollution. However, harmful chemicals and air, water and land pollution and contamination have been targeted to reduce the diseases and mortality rate by 2030. Especially in India, the road sweepers and scavengers have contributed a lot in reducing the pollution rate. They have performed a lot in cleaning up the dirt, not only from garbage to sanitizing the roads; they contributed when the whole world, even India was fighting with the Covid-19 pandemic but it was very unfortunate that their caste identity has become a stigma on their head which becomes the matter of inclusion of caste in common congregation. They have been suffered the most for the centuries on the basis of the same. Even after doing so much service to the society, oppression with this community has not been reduced because of the constructed perception of the society that these people are considered inferior and polluted. Therefore, this paper tries to explore the real factors behind this social perception towards caste identity and examine the role of lower caste community in sustainable development by cleaning the city especially in Delhi during the pandemic Covid-19.

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Introduction:-

The tempo of globalization, industrialization, and urbanization has forged ahead with environmental concerns in developing countries. Over the past few decades, the natural resources have depleted remarkably resulting in the rapid growth of economic and social transformation. The continuously accelerated changes and environmental degradation emerged as a risk factor for sustainable development which might be called the foundation for long-term economic development. Spontaneously environmental pollution came out in the front of the realm as a global problem (Govind, 1989). Especially in developing countries like India, the impact of environmental pollution has been more rigorous (Nazeer et al., 2016). It became a major cause of ill health, increasing disabilities, and mortality rate annually (Briggs, 2003). That's why the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) became a historic mark and remarkable method of global mobilization to achieve sustainable solutions worldwide. Since 2000, the MDGs have focused on developing countries to reduce extreme poverty. But the agenda of only poverty reduction became a noticeable factor of global environmental change that has pushed the global population into a new geological era—the anthropocentric age (Steffen et al., 2011).

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For these MDGs, targets have been combined with Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) updated and extended for 2030, by producing six goals such as prosperous lives and livelihoods, universal clean energy, healthy and productive ecosystems, sustainable food security, sustainable water security and governance for sustainable societies (Griggs et al., 2013) and the continuing importance of improving sanitation in developing countries such as India for sustaining reductions in rate of mortality and ill-health (Humphrey, 2009). Lower castes community contributed a lot in sanitation and sweeping the polluted area by sweeping the roads and sanitation all over the India. The practice of manually cleaning excrement from private to public toilets and open drains adhered in several parts of South Asia especially in India (Human Right Watch, 2014). Among the metropolitan cities of India, Delhi is appreciated in regard to the absence of caste discrimination due to its educated and urban population. Delhi is in the preparation to end manual scavenging by using sewer cleaning machines (Ahmed, 2021). But basically, caste is hereditary in nature which is determined by one's birth into a particular caste and this is defined by descent and occupation which creates a ranking system between the people or social stratification in graded ranks (Vaid, 2014). Therefore the perception of the society is not getting a change in perceiving lower caste community as normal societal human being. Hence, the scope of the study implies for investigating the role of lower caste as sanitation workers in sustainable development and social perception of the population towards caste due to their status in society which is to be considered as polluted streams.

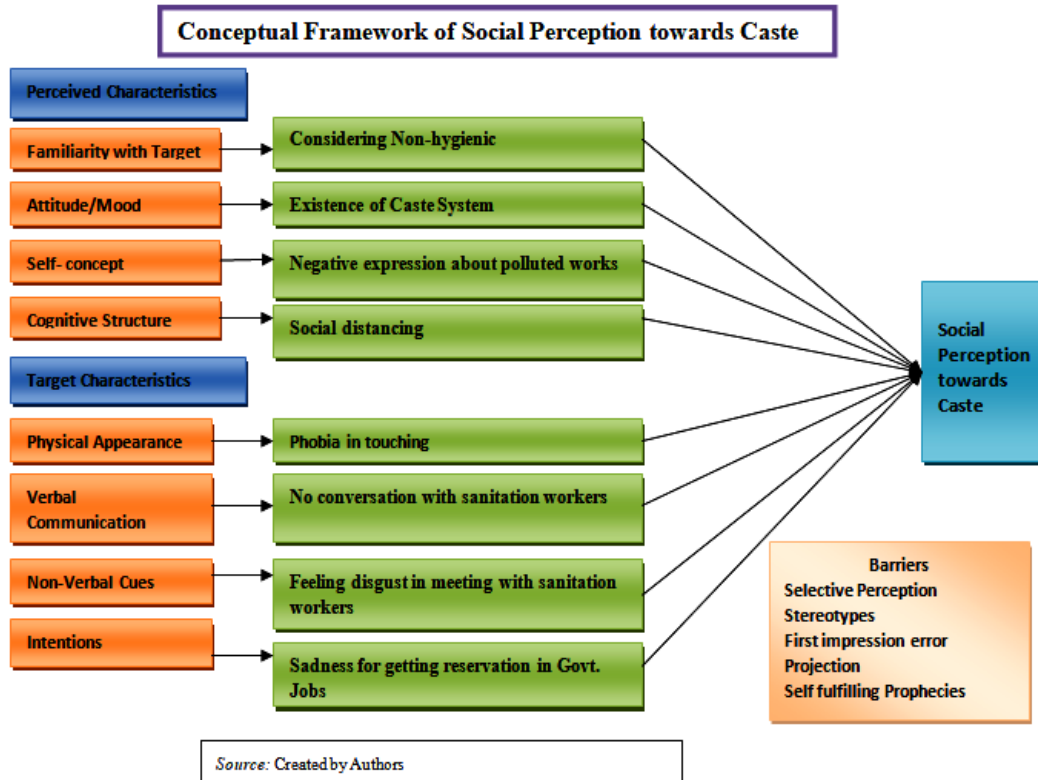
Review Of Literature:-

Many scholars believe that the environmental discourses grant a defence of the caste system. For instance, as Kailash Malhotra, an anthropologist comment, "The caste system...was actually based on an ancient concept of sustainable development which disciplined the society by partitioning the use of natural resources according to *specific occupations* (or castes); and "created" the right social milieu in which sustainable patterns of resource use were encouraged to "emerge" (cited in CSE, 1985). However, Mukul Sharma (2012) believes that Indian environmental paradigms and politics, frequently conceptualized and expressed in terms of India's glorious past, often render questions of caste and Dalits invisible. However, some scholars such as Rajesh Singla (2020) accepted that SDGs' an objective like complete elimination of open defecation in each space, eradication of manual scavenging, promotion of recycling, and reutilization of municipal solid waste bring *behavioral changes* in the society regarding *hygiene* and health sector. He observes *Swachha Bharat Abhiyan* (which is initiated in 2014) with a vision of 'Clean India' as a drive that is the best option for the elimination of social problems from society. However, Malcolm Blincow (1986) shows a big contribution of scavengers in recycling the waste materials which follow Sustainable Development Goals. Albeit in India, public and the government expressed their gratitude for Corona warriors in which doctors, paramedics, sanitary workers, and health department professionals were included during lockdown who were working day and night to contain the COVID-19 pandemic and selflessly treating patients who are affected by it (New18 India).

We can observe the contribution of sweepers and scavengers in Indian society everywhere but even then their caste attributes cause their discrimination and depression. Nominations such as 'Dalits', 'outcastes', 'untouchables', 'Scheduled Caste' have become their caste identity. D. Ajit, Han Donker, & Ravi Saxena (2012) asserts that how caste-based systems foster social discrimination and economic inequality (as selective perception). Anil Teltumbade (2014) has pointed that India will not be clean unless caste ethos is completely eradicated. Lower castes always suffer due to their work profile and social perception of the Indian communities because they are considered as 'polluted', 'Shit bearer', 'unclean by birth', 'untouchable' (Ghose, 2003), even their shadow is somewhere considered to be impure (as an stereotype) because they always living in dirt. Society negatively takes lower caste community as socially, politically and economically. However, Lower caste communities sought to end all forms of discrimination and exclusion by various means like—resort to protest, collective mobilization and religious conversion, apart from this they tried to successfully change their social conditions (Judge, 2012). But dealing with faeces/ sanitation is considered the only responsibility of lower caste communities, because forward caste member perceived that they would become lower caste or untouchables if they deal with sanitation (Bongartz, Vernon & Fox, 2016, 291). Reservation also created a dichotomic line between castes which means it did not show a positive impact on the society to eradicate castes or caste discrimination (Mosse, 2018, 431). Sonia Sikka (2012) also asserts that identity construction of Dalit as lower castes has been historical and cultural (as first impression error). Vijay Prashad (1995), however, believes that they have been bearing this kind of identity and discrimination due to the social perception toward their caste since the colonial period especially in Delhi. Due to this cause the study about the social perception towards caste and role of lower castes in sustainable development are taken as a serious matter for investigation.

Conceptual Framework of Social Perception towards Caste Identity

Basically, the social perception process helps us in understanding other people and in doing so looks for the causes behind their behavior. According to Elliot Aronson, “Social perception refers to the ability to make accurate interpretations and inferences about other people from their general physical appearance, verbal, and nonverbal patterns of communication. Things like facial expressions, tone of voice, hand gestures, and body position or movement are all cues people with higher levels of social perception pick up on to work out what other people are thinking, feeling or are likely to do next” (Aronson et al., 2010). In India social perception of the population towards the lower caste may be recognized with Non-hygienic features, Social distancing, Failing in contact due to Untouchability, No-conversation, Feeling disgust in meeting, sadness for reservation policy, phobia in touching/proximity etc. We can observe the conceptual framework of Social perception towards caste identity in the following figure:



Objectives of the study:-

1. To explore the real factors that shows overall Social Perception towards the caste identity/sanitation workers.
2. To analyze the relationship between overall Social Perception with the age, gender, qualification, occupation, income and domicile.
3. To analyze the correlation between overall Social Perception with variables related to caste and sustainable development.

Hypotheses of the Study:-

1. H01: There is no relationship between overall social perception with the age, gender, qualification, occupation, income and domicile.
2. H02: There is no relationships between overall social perception and Considering Non-hygienic, Existence of Caste System, Negative expression about polluted works, Social distancing as squalid body language, Failing in contact due to Untouchability, No conversation with sanitation workers, Not taking interest in Castes related news, Feeling disgust in meeting with sanitation workers, Negative reaction on recognition of caste, Sadness for reservation policy in Govt. Jobs, Phobia in Touching/Proximity, Working of Sanitation Workers Regularly and Honestly, Appreciable Performance in Covid-19 and Risky Conditions, Contribution in reducing pollution in India, Contribution in Sustainable Development.

Research Methodology:-

The present study is a descriptive cum exploratory in nature and is based upon primary and secondary data. And the data has been collected with the help of a well-structured questionnaire as Google form. The questionnaire has been designed with the help taken from the secondary data. In the first phase, all 212 questionnaires were analyzed to assess the social perception towards caste and sustainable development. For the study the research tool was divided into two sections in which first section consisted of detailed socio-demographic information intended to explore Age, Gender, Qualification, Employment Status, Family Income, and Domicile. The second section consisted of Social perception survey (calculated by SPSS) with an internal reliability test with Cronbach's Alpha ($\alpha = .713$) consisted of 15 items (See Table No.1) followed by four point Likert scale as (Agree-1, Disagree-2, Strongly Agree-3, and Strongly Disagree-4). The scale comprised of fifteen facets as shown in Table No.3. To explore the factors that determine social perception of the population towards Caste identity, Chi-Square test has been applied to explore the relationship between overall social perception with the age, gender, qualification, occupation, income, and domicile and Pearson's correlation to explore the relationship between the variables.

Table No.1:-

Reliability Statistics		
Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items
.713	.721	15

Socio-Economic Background of the Respondents

This study is based upon a non-probability purposive random sampling that was employed to the respondents that are residing in Delhi (62.3%) and outside Delhi (37.7%). The total numbers of respondents were 212 that selected for the sample survey (See Table No.2). The family income of the respondents were in two categories such as 'More than 51,000' (49.5%) and 'More than 100,000' (50.5%). The employment status was considered as Students (12.3%), Business/Self-Employed (49.5%), Unemployed (25.5%), and Govt. Servant (12.7%). The academic qualifications of the respondents were in four categories such as Undergraduate (11.8%), Graduate (12.3%), Post-Graduate (50.5%), and Doctoral Degree holders (25.5%). Gender wise data consisted as Male (37.3%) and Female (62.7%). The age groups have taken under consideration from '17-25Years' (11.3%) and '26-45 Years' (88.7%).

Table No.2:-

Demographics		Frequency	Percent
Age	17-25 Years	24	11.3
	26-45 Years	188	88.7
Gender	Male	79	37.3
	Female	133	62.7
Qualification	Undergraduate	25	11.8
	Graduate	26	12.3
	Post-Graduate	107	50.5
	Doctoral Degree	54	25.5
Employment Status	Student	26	12.3
	Business/Self-Employed	105	49.5
	Unemployed	54	25.5
	Govt. Servant	27	12.7
Family Income-Monthly (INR)	More than 51,000	105	49.5
	More than 1,00,000	107	50.5
Domicile	Delhi	132	62.3
	Outside Delhi	80	37.7
	Total	212	100.0

Result/Findings:-

All 15 factors, as shown in Table No. 3, were analyzed by utilizing SPSS software. The varimax rotation statistical technique was employed for the factor loading to clarify the relationship among the factors/variables and the extraction method of maximum. The result of the analysis showed nine factors with eigenvalues greater than 0.9. These factors were considered as appropriate for the reporting.

Table No. 3:- Factor loading of fifteen-facets of Social Perception towards Caste and Sustainable Development.

<i>Variables/Facets</i>	<i>Factors</i>
Considering Non-hygienic	1.17
Existence of Caste System	.399
Negative expression about polluted works	.977
Social distancing as Squalid body language	1.00
Failing in contact due to Untouchability	.662
No conversation with sanitation workers	.458
Not taking interest in Castes related news	1.16
Feeling disgust in meeting with sanitation workers	1.00
Negative reaction on recognition of caste	1.07
Sadness for reservation policy in Govt. Jobs	1.00
Phobia In Touching/Proximity	.772
Working of Sanitation Workers Regularly and Honestly	.865
Appreciable Performance in Covid-19 and Risky Conditions	.431
Contribution in Reduction Pollution in India	1.07
Contribution in Sustainable Development	1.02

To find out the significant relationship between age, gender, qualification, employment status, family income and domicile with overall social perception towards caste the Chi-square test has been applied (See Table No.4). The results of Chi-square tests for the hypothesis are in significant level. The chi-square values are much greater than 0.05 significant levels. Therefore, the null hypothesis is supported. This reveals a negative association between age, gender, qualification, employment status, family income and domicile with overall social perception. H01 is supported by the result.

Table No. 4:- Result of Chi-Square Test.

VARIABLES TESTED	Pearson Chi-Square Value	Degree of Freedom df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)	Result
Age* Social Distancing	3.964	3	.265	Supported
Gender* Social Distancing	26.114	3	.000	Supported
Qualification* Social Distancing	11.352	9	.252	Supported
Employment status* Social Distancing	14.255	9	.114	Supported
Family Income* Social Distancing	.108	3	.991	Supported
Domicile* Social Distancing	2.625	3	.453	Supported

Moreover, to explore the relationship between overall Social perception with 15 facets of caste and sustainable development a Pearson Correlation test was applied and the result of the correlation represents that the overall social perception is associated with Considering Non-hygienic ($r = 1.00, p > .001$); Existence of Caste System ($r = .121, p > .001$); Negative expression about polluted works ($r = .124, p > .001$); No conversation with sanitation workers ($r = .304, p > .001$); Not taking interest in Castes related news ($r = .403, p > .001$); Feeling disgust in meeting with sanitation workers ($r = .041, p > .001$); Negative reaction on recognition of caste ($r = .429, p > .001$); Sadness for reservation policy in Govt. Jobs ($r = .095, p > .001$); Working of Sanitation Workers Regularly and Honestly ($r = .025, p > .001$); Appreciable Performance in Covid-19 and Risky Conditions ($r = .019, p > .001$); in some cases it reveals negative association with Social distancing as squalid body language ($r = -.043, p < .001$); Failing in contact due to Untouchability ($r = -.019, p < .001$); Phobia In Touching/Proximity ($r = -.110, p < .001$); Contribution in Reduction Pollution in India ($r = -.049, p < .001$); Contribution in Sustainable Development ($r = -.052, p < .001$).

As indicated in Table No.5 stepwise regression summary, it is clear that at least ten factors affecting social perception of population towards caste and sustainable development. These are positively related with caste and sustainable development. Hence it supports the null hypothesis (H02) and concludes that there is sufficient evidence at the 1% level of significance. It represents a strong relationship between Social perception and factors related to caste and sustainable development.

Table No. 5:- Correlation of Overall social perception with fifteen facets of Caste and Sustainable Development.

	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Std. Deviation</i>	<i>r</i>	<i>Sig. (2-tailed)</i>
Considering Non-hygienic	2.7877	1.17124	1.00**	.000
Existence of Caste System	1.1981	.39952	.121**	.080
Negative expression about polluted works	2.1981	.97766	.124**	.072
Social distancing as Squalid body language	1.6934	1.00490	-.043**	.529
Failing in contact due to Untouchability	1.3962	.66289	-.019**	.779
No conversation with sanitation workers	1.2972	.45809	.304**	.000
Not taking interest in Castes related news	2.1887	1.16922	.403**	.000
Feeling disgust in meeting with sanitation workers	1.6934	1.00490	.041**	.552
Negative reaction on recognition of caste	2.1981	1.07465	.429**	.000
Sadness for reservation policy in Govt. Jobs	1.9906	1.00232	.095**	.167
Phobia In Touching/Proximity	2.0000	.77276	-.110**	.110
Working of Sanitation Workers Regularly and Honestly	1.8302	.86503	.025**	.717
Appreciable Performance in Covid-19 and Risky Conditions	1.2453	.43127	.019**	.782
Contribution in Reduction Pollution in India	2.1792	1.07357	-.049**	.480
Contribution in Sustainable Development	1.8396	1.02237	-.052**	.449

Conclusion:-

The objective of the study was to explore the real factors that determine overall Social Perception towards the caste identity. Non-hygienic factor, negative expression about polluted works, social distancing, not taking interest in caste related news, feeling disgust in meeting, sad expression for the reservation policy in government jobs were found as real factors that determine social perception towards caste identity in the Indian society especially in Delhi. However, people believe that sanitation workers' contribution in reduction pollution and sustainable development is appreciable but in the making of social perception towards caste identity age, gender, qualification, employment status, family income and domicile of the population have no meaning. It seems that feeling disgust works towards caste identity as stereotype due to their historical work profile. However, despite of contributing positively in the society and having a positive role in reducing pollution and increasing sustainable development the caste identity creates another stream beyond the society. However, generalization of the findings is limited to a similar context and comparable population of group. Despite this limitation study provided the base for the conclusion to be established and it could be concluded that factors predict the overall social perception not in positive sense. Therefore, findings of the current study might be helpful to the society and state especially in the policy making under the affirmative action.

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