

Caste in Australia: A Phenomenology of Casteism

**Report of the National Community Consultation for
Caste Discrimination submitted to FECCA and AHRC**

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Sri Guru Ravidass Sabha Sydney Inc.



Caste in Australia: A Phenomenology of Casteism

Report submitted towards the completion of the National
Community Consultation for Caste Discrimination (NCCCD)

For

The Australian Human Rights Commission

&

Federation of Ethnic Communities Councils of Australia (FECCA)

By

Shri Guru Ravidass Sabha, Sydney

Ambedkar International Mission, Australia

Acknowledgment of country

We, the authors of this report, acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of Country throughout Australia and their connections to land, sea, and community. We pay our respect to their Elders, past and present.

Prologue

A multipronged legal advocacy strategy using the NCCCD report to address caste discrimination in Australia

Australia's [National Anti-Racism Framework](#) (NARF) recognises caste-based discrimination as a form of intersectional racial discrimination and need for improving protections in anti-discrimination laws. To that effect NARF in recommendation 17 calls upon 'The Australian Government [to] investigate options for legal protections against caste discrimination, including potential reform of existing legislation.' A standalone recommendation on prohibiting caste discrimination in Australian law is a significant achievement and a step toward the ultimate goal of amending the Federal Racial Discrimination Act, of 1975, to include caste discrimination as a ground for discrimination. This recognition was possible only due to the advocacy strategy led by SGRS and AIM within a short span of six months after the drafting of the report.

The commissioning of the community consultations, of which this report is an outcome, by FECCA and AHRC was to identify statuses of existing forms of racial discrimination and to locate emerging forms of racism in multicultural communities by relying on lived experiences of racialised communities in Australia was with the key aim to inform the development of the National Anti-Racism Framework.

I, as the advocacy lead for SGRS and AIM, developed a multipronged legal advocacy strategy aimed at undertaking any form of advocacy to fight caste discrimination in Australia based on empirically sound evidence, collected, analysed and reported using the best-in-the-field methodology of data collection and analysis. For a long time, the lived experiences of the subalterns have been relegated to the margins of policymaking for not being scientific or objective enough to form data sources. Such experiences are that are too 'insignificant' to be taken seriously by those in positions of power. The Australian Human Rights Commission's approach to giving primacy to the lived experiences of individuals in drafting the National Anti-Racism Framework was a welcome move towards not just relying on the quantity of experiences but on qualitative empirical data. The latter too demonstrates the significance of casteism as a form of intersectional race discrimination in Australia. The study of the design shows this rigour by locating and processing the lived experiences of caste-oppressed communities in Australia in a sound methodological framework.

Using this strong foundational base, I developed a multipronged legal advocacy strategy, after submission of this report to FECCA in May 2024 to urgently undertake advocacy on three pillars. First, recognise the existence of caste discrimination in Australian society as a form of pervasive and systemic intersectional racism and not just an inter-personal diaspora community issue. Second, to highlight the *extent* of casteism in Australia in all aspects of public and private life relying on empirical realities by the data; Finally, adopt a proactive human rights approach to advocacy which involves identifying and engaging government and civil society organisations and media representation to share the insights exhibited from the grassroots.

A. Petitioning Australian Human Rights Commission to recognise Caste-based discrimination within NARF

The advocacy team undertook extensive petitioning and lobbying with the AHRC officials responsible for drafting the NARF. A formal petition detailing the insights from the NCCCD report, based foundationally on references to Australia's international law obligation, was aimed at highlighting the relevance of caste before the nodal body. With multiple rounds of meetings with the AHRC officials, especially the Race Discrimination Commissioner, we were able to advocate for the recognition of caste-based discrimination within the NRF successfully.

B. FECCA 2025 conference and FECCA's recommendation to AHRC

The advocacy approach also involved engaging with FECCA's leadership to highlight the pervasiveness of caste discrimination in Australian society which led to a separate section in the report on Caste-Discrimination in FECCA's community consultation report [An Anti-Racism Framework: Experiences and Perspectives of Multicultural Australia](#). This report noted the central finding of our study,

Participants reported worst of caste identity-based discrimination in form of physical assault, being treated as untouchables (especially children), and socioeconomic boycott on business and persons. The results also pointed towards presence of overt and covert forms of prejudice and discrimination based on the caste identity in education, employment, and marriage, intersectional discrimination based on gender and religion (and of course caste) and exclusionary practices that make caste as the central consideration of socio-cultural and socio-economic life in Australia within the Indian diaspora community. The impact of such pervasive

discrimination was negative, and it significantly affected the well-being, mental, and psychological, of the caste-oppressed persons. Based on our work, I, as the advocacy and project lead of NCCCD was invited by FECCA as a panellist to the FECCA 2025 conference. Dr. Vaibhav Gaikwad, a community leader on behalf of AIM and I engaged in extensive lobbying with AHRC officials and civil society organisations to highlight the findings from our research. This engagement as with the panellist helped us with one-on-one interaction and advocacy with senior AHRC officials leading to the recognition of caste-based discrimination in NARF.

C. Advocacy at the United Nations

As a direct outcome of the advocacy efforts of the advocacy of Shri Guru Ravidass Sabha Sydney (SGRS), Ambedkar International Mission (AIM), the UN Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia, and related intolerance issued a [formal communication](#) to the Australian Government, specifically urging the Australian Human Rights Commission and the government to recognise caste discrimination as part of the National Anti-Racism Framework (NARF) and to include it in the Australian Federal Anti-Discrimination Law.

As the research and advocacy lead of the National Community Consultation on Caste Discrimination (NCCCD), I engaged in weeks of advocacy and lobbying at the UN on behalf of SGRS and AIM. The UN Special Rapporteur on Racism leveraged their mandate from the UN Human Rights Council based on this extensive lobbying which contributed towards the national support for our anti-caste advocacy and NARF development.

D. Media representation and state-wise advocacy

The final leg of advocacy involved media representation in the form of an Op-Ed article in the Guardian [Even in Australia, alarming levels of caste discrimination exist. We must fight it with evidence](#) and an interview with Australia's National broadcaster ABC News Australia on the NCCCD project. This was instrumental in highlighting the issue of caste-based discrimination across Australia along with the findings of the report.

We have continued to engage with the state governments of NSW, Victoria and Queensland to lobby to prohibit caste-based discrimination in state law.

Asang Wankhede
Balliol College,
Oxford
14 April, 2025

Table of Contents

Acknowledgement	10
Executive Summary	11
Chapter 1: Introduction	1
1.1. Background	1
1.2. About this project.....	2
1.3. Caste-oppressed community organisations associated with this project.....	3
1.3.1. Shri Guru Ravidas Sabha, Sydney – Lead organisation.....	3
1.3.2. Ambedkar International Mission (AIM), Australia – Co-lead.....	4
1.3.3. Shri Guru Ravidas Sabha (SGRS), Melbourne – Collaborator	5
Chapter 2: Caste in Australia	7
2.1. What is the caste system?	7
2.2. Why should we care about caste in Australia?	8
2.3. Community-led efforts to mitigate caste discrimination in Australia	9
Chapter 3 Methodology	11
3.1 Definition of caste-oppressed communities:	13
3.2 Timeline, locations and participants:	13
3.3 Phenomenological interview and semi-structured Questionnaire.....	15
3.4 Sample	18
3.5 Data collection	19
3.6 Data interpretation and analysis	22
Chapter 4 Demographic Information of the Participants.....	33
4.1. Overview	33
Chapter 5 Thematic Analysis	37
5.1 Introduction	37
Codes	38
5.2 Sub Part I-Physical Assault, untouchability, social boycott based on caste identity in Australia	47
Untouchability	53
Social and economic boycott	60
Accounts of no discrimination and confusion about the experiences	63
5.3 Sub-Part II: Where the journey starts: Modes of identifying caste oppressed communities in Australia	75
Children experiencing caste discrimination.	99
Education	106

Primary and secondary education—Teaching of casteism in school.....	107
University—.....	109
Employment lived experiences.	114
Caste slurs as a daily aspect of life for caste oppressed communities	130
Marriage	133
Intersectionality: Caste, gender and religion.	139
Intersectionality of Gender and Caste:	139
Intersectionality of Religion and Caste:	141
Social life	146
Social media	148
5.4 Sub-Part II Impact of discrimination	152
Breakdown of friendships	152
Psychological impact on well-being	154
5.5 Sub-part IV Navigating Caste Identity and Coping Mechanism Strategies	158
A. Hiding Low Caste Identity	159
B. Avoidance and Self- Exclusion:	161
C. Engaging with Non-Indian Communities:	162
D. Passing off as an upper caste:	163
E. Resilience, and fighting actively against identity-based marginalization: ..	164
Chapter 6 Conclusion and Recommendation.....	202
Bibliography	206

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Most importantly, we thank all the participants of the NCCCD for their courage in sharing their lived experiences of caste discrimination in Australia and to all those brave souls who continue face and resist this discrimination in Australia. They are the true trailblazers of this project.

Thank you!

Executive Summary

In 2022, there was a significant development in Australia as members of the caste-oppressed community and academia submitted proposals to the Australian National Human Rights Commission, urging the inclusion of caste within the National Anti-Racism Framework (NARF). Following this, the AHRC released a groundbreaking scoping report later that year, recognizing caste discrimination as an intersectional form of racism for the first time.

Building on this progress, in 2023, the Federation of Ethnic Communities' Councils of Australia (FECCA) initiated consultations with multicultural communities across the country to gather their experiences and insights on combating racism. These consultations, crucial for informing the National Anti-Racism Framework, encompassed various themes, including the experiences of communities affected by caste systems. The crucial aim of these consultations was to collect lived experiences as valid qualitative empirical data to inform the amendments and reform to the Australian anti-racism policy.

FECCA selected the Shri Guru Ravidas Sabha, Sydney (SGRS, Sydney) to lead consultations on caste discrimination in Australia, with support from the Ambedkar International Mission (AIM), Australia. Both SGRS and AIM Australia are organizations led by individuals from caste-oppressed communities. This consultation exactly did that. It undertook interviews of over 146 participants from caste oppressed communities in Australia using empirical methodology in form of semi structured questionnaire to study the lived experience of caste oppressed communities.

The study provided first of its kind data set of over 620 pages of interview transcripts that capture and describe the lived experiences of Dalits or caste oppressed communities.

The results indicated that Caste discrimination and prejudice is persistent and systemic in Australia, in all aspects of life. It is both overt and covert. The central finding of the thematic analysis, developed through inductive reasoning, is that Caste discrimination and prejudice is not just a case of an interpersonal and inter-cultural issue within the South Asian diaspora, it is a pervasive, systemic and racism problem. Furthermore, participants reported worst of caste identity-based discrimination in form of physical

assault, being treated as untouchables (especially children), and socio-economic boycott on business and persons.

The results also pointed towards presence of overt and covert forms of prejudice and discrimination based on the caste identity in education, employment, marriage, intersectional discrimination based on gender and religion (and of course caste) and exclusionary practices that make caste as the central consideration of socio-cultural and socio-economic life in

Australia within the Indian diaspora community. The impact of such pervasive discrimination was negative, and it significantly affected the well-being, mental and psychological, of the caste oppressed persons.

The coping mechanism ranged from hiding caste identity, passing off, to being resilient in the times of discrimination and fighting back against casteism.

The recommendations include

1. Raising education and awareness among all sections of Australian population and not just Indian diaspora.
2. Reforming policy and legislation to caste-based discrimination in employment, education, housing, and public services.
3. Amend the anti-discrimination law in Australia to include caste as a protected characteristic
4. Community Engagement
5. Establish support networks
6. Enable corporate responsibility

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1. Background

In 2022, several members of the caste-oppressed community and academia made submissions to the Australian National Human Rights Commission to include caste as part of the National Anti-Racism Framework (NARF). Based on the submission received, the AHRC released the landmark National Anti-Racism Framework scoping report later that year, which for the first-time acknowledged caste discrimination to be an intersectional form of racism.



National Anti-Racism Framework Scoping Report graphic

Furthering this development, the Federation of Ethnic Communities’ Councils of Australia (FECCA) in 2023 commenced consulting multicultural communities across Australia to gather their lived experience, perspectives, insights, and knowledge on addressing and preventing all forms of racism. The consultations will feed into the National Anti-Racism Framework being developed by the Australian Human Rights Commission. FECCA sought applications from organisations to deliver consultations with multicultural communities across all states and territories including remote, regional, and metropolitan areas. The consultations had multiple focus themes, including ‘people from communities with caste systems.’

FECCA then selected the application led by Shri Guru Ravidas Sabha, Sydney (SGRS, Sydney) for conducting consultations on caste discrimination in Australia. The application was supported by the Ambedkar International Mission (AIM), Australia. Both

SGRS and AIM Australia are organisations led by people from caste-oppressed communities. More information about the consultation project is provided in the subsequent sections.

1.2. About this project

The main aim of this project i.e. National Community Consultations on Caste Discrimination (NCCCD) consultation is to support the AHRC in the creation of ‘a National Anti-Racism Framework, to end racism in Australia. The project is led by members of caste oppressed communities, with the Shri Guru Ravidas Sabha, Sydney being the lead organisation and supported by the Ambedkar International Mission.

The project aims to provide the AHRC evidence in the form of lived experiences of racism faced by multicultural communities, including caste-oppressed communities across Australia. This in-depth insight will help identify evidence of the lived experiences of caste oppressed communities in Australia which then will be used to submit a report to AHRC encompassing the findings and recommendations. This evidence will be crucial for developing an argument for reforming federal and state-level legislations and policy frameworks, especially informing the National Anti-Racism Framework to include caste as a protected ground.

As a part of the project, focus groups and individual in-person and online interviews were used as the key methods to undertake the qualitative empirical research using semi-structured questionnaires to explore the lived experiences of caste-oppressed communities in all aspects of their life in Australia and how is the lived experience perceived by such communities. The focus was on *what* is the lived experience of caste oppressed communities in Australia, *how* do they perceive and experience it, and *why* do they experience it, whether solely based on their caste identity and/or is it also intersectional?

The main research questions identified were—

1. What is the lived experience of caste-oppressed communities in Australia?

2. In what ways have the caste-oppressed communities identified been discriminated against, unfairly treated and experienced bias and exclusion based on their caste?
3. What are the ways to address caste discrimination within the existing anti-racism legal framework?
4. How can the legal and non-legal mechanisms be used to address casteism?

A detailed section on methodology used to develop the framework for this project is provided in subsequent sections of this report.

1.3. Caste-oppressed community organisations associated with this project.

1.3.1. Shri Guru Ravidas Sabha, Sydney – Lead organisation

Established in 2001, Sri Guru Ravidas Sabha, Sydney is a religious organisation with a primary goal of spreading the teachings of Sri Guru Ravidas Ji. The organisation aims to foster love, universal brotherhood, equality, and actively combat caste discrimination within the Australian community. The Sabha currently includes membership of over 500 individuals.

Annually, SGRS commemorates the birthdays of Guru Ravidas Ji and Babasaheb Bhim Rao Ambedkar as tribute to their enduring legacies. The monthly congregations organised by the Sabha offer members the opportunity to review Guru Ji's teachings, engage with one another, and extend help to those in need. Sabha has undertaken multiple projects in Australia and India. Among the key initiatives organised by Sabha are Australia Clean Up Day and blood donation events in Sydney, both which are ongoing. In 2015, the SGRS organisation initiated a Clean Water and Sanitation Project within the villages of Kapsa and Gusiaryi, located in the state of Uttar Pradesh, India. The project aimed to address the critical issue of insufficient access to clean water experienced by the local community. A total of \$21,030.00 was successfully raised by the Sabha to fund this important initiative. As a result, seven handpumps were installed in strategic locations within the villages. These handpumps now serve as a vital resource, providing the residents with consistent access to clean and safe drinking water.

In 2024, SGRS collaborated with Ambedkar International Mission to organise National Community Consultations on Caste Discrimination, aligning with the teachings of Guru Ravidas Ji. This collaboration served utmost importance, unifying the relations between SGRS and fellow organisations.

Lastly, Sabha is currently looking forward to building a common place for our members to preach Guru's teachings.

1.3.2. Ambedkar International Mission (AIM), Australia – Co-lead

Ambedkar International Mission (AIM), Australia was formed in the early 2000s by a group of volunteers in Sydney, Melbourne and Canberra led by the late Mr. Nandu Kumar Gaikwad. Mr. Raju Kamble and Mr. Nandu Gaikwad were amongst the founding members of the first AIM chapter created by a group of Dalit Ambedkarite families that had migrated to Malaysia in the eighties. Their aim was to welcome and support first-generation Buddhist Ambedkarite migrants who experienced stigma and exclusion in existing dominant caste community organisations and spaces. Their vision was also to strive to secure the human rights and human dignity of Dalits, untouchables and tribals of India. AIM members work through programs for educational, social, economic and cultural development including raising awareness amongst Dalits about how to fight for their rights as well as direct forms of assistance to needy people through welfare programmes.



Members of caste oppressed community celebrating Dr. Ambedkar's 125th birth anniversary at the Parliament of Australia

Over the last two decades, AIM has grown organically as a volunteer-driven social collective primarily through networking. It now has active chapters in the major Australian cities of Sydney, Canberra, Adelaide, Brisbane, Melbourne and Perth with over 300 participants. In keeping with their Buddhist values, members continue to work on an entirely voluntary basis to identify and meet the diverse needs of a growing community which includes international students, professional/skilled migrants from various sectors such as, IT, public services, and medicine, and the families that accompany these migrants.

Every year, AIM Australia commemorates the birth anniversary of Dr. Ambedkar through a public event that is attended by hundreds of people across Australia and internationally. AIM Australia is actively engaged in spreading awareness about caste discrimination and continues to play leadership role in engaging multiple stakeholders from the public and private sphere to develop and implement policies to end caste discrimination in Australia.

1.3.3. Shri Guru Ravidas Sabha (SGRS), Melbourne – Collaborator

SGRS Melbourne was established in 1996, which is also the founding year for their Gurudwara in Campbellfield, Victoria. SGRS Melbourne furthers the teachings of Shri Guru Ravidas ji and celebrates several festivals annually, including the birth anniversary of Shri Guru Ravidas ji and Dr. Ambedkar. They also undertake many public service activities including blood donations, food donations during crisis such as bush fires and Covid-19 pandemic. SGRS Melbourne provide a free communal food service every Sunday to everyone *who comes to their Gurudwara (langar)*. Their estimated sangat or community in Melbourne region is approximately 2000 people.



Dr. Ambedkar's birth anniversary celebrations at the SGRS Gurudwara, Melbourne.

As a community service, SGRS Melbourne provided food and the use of Gurudwara premises for the purpose of these consultations at no cost.

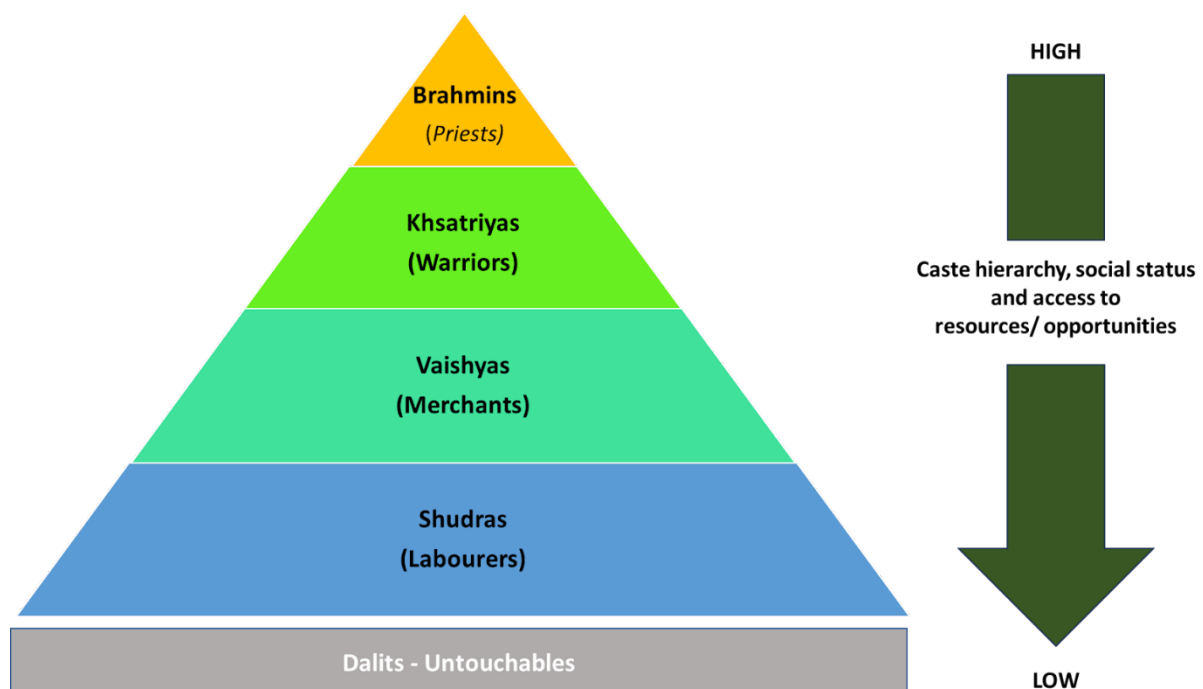
Chapter 2: Caste in Australia

2.1. What is the caste system?

The caste system is a birth-based rigid and discriminatory social stratification which is often sanctified by religious codes. It confines social interaction to a regulated structure and forbids any intermixture of castes.

Although prevalent in South-Asian societies for several millennia, caste is now a global occurrence and a recognised basis for discrimination by the many international human rights bodies including the United Nations and the Australian Human Rights Commission.

Briefly, the caste system comprises of 4 main castes (*varnas*) i.e. Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas, and the Shudras. These castes are further divided into thousands of sub-castes (*jatis*). The Brahmins, who are at the top of this pyramid are believed to have come from Brahma's (god of creation) head and are ordained to do teaching and intellectual work. Moving down the caste hierarchy, the Kshatriyas (warriors) come from the arms, Vaishyas (traders) come from the thighs, and the Shudras (labourers) come from the feet. Outside of the caste system, are the Dalits or the erstwhile Untouchables.



Dr. Ambedkar saw the caste system as *‘unequal mode of organization of social relations, with the pure and the impure at either extreme.’* Unlike class, there is no scope for mobility in caste and one is confined to the caste they are born in. This is one of the most oppressive elements of the caste system for those born into the lowest strata of this system (Shudras and untouchables) as their access to opportunities and resources gets severely limited leading to continued inhuman and unjust treatment. Conversely, for those born into the upper or oppressor castes the system protects their hegemony.

2.2. Why should we care about caste in Australia?

The migration of people from South Asia brought several components of its culture to Australia, including food and festivals. It is therefore unsurprising that caste, which is deeply entrenched in several South-Asian cultures, was brought into Australia through the diasporic movement. The south-Asian diaspora is one of the largest migrant communities in Australia, for example, the Indian diaspora is Australia’s fastest-growing diaspora and has grown five-fold over the last twenty years, comprising over 750,000 people in 2022. This makes it the second largest migrant community in Australia and roughly 3% of our national population.

There are multiple news reports highlighting caste discrimination incidents in Australia and showcasing how entrenched caste is in Australian society. Some of these include instances like being evicted from rental accommodation, denial of religious services, workplace discrimination, detrimental effect on relationships and matrimony, etc.” What makes the caste oppressed communities even more vulnerable is that there is no legal redressal mechanism against caste discrimination available in Australia and very little awareness about this type of discrimination. In addition, the effects of caste discrimination can be compounded even further due to intersectional experiences of racism and other types of discrimination faced by the caste oppressed communities.

The consequences of caste discrimination are generational and promote the creation of a society that is unjust, unequal, and excludes its most vulnerable from accessing even the basic civil liberties. In fact, AHRC’s race discrimination commissioner, Chin Tan, was quoted in an article by The Guardian saying: *“Discrimination of any kind is unacceptable, and that includes discrimination on the basis of caste. I am deeply concerned by the experiences of casteism in Australia that were shared with the Commission.”*⁵

The fallouts of caste discrimination go directly against the human rights-based approach which the AHRC seeks to apply in its own work. A key component of the approach is Non-discrimination and equality, which entails that *‘all forms of discrimination in the realisation of rights must be prohibited, prevented and eliminated. It also means that priority should be given to people in the most marginalised or vulnerable situations who face the biggest barriers to realising their rights.’*⁷ Furthermore, the AHRC also considers that, for Australia to comply with its international responsibilities, all areas and level of government in Australia have a responsibility to apply human rights-based approaches.⁷ In fact,

2.3. Community-led efforts to mitigate caste discrimination in Australia

Although there presently is no law in Australia to specifically tackle caste discrimination, members of the caste oppressed communities have been at the forefront of the struggle against caste discrimination. Oppressed community organisations/ social collectives such as Shri Guru Ravidas Sabha and Ambedkar International Mission (AIM), Australia have played a pivotal role in this movement. One of the key successes of community led initiatives is the recognition of caste as an intersectional form of racism by the AHRC in the National Anti-Racism Framework (NARF) scoping report (2022). There are several other successful community led in this space including the inclusion of caste as a basis of discrimination in the NSW Greens anti-discrimination policy (2023), engaging with local city councils such as Inner West (NSW), Manningham (VIC), Monash (VIC) to spread awareness and encourage them to consider caste in their anti-discrimination policies.

Celebrating their festivals is another way in which the oppressed caste communities stand against caste discrimination and prevent the erasure of their culture, identity and struggle. The birth anniversaries of Shri Guru Ravidas ji and Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar are celebrated with much fanfare by caste oppressed communities in Australia and are attended by hundreds, if not thousands of people. Many of these celebrations have been organised at iconic venues, including the Federation Square and the Parliament of Australia.

Furthermore, the movement has also been supported by allies such as former Senator Lee Rhiannon who was instrumental in getting a landmark motion passed in the Australian government in 2018 which urged the government to act on fighting caste discrimination. Similarly, the inclusion of caste in Greens NSW's anti-discrimination policy could not have happened without the support of Senator David Shoebridge and former Senator Lee Rhiannon. The community also acknowledges Andrew Braddock, MLA – a Member for the Gungahlin-based seat of Yerrabi and ACT Greens Multicultural Spokesperson, who in 2023 spoke about caste discrimination in the ACT legislative assembly and shed light on caste discrimination, its detrimental impact on the society and actions needed to mitigate it in Australia. Very recently (2024), the Monash city council passed a motion, which was moved by Councillor Anjalee De Silva, to include caste as a protected category in their policies.

Chapter 3 Methodology

For this nation-wide study, we adopted qualitative empirical research method relying on focus group interviews and individual interviews of persons who belonged to caste oppressed communities in Australia to understand their lived experience in Australian society. The choice of this methodology naturally followed from the terms of reference given to the community organisations and leaders as part of the National Anti-Racism Framework: Multicultural Community Consultations organised by The Federation of Ethnic Communities' Councils of Australia (FECCA)¹ and The Australian Human Rights Commission (AHRC).² The mandate of the consultation sessions was 'to create a safe and respectful space for individuals to share their experiences and insights regarding racism and to collaboratively explore strategies for ending racism in Australia.'³ Thus, the choice of qualitative empirical research methodology was appropriate as it would help us answer 'what, how and why questions (Creswell, 2012)⁴ about the experiences of discrimination, prejudice and caste identity of caste oppressed groups in Australia. The overall approach adopted by the project was hermeneutic phenomenological approach informed by Gadamer (1976) and (Pryce-Miller, et al., 2023).⁵ Furthermore, since the present national consultation is meant to capture and categorise the social phenomena of casteism/caste discrimination, it through understanding the phenomenology of the lived experience of caste-oppressed groups in Australia such an exercise can be possible.

¹ Federation of Ethnic Communities' Council of Australia (FECCA), *National Anti- Racism Framework Multicultural Community Consultations* (FECCA, 2024) <https://fecca.org.au/resources/national-antiracism-framework-multicultural-community-consultations/>

² Australian Human Rights Commission, *National Anti-Racism Framework Scoping Report* (AHRC, 2022) <https://humanrights.gov.au/our-work/race-discrimination/publications/national-anti-racism-framework-scoping-report>

³ Consultation terms of reference

⁴ Jessica C Harris, 'Multiracial College Students' Experiences with Multiracial Microaggressions' (2016) 20 *Race Ethnicity and Education* 429 <https://doi.org/10.1080/13613324.2016.1248836n>

⁵ 'Phenomenology is a form of qualitative research that focuses on the study of an individual's lived experiences within the world.' Hermeneutic Phenomenology considers 'Lived experience is an interpretive process situated in an individual's lifeworld... Hermeneutic phenomenology studies individuals' narratives to understand what those individuals experience in their daily lives, in their *lifeworlds*.' Beate E Neubauer, Catherine T Witkop, and Lara Varpio, 'How Phenomenology Can Help Us Learn from the Experiences of Others' (2019) 8(2) *Perspectives on Medical Education* 90, doi:10.1007/s40037-019-0509-2.

To reiterate the main aim of the consultation was to support the AHRC in the creation of ‘a National Anti-Racism Framework, to end racism in Australia.’ The project aims to provide the AHRC evidence in the form of lived experiences of racism faced by the multicultural communities (including caste-oppressed communities) across Australia. FECCA thus was tasked with organising over 17 consultations with different multicultural communities across Australia and the current project was one of such consultations. This in-depth insight will help identify evidence of the lived experiences of caste oppressed communities in Australia which then will be used to submit a report to AHRC. This evidence will be crucial for developing an argument for reforming federal and state-level legislations and policy frameworks, especially informing the National Anti-Racism Framework to include caste as a protected ground.

Focus groups and individual in-person and online interviews were used as the key methods to undertake the qualitative empirical research using semi-structured questionnaire to explore the lived experiences of caste-oppressed communities in all aspect of their life in Australia and how is the lived experience perceived by such communities. The focus was on *what* is the lived experience of caste oppressed communities in Australia, *how* do they perceive and experience it, and *why* do they experience, whether solely based on their caste identity and/or is it also intersectional?⁶

The main research questions identified were—

1. What is the lived experience of caste-oppressed communities in Australia?
2. In what ways have the caste-oppressed communities identified been discriminated against, unfairly treated and experienced bias and exclusion based on their caste?
3. What are the ways to address caste discrimination within the existing anti-racism legal framework?
4. How can the legal and non-legal mechanisms be used to address casteism?

⁶ Maxine Pryce-Miller and others, ‘The Lived Experiences of Racial Bias for Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic Students in Practice: A Hermeneutic Phenomenological Study’ (2023) 66 Nurse Education in Practice 103532, doi: 10.1016/j.nepr.2022.103532.

The qualitative research is to be supplemented by some documentary research to map the field of research already undertaken on caste in Australia, which will help make the findings from the empirical research more rounded, as it is already undertaken in the introduction to this report.

3.1 Definition of caste-oppressed communities:

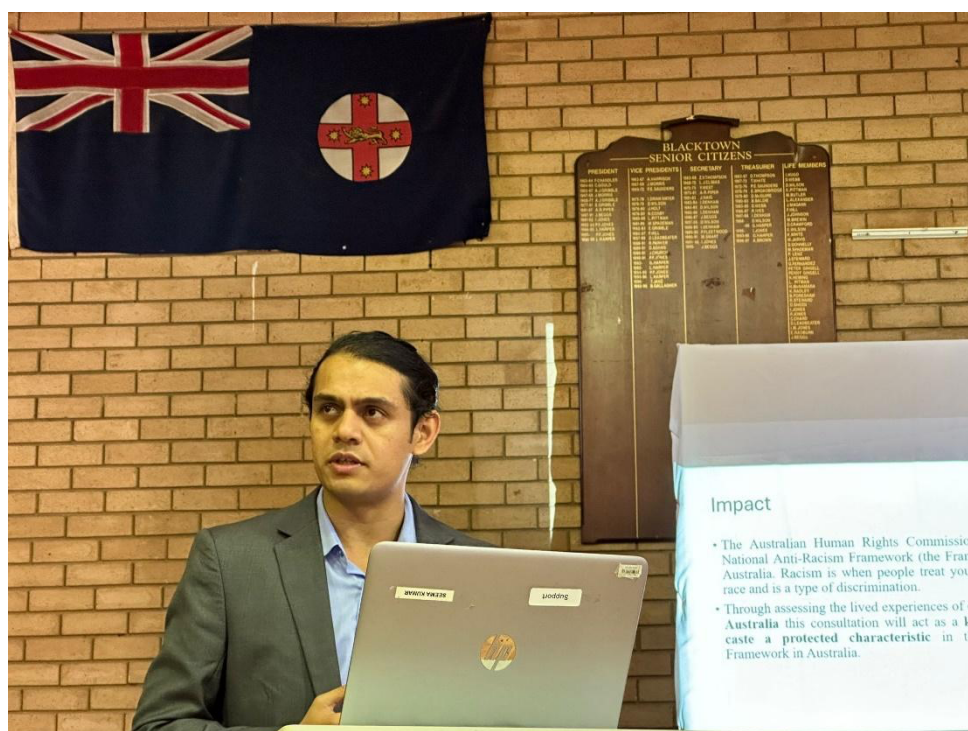
For the purposes of the study to identify caste oppressed communities we adopted the following definition, *Discrimination based on caste, a system of unequal social ranking, disproportionately impacts lower caste communities also known as Dalits (formerly untouchable castes). Some Shudra castes may also have experienced such caste discrimination and are also a 'caste-oppressed' community for the purpose of this consultation.* Thus, the focus was on *Dalits* or erstwhile untouchables in the diaspora and individual's historic caste position even when they might have converted from Hinduism to other religions like Buddhism, Christianity and Islam. Certain 'Other Backward Classes' who would have experienced such caste discrimination and some forms of untouchability as an OBC caste were also eligible to register.

3.2 Timeline, locations and participants:

The community consultations covered all of Australia to capture the lived experiences of Caste Oppressed Communities from all over Australia. The sessions were held in each of the Capital cities of the various states, except for Western Australia which was undertaken online. The timeline for the in-person consultations and online consultations was as under—

1. **Sydney (In-person):** 23rd March 2024
2. **Canberra (In-person):** 24th March 2024
3. **Melbourne (In-person):** 31st March and 1st April 2024
4. **Melbourne (Online):** 3rd April
5. **Brisbane (Online):** 4 April 2024
6. **Adelaide (In-person):** 6 April 2024
7. **Perth & Consultation for all of Australia (Online):** 7th April 2024

The lead researcher and facilitators are all from the Dalit community and were trained by the lead researcher in how to conduct the interview through facilitator training, following the guidelines from FECCA and best industrial practices and standards.⁷ The approach adopted a trauma-informed approach focusing on safety, trust, collaboration, empowerment and cultural consideration.



Research lead Asang Wankhede briefing participants during the Sydney consultations.

The caste oppressed communities were asked to join the consultation strictly on a volunteer basis by using an online ‘Participants Registration’ Google form. The ‘Participants Registration’ Google form (attached in the Appendices) was decimated

⁷ We followed the principles and practices recommended by FECCA— During these consultation sessions, we prioritise the following principles and practices to ensure a safe and respectful space:

- ‘1. **Safe and Anonymous Participation:** We assure participants that all information shared in these sessions will remain anonymous. No personal details, such as names, addresses, or contact information, will be requested, or disclosed in any reports.
2. **Encouragement of Open Dialogue:** We invite participants to speak freely and honestly about their thoughts and experiences with racism. Your perspectives are crucial in helping us understand the impact of racism and inform strategies to address it.
3. **Accessibility and Inclusivity:** We are committed to making these sessions accessible to all. If you require language assistance or have hearing or visual impairments, we will arrange interpreters and welcome your support persons. Please communicate any special requirements to your community organisation or leader in advance.
4. **Cultural Sensitivity:** We respect and value the diverse cultural backgrounds of our participants. Your cultural perspectives and experiences are important, and we encourage you to share them.
5. **Emotional Support:** If at any point during the consultation session you feel uncomfortable or require emotional support, please reach out to one of FECCA’s dedicated staff members or your community organization/leader present at the session. Your well-being is important to us.’

widely on social media handles and in the social circles of two lead community organisations, SGRS and AIM. The aim was to focus on South Asian diaspora communities in Australia from India, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Pakistan, Nepal and Bhutan and all efforts were made to invite participant on a voluntary basis. The final registration count for the Google form was 177.

More people, however, joined as in-person registrations and walk-in was also allowed leading to the total number of registered participants to be 221. Out of the total registered participants, 146 attended the actual consultations. Each participant was asked to self-identify some demographic information about their specific caste, religion and gender. Participants self-identified as evident, 45% of the participants identified as Buddhist, while 44% as Ravidasia, 5% of the participants identified as Hindu, 4% as atheists, and 1% each as Sikhs and non-religious. For gender, it was Female n=43 or 29%, Male n=104 or 71%, other n=0.

The responses were accepted in all languages, English, Hindi, Punjabi, Marathi, Gujarati, etc., to ensure that the participants can comfortably share their thoughts without any language barriers.

3.3 Phenomenological interview and semi-structured Questionnaire

As explained above, the hermeneutic phenomenological approach attempts to capture the lived experiences in the daily life of the subjects and hence the attempt was made to conduct phenomenological interviews that “attempts to obtain descriptions of the participants’ lived world and comes close to an everyday conversation, but as a professional interview it has a purpose and a specific technique (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009).” The semi-structured questionnaires, separately designed for focus groups and individual interviews, was drafted in the form of open-ended questions with probing questions. The questions covered all aspects of the lives of the caste-oppressed community members in Australia and slowly opened up the issue of prejudice and discrimination to the participants. No structure was followed to ask the questions as per the list, and instead, the facilitators were trained to probe a particular theme, should that insight seem more relevant to the study. Furthermore, The sequencing of these themes

was tailored to accommodate the participants' narratives, allowing them the flexibility to guide the conversation based on their own experiences. The questions were drafted being guided by themes from the literature review of the subject and other similar studies undertaken in the racial discrimination context.⁸

Following is the questionnaire for the phenomenological interviews—

Questionnaire for each session

1. Second Session, Focus group interviews (1-1:30 hour)

Let's start by having you describe your—

- **What is your name? (Basic questions)**
- **How would you describe your caste background?**
- **Which course are you studying?**
- **Where do you work and in what capacity? (common questions)**

Main questions—

1. What is **caste discrimination/prejudice** and negative attitudes based on low caste **for you**?
2. In what ways do you **perceive caste**-based prejudices manifesting in Australian society, both **express** (overtly) and **hidden**(covertly)?
3. Think back last time **you experienced differential treatment** *maybe* because of your caste identity and/or other identity.

⁸ Lorelli S Nowell, Jill M Norris, Deborah E White, and Nancy J Moules, 'Thematic Analysis: Striving to Meet the Trustworthiness Criteria' (2017) 16(1) International Journal of Qualitative Methods <https://doi.org/10.1177/1609406917733847> ; Maxine Pryce-Miller and others, 'The Lived Experiences of Racial Bias for Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic Students in Practice: A Hermeneutic Phenomenological Study' (2023) 66 Nurse Education in Practice 103532, doi:10.1016/j.nepr.2022.103532; Michael L Birzer and Jackquice Smith-Mahdi, 'Does Race Matter? The Phenomenology of Discrimination Experienced among African Americans' (2006) 10(2) Journal of African American Studies 22 <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41819112>; Samuel D Museus and others, 'A Qualitative Analysis of Multiracial Students' Experiences with Prejudice and Discrimination in College' (2016) 57(6) Journal of College Student Development 680 <https://dx.doi.org/10.1353/csd.2016.0068>

4. Think back last time **your family member, friends and/or acquaintance experienced differential treatment** *maybe* because of the caste identity and/or other identity.
5. Can you describe any **instances** where you felt **excluded or marginalized** due to your caste background in Australia?
6. How has caste discrimination **affected** your **daily life, relationships, and opportunities** in Australia?
7. How do you navigate the complexities of caste dynamics within your social circles, both within your own community and in interactions with individuals from other backgrounds?
8. What **strategies** have you and/or your community **employed to cope with caste discrimination** or prejudice you face?
9. How do you perceive the **awareness and understanding of caste issues** within **broader Australian society**?
10. What **changes or initiatives** do you believe could help **address caste-based discrimination** and promote equality and inclusion for caste-oppressed communities in Australia?

2. Individual in-depth Interview

Let's start by having you describe your—

- **What is your name? (Basic questions)**
- **How would you describe your caste background?**
- **Which course are you studying?**
- **Where do you work and in what capacity? (common questions)**

Main questions—

1. Could you please **share your lived experiences of discrimination**, prejudice, stereotype (if any) and/or because of your **caste+ identity** (Ask for providing specific instances or anecdotes that have impacted you?)
2. Could you describe a particularly **challenging or significant encounter with caste-based prejudice** and how it affected you **emotionally and psychologically**, if comfortable?
3. Have you ever felt confused from a differential treatment or rude behaviour towards you, failing to identify the cause of such hostility?
4. Can you reflect on any **internal conflicts or struggles** you've faced in reconciling your cultural heritage and caste identity with your life in Australia?
5. Can you discuss any **long-term effects or consequences on your personal relationships, career aspirations, or mental health** because of experiencing caste discrimination?
6. How do you **navigate** your **cultural identity and caste heritage** within Australian society?
7. Have there been moments where you've **felt empowered or resilient in the face of caste discrimination**? If so, what factors contributed to these feelings?
8. Could you share any **coping mechanisms or strategies** you've developed to deal with the challenges posed by caste discrimination in your day-to-day life?
9. In what ways do you perceive your experiences of **caste-based discrimination intersecting** with other forms of marginalization or oppression you may face as an individual living in Australia? Are they overlapping?
10. Looking towards the **future**, what do you believe needs to change to achieve greater **anti-caste equality and inclusion** in the Australian society?

3.4 Sample

The sample participants are purposefully sampled using an intentionally stratified sampling method and homogeneous purposive sample method where Dalits (or the erstwhile untouchables) and some *Shudra* or Other Backward Classes who would have

experienced untouchability are the castes groups that selected as the only sample group of participants for the study for having certain characteristics or set of characteristics due to historical discrimination based on their caste identity. They form a homogenous sample created on the basis of caste identity. We do not intend to study the lived experiences of all caste oppressed groups in Australia (at the level of nationwide census) due to the limitations of the resources and the scope of the study. However, the sample size is significant enough to capture in-depth lived experiences of caste discrimination in Australia. The caste-oppressed communities invited to participate in the study are irrespective of their religious and regional affiliations, as the caste identity of the participants is uniform, and the study excludes other dominant and upper-caste groups. Dalits and some Shudra communities are the only caste groups that have historically faced, and contemporarily continue to face caste discrimination because of their low social position within the caste hierarchy.

The registration form was publicly shared with everyone, and registrations were invited from all individuals who think they belong to a caste-oppressed group. Though a great deal of help was provided by community organisations SGRS and AIM in their outreach to request volunteers to participate in the study. No recruiting or recommending of particular participants was undertaken by these organisations despite a close outreach being made by these organisations in their own social networks.

The participants will be the study’s “data sources” providing an opportunity to study in-depth the lived experiences of caste oppressed communities in Australia through the individual’s experience with casteism in Australia. It will enable us to identify the prevalence of caste discrimination and bias faced by individuals in all walks of life of the caste oppressed group person—socially, institutionally, in the workplace and in educational institutions (among others).

3.5 Data collection

In total 27 focus group interviews and 13 individual interviews. Please refer to the next chapter that indicates the number of in-person focus group and individual interviews and online interviews that were conducted. On an average there were 6 people in a focus group. All the interviews were conducted in a span of 16 days and doing so in such a short

period of time kept the moment going across Australia due to the Pan-Australian network of the community organisations, gathering more support and encouraging more people to come out and voluntarily share their experiences.

Each session started with a PowerPoint presentation (attached in Appendix) that appraised the participants on the key ground rules of mutual respect to allow everyone to speak without interruption and give ample time to let everyone participate instead of dominating the conversation. Furthermore, it was reiterated that full confidentiality of data will be maintained, and all the principles recommended by FECCA, as discussed above, have been included in the study.

The sessions were divided into the following format and structured accordingly, and the following information was shared with the participants—

1. **Welcome and introduction and first session (45 mins-1 hour):** This session will appraise participants with the overall agenda of the day and give a breakout of various sessions that will be conducted throughout the day.

The lead researcher will then begin by explaining different ways caste bias, discrimination and harassment occur in both overt and covert ways institutionally, in social interactions and in educational institutions. The lead researcher will do so by giving examples from the literature review of studies undertaken across the world that capture the lived experiences of ethnic minorities on how bias and discrimination may look by sharing examples about the lived experiences of caste discrimination.

No attempt will be made to tell participants what to respond and instead, the focus will be to provide participants with a sense of how to respond and expectations from the participant on how to respond to the questions and time given to the participants to study the questionnaire which was available in English, Hindi and Punjabi for the readers to engage with.

2. **Second Session, Focus group interviews (Parallel sessions of 1-1:30 hours each):** Each focus group was conducted using a semi-structured interviews model based on a pre-agreed questionnaire. Group interviews are always tricky but the most crucial way for us to show intersectional discrimination based on religion and caste. The groups will be constituted based on religion and regional ties depending on the number

of participants. For example, if there are 20 Marathi Buddhist community persons then they will be a focus group among themselves. If there are only 5 Chamar caste persons and 25 Hindu Dalits who speak Hindi, then they form one group. (intentionally stratified sampling method) There will be a lead facilitator for each of these sessions which will run parallel. A separate questionnaire is used for this.

3. Third (Final) session, Individual in-depth interviews (20-30 min interviews):

Through the use of semi-structured interviews based on a predefined questionnaire, participants will be called upon to share their experiences in a more closed environment and speak freely. This will help us capture experiences from participants who would not be comfortable or completely open in a group setting (in the above two sessions). Only those registered participants who also consent to be interviewed individually will be assigned a facilitator who will engage in 1:1 interview. Video/audio recording will be done to capture all the details of the interview and will be anonymised on the day of recording. All references to personal sensitive data will be removed from those recordings.

4. Anonymous written testimonials (documentary analysis) in this post-session avenue, our participants will have a final chance to send us detailed testimonial accounts of their experiences of caste discrimination where they can share their experiences, anonymously, freely and without any spatial pressures.

The average time for focus groups was 1.5 hours and for individual interviews was 20-25 mins which allowed enough time to the participants to engage meaningfully and deeply to share their lived experiences.

Safe data collection practice was adopted by establishing a single point of contact for the storage of the voice recordings from the sessions to maintain the anonymity and ensure all the voice recorders are plugged into one system to avoid duplication of sensitive recordings. All of the focus group and individual interviews were transcribed verbatim.



Shri Guru Ravidass
Sabha, Sydney Inc



CERTIFICATE OF PARTICIPATION

THANK YOU

For participating in the National Community Consultations on Caste
Discrimination (NCCCD), 2024. We are grateful for your time and support.

Jai Gurudev | Jai Bhim



NCCD team, March 2024

Certificate presented to participants of the NCCCD project.



3.6 Data interpretation and analysis

The study employs Braun and Clarke's (2006 and 2013) thematic analysis framework for data interpretation and data analysis.⁹ By relying on Nowell et al. (2023) 'practical and effective procedure for conducting thematic analysis' one that cites and uses the leading papers in the field of qualitative methods and combines trustworthiness criteria outlined by Lincoln and Guba (1985) and Braun and Clarke's (2006 and 2013) thematic analysis framework. Briefly, Lincoln and Guba (1985) 'refined the concept of trustworthiness by introducing the criteria of *credibility*,¹⁰ *transferability*,¹¹ *dependability*,¹² and

⁹ Victoria Clarke and Virginia Braun, 'Teaching Thematic Analysis: Overcoming Challenges and Developing Strategies for Effective Learning' (2013) 26 *The Psychologist* 120 <https://dx.doi.org/10.1353/csd.2016.0068>.

¹⁰ For maintaining the credibility of the study, we followed the techniques 'such as prolonged engagement, persistent observation, data collection triangulation, and researcher triangulation.' Since all transcripts are verbatim to 'produce a complete record of spoken words' the transcripts were vetted and checked through two rounds of reviews to ensure all words and sentences are captured accurately. In collaboration with FECCA and Monash University the findings of the report will be checked for the 'referential adequacy as a means to check preliminary findings and interpretations against the raw data.'

¹¹ The lead researcher has provided a descriptive account of the research process to enable those 'who seek to transfer the findings to their own site can judge transferability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).'

¹² Audit trails ensure that another researcher with the same data, perspective, and situation could arrive at the same or comparable, but not contradictory, conclusions: T Koch, 'Establishing Rigour in Qualitative Research: The Decision Trail' (1994) 19 *Journal of Advanced Nursing* 976 <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1365-2648.1994.tb01177.x>

*confirmability*¹³ to parallel the conventional quantitative assessment criteria of *validity and reliability*.¹⁴

All the raw data has been systemize through coding using NVivo which is the top standard Qualitative Data Analysis Software with the understanding that ‘Software can enable the researcher to work efficiently with complex coding schemes and large amounts of text, facilitating depth and sophistication of analysis (King, 2004).’ The thematic analysis in this study was undertaken by following Nowell et al. (2023) and the interpretation of the six phases of thematic analysis provided by Braun and Clarke’s (2006 and 2013) therein. The following table from Nowell et al. (2023) provides a brief overview of the six phases of thematic analysis in the study.

¹³ Confirmability is concerned with establishing that the researcher’s interpretations and findings are clearly derived from the data, requiring the researcher to demonstrate how conclusions and interpretations have been reached. It will be easy for researchers to understand the analysis in this report as it is grounded in clear exposition of the 'theoretical, methodological and analytical choices': G A Tobin and C M Begley, ‘Methodological Rigour within a Qualitative Framework’ (2004) 48 J Adv Nurs 388, 392.

¹⁴ *ibid.*

Table 1. Establishing Trustworthiness During Each Phase of Thematic Analysis.

Phases of Thematic Analysis	Means of Establishing Trustworthiness
Phase 1: Familiarizing yourself with your data	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Prolong engagement with data Triangulate different data collection modes Document theoretical and reflective thoughts Document thoughts about potential codes/themes Store raw data in well-organized archives Keep records of all data field notes, transcripts, and reflexive journals
Phase 2: Generating initial codes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Peer debriefing Researcher triangulation Reflexive journaling Use of a coding framework Audit trail of code generation Documentation of all team meeting and peer debriefings
Phase 3: Searching for themes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Researcher triangulation Diagramming to make sense of theme connections Keep detailed notes about development and hierarchies of concepts and themes
Phase 4: Reviewing themes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Researcher triangulation Themes and subthemes vetted by team members Test for referential adequacy by returning to raw data
Phase 5: Defining and naming themes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Researcher triangulation Peer debriefing Team consensus on themes Documentation of team meetings regarding themes Documentation of theme naming
Phase 6: Producing the report	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Member checking Peer debriefing Describing process of coding and analysis in sufficient details Thick descriptions of context Description of the audit trail Report on reasons for theoretical, methodological, and analytical choices throughout the entire study

For the *Phase 1*, the qualitative data consisted of 40 voice recordings and 40 transcripts from the focus group interviews and individual interviews. The original data were stored in a centralized repository, which is a secure network location containing folders categorized by the type of raw data. Each piece of data was archived with timestamps to establish an audit trail and to verify the adequacy of our data analysis and interpretations. We managed a common Google Spreadsheet to know the status of transcription of the raw data. The transcripts went through two rounds of reviews to ensure proper and error free transcription that included words and sentences as spoken as it is in writing.

In *Phase 2*, the initial codes were generated in *NVivo* both deductively and inductively. Deductively, the existing literature review and field notes were helpful in coming up with codes for initial thematic analysis. Inductively, the initial themes were analysed by reviewing all transcripts in *NVivo*. The following initial themes were generating inductively and deductively—

- alienation
- Asking directly what is your caste
- Asking indirectly what is your caste
- Assertion of Autonomy and Individual Identity
- Avoidance
- Awareness
- Awareness about caste
- Boycott overt
- career impact
- caste identity
- Caste in mind
- Caste slurs
- Children
- Confusion about caste identity
- Confusion or uncertainty about the experience
- Covert discrimination
- Covert prejudice

- Definition overt
- Demographic information
- Denial of casteism
- Differential treatment
- Education
- effect-career opportunities
- Effect-relationship
- Employment lived experience
- Exclusion
- Family life
- Fear
- Food choices
- Friendship breakdown
- Gender
- Harassment and Bullying
- Hiding low caste identity
- Impact of Discrimination on career
- Impact of Discrimination on Personal Experiences
- Impact on well-being
- Important quotes
- Intersectionality
- Last name identifier
- Legal prohibition
- Marriage
- Mental health
- Microaggression
- Miscellaneous
- Modes of identification
- Navigating caste identity and coping mechanisms
- No discrimination
- Overt discrimination
- Overt Prejudice

- Passing off
- Physical assault
- Psychological Impact
- Recommendation
- Religion
- resilience
- Self exclusion
- Social life
- Social Media
- Strategies

The above initial themes identified deductively and inductively were done so by more than one researcher to enhance the credibility of the exercise.

In Phase 3 and Phase 4, we attempted to sort and collate the relevant codes into themes which are related to the research questions of this study. The concept of theme for this project is understood as

A theme is an abstract entity that brings meaning and identity to a recurrent experience and its variant manifestations. As such, a theme captures and unifies the nature or basis of the experience into a meaningful whole (p. 362). Themes are identified by bringing together components or fragments of ideas or experiences, which often are meaningless when viewed alone (Aronson, 1994). A theme is not necessarily dependent on quantifiable measures but rather on whether it captures something important in relation to the overall research question (Braun & Clarke, 2006).¹⁵

The thematic analysis for this project is data-driven, inductively, and also deductively grounded in similar theoretical and analytical studies present in the literature and thus the final outcome of the project in the form of the results is ‘rooted in the data generated.’¹⁶ The above codes were then consolidated to define the main themes for the thematic analysis. No data was abandoned or rejected if it did not belong to the main

¹⁵ Jeffrey Aronson, ‘A Pragmatic View of Thematic Analysis’ (1994) 2 The Qualitative Report 1 <http://www.nova.edu/ssss/QR/BackIssues/QR2-1/aronson.html> ; Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke, ‘Using Thematic Analysis in Psychology’ (2006) 3 Qualitative Research in Psychology 77, doi:10.1191/1478088706qp063oa.

¹⁶ *ibid.* 8.

questions at hand and instead, the marginally relevant themes or the ones which did not reoccur significantly (for example, no discrimination) were not abandoned and instead were used contextually to make the study more rounded in its analysis. The following screenshot shows the themes and sub-themes which are an outcome of the consolidation process.

Name	^	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > <input type="radio"/> Caste identity 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="radio"/> Children 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ <input type="radio"/> Covert discrimination 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="radio"/> Microaggression 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ <input type="radio"/> Covert prejudice 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="radio"/> Asking indirectly what is your caste 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="radio"/> Attitudes 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="radio"/> Caste in mind 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ <input type="radio"/> Denial of casteism 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="radio"/> Denial of prejudice and discrimination 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="radio"/> No discrimination 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ <input type="radio"/> Education lived experience 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="radio"/> Primary and secondary 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="radio"/> University 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ <input type="radio"/> Employment lived experience 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="radio"/> business 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ <input type="radio"/> Exclusion 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> > <input type="radio"/> Self exclusion 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="radio"/> Hiding low caste identity 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="radio"/> humiliation 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ <input type="radio"/> Impact 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="radio"/> Effect-relationship 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="radio"/> Family life 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="radio"/> Shortcut to Code 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="radio"/> Friendship breakdown 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ <input type="radio"/> Impact of Discrimination on career 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="radio"/> career impact 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="radio"/> effect-career opportunities 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="radio"/> Impact of Discrimination on Personal Experie... 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="radio"/> Impact on education 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ <input type="radio"/> Impact on well-being 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="radio"/> alienation 		

- Important quotes
- ✓ Intersectionality
 - Gender lived experience
 - Marriage
 - Miscellaneous
- ✓ Navigating caste identity and coping mechanisms
 - > Strategies
 - No police action on complaints of discrimination
 - non-south asian asking caste identity
- ✓ Overt discrimination
 - Boycott overt
 - Caste slurs
 - Differential treatment
 - Harassment and Bullying
 - Physical Assault
 - Untouchability
- ✓ Overt Prejudice
 - Asking directly what is your caste
 - Attitudes
- ✓ Psychological Impact
 - Mental health
- ✓ Recommendation
 - > Advocacy for Legal Protections and Policy Changes
 - Awareness
 - Awareness about caste
 - Promotion of Cultural Awareness and Inclusivity
- ✓ Social life lived experience
 - Food choices
 - Religion
 - Social Media

In the above, due care was taken to make sure that there is a clear distinction between choosing of the themes. Despite that there may be some overlap, which is natural given the complexity of discrimination and prejudice and the way lived experiences are shared by the individuals.

Based on the above, we then at *Phase 5: Defining and Naming Themes* and *Phase 6: Producing the Report*, finalised the themes by assessing the storyline that the transcribed and coded data indicated. We further assessed how the thematic separation of the entire data set addressed the research questions at hand and accordingly defined and named themes before producing the report. The transcripts, for the purposes of theme identification, were ‘interpreted through an iterative and recursive process which included becoming familiar with the data, moving backwards and forwards through it’¹⁷ to ensure correct analysis of the content.

3.7 Validity, reliability, and dependability

The qualitative empirical legal study adopts a triangulation of methods to generate a variety of data on the lived experiences of caste-oppressed communities. All the participants will be made aware of the importance of conveying true and honest accounts of their lived experiences. Sharing lived experiences of discrimination can be difficult and therefore participants will have reliable ways to convey their experiences in different settings, three sessions and anonymous written testimonials. Each of these sessions will have a different set of questions which are developed, as the questionnaires reflect, to capture the phenomenon of caste discrimination accurately.

In terms of maintaining the dependability and integrity of the project, all steps will be taken to ensure that the research and its findings are free from bias. We will ensure this by adhering to the FECCA framework and the methodology (qualitative empirical legal research). The questions posed, the method used to generate data, triangulation (the combination of methods and data types) and modes of data analysis (Classical content analysis through thematic categorization) will all ensure that the evidence from the

¹⁷ Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke, ‘Using Thematic Analysis in Psychology’ (2006) 3 *Qualitative Research in Psychology* 77, doi:10.1191/1478088706qp063oa.

consultation supports the findings that the analysis will arrive at. Thereby ensuring the integrity and reliability of results from the national consultation study.

Chapter 4 Demographic Information of the Participants

4.1. Overview

During this project, 221 people from across Australia registered for the consultation process, out of which 146 people eventually participated (see Table 4.1). Overall, the turnout percentage was 66%.

Table 4.1 – Number of registrations and participants

Total number of registrations	221
Total number of participants	146

A state and territory-wise distribution of number of participants is provided in Table 4.2. Victoria recorded the highest number of participants (47), followed by NSW (44).

Table 4.2 – Number of participants

State	Number of participants
ACT	24
NSW	44
NT	0
QLD	9
SA	21
VIC	47
WA	1
Total	146

4.2. Participant gender and age distribution

Table 4.3 provides state and territory-wise information about participants' gender. 71% of participants identified as Male, while 29% as female. Participants were provided an option to identify by non-binary gender types as well.

Table 4.3 Participants' gender data

State	Number of participants	Gender	
		Male	Female
ACT	24	16	8
NSW	44	29	15
NT	0	0	0
QLD	9	9	0
SA	21	14	7
VIC	47	35	12
WA	1	1	0
Total	146	104	42
Percentage		71%	29%

Figure 4.1. depicts the age group classification of participants across 8 categories. Majority of the participants (42%) belong to the age group of 37-44 years.

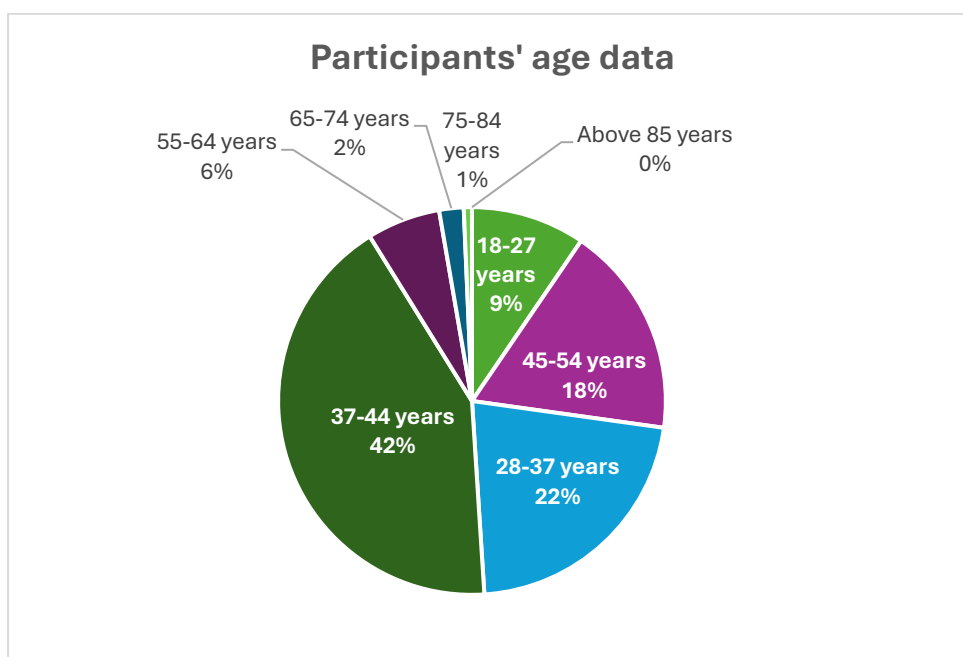


Figure 4.1 – Participants' age data

4.3. Participant religion/ religious identity and caste data

Table 4.4. provides information about participants' religion. As evident, 45% of the participants identified as Buddhist, while 44% as Ravidasia. 5% of the participants identified as Hindu, 4% as atheists, and 1% each as Sikhs and non-religious.

Table 4.4. Participants’ religion data

State	Number of participants	Religion/ religious identity					
		Buddhism	Hinduism	Ravidasia	Atheism	Sikh	Non-religious
ACT	24	15	1	8	0	0	0
NSW	44	23	2	13	3	2	1
NT	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
QLD	9	3	0	6	0	0	0
SA	21	12	4	2	3	0	0
VIC	47	12	0	35	0	0	0
WA	1	0	1	0	0	0	0
Total	146	65	8	64	6	2	1
Percentage		45%	5%	44%	4%	1%	1%

Figure 4.2. depicts information pertaining to participants’ caste. 45% of the participants identified their caste as Ravidasia, 19% as Neo-Buddhists, 15% as Buddhists. Please note that the data presented is based on what participants have identified their caste as. While it may be confusing to consider Ravidasias, Neo-Buddhists and Buddhists as ‘castes’, it is important to note that they all are a part of ‘Scheduled Castes’ in the Indian constitutional parlance - a group that comprises of several of the lowest of the castes as per social hierarchy, including former ‘untouchables’. Such caste identities are often employed by caste oppressed communities to assert their new identities or showcase their resistance to the discriminatory caste system. For example, many former untouchables who renounced Hinduism and converted to Buddhism, identify their caste as ‘Neo-Buddhists’.

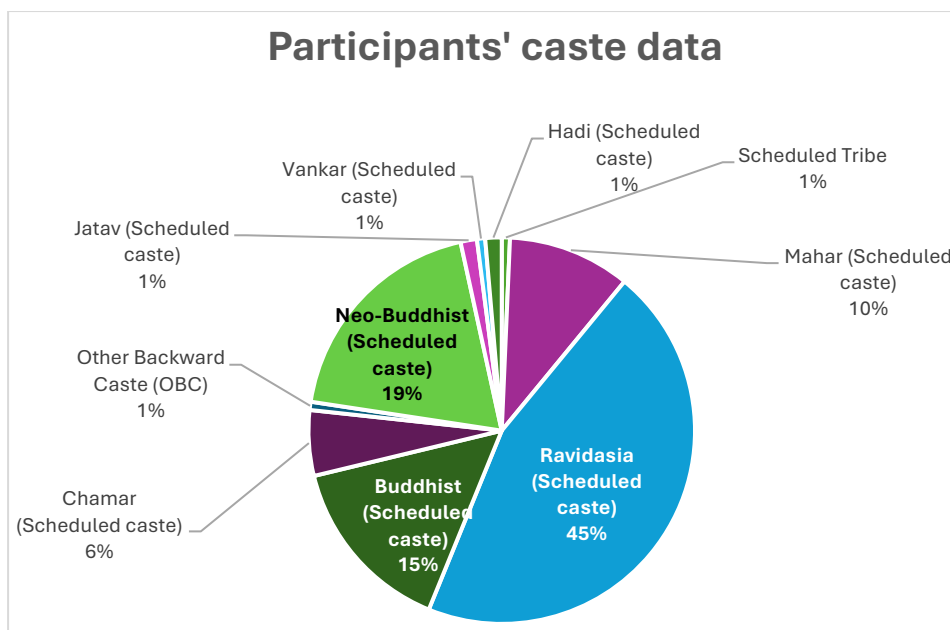


Figure 4.2 – Participant caste data

4.4. Consultation format (In-person/ Online) data

An overwhelming majority of 117 participants joined the consultations in-person to record their lived-experiences, while 29 joined on-line (See Table 4.5). In-person to online ratio was 80:20.

Table 4.5. Online vs In-person participation

State	Number of participants	Consultation format	
		In-person	Online
ACT	24	20	4
NSW	44	39	5
NT	0	0	0
QLD	9	0	9
SA	21	19	2
VIC	47	39	8
WA	1	0	1
Total	146	117	29
Percentage		80%	20%

Chapter 5 Thematic Analysis

“These people (Upper castes) who came from India, brought this dirty, filthy bag (caste prejudice and discrimination) with them (to Australia). They brought it with them. Not everybody is the same.” Sydney Focus Group 3

5.1 Introduction

The insights from the thematic analysis of the verbatim transcripts indicate the presence of caste-based discrimination and prejudice in all aspects of life in Australian society. Caste discrimination and prejudice is persistent and systemic in Australia. It manifests in varying degrees in all aspects of public and private lives overtly and covertly. The central argument of the thematic analysis, developed through inductive reasoning, is that Caste discrimination and prejudice is not just a case of an interpersonal and intercultural issue within the South Asian diaspora, it is a pervasive, systemic and racism problem. The discussion on addressing it remains entirely absent from federal and state government law and policy in reference to the existing anti-racism framework.

In this part, we will attempt to provide readers with ‘a concise, coherent, logical, non-repetitive, and interesting account of the data within and across themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006)’.¹⁸ The findings in these sections were primarily developed inductively by reviewing all the transcripts and listening to all the recordings and thus the analysis is based on the real lived experiences of caste-oppressed communities, where researchers have kept audit trial notes and methodological notes for the thematic analysis undertaken in NVivo 14.

The following codebook was used by the researchers to thematically investigate all transcripts and provides a description of each theme, what each theme means and the implications of each theme as such (this answers the question *What are the key themes that emerged from the discussions?*):

¹⁸ Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke, ‘Using Thematic Analysis in Psychology’ (2006) 3 *Qualitative Research in Psychology* 77, doi:10.1191/1478088706qp063oa.

Codes

Name	Description	Sources	References
Caste identity	Umbrella code for caste identity related experiences	14	21
Confusion about caste identity	When the participants indicated confusion about their caste identity	7	8
Confusion or uncertainty about the experience	Used when the participants were unsure or confused about their experiences, whether it is related to caste identity, or if it amounts to differential treatment and/or prejudice and/or discrimination	20	30
Definition	What do participants think is caste discrimination and prejudice.	20	48
Demographic information	Participant demographic information	16	18
Last name identifier	How caste is identified using the last name of the individuals	20	46
Modes of identification	Various modes of identifying caste of an individual, example, background information, indirectly etc.	19	36
Children	This theme captures the experiences of discrimination, differential treatment, prejudice,	17	50
Covert discrimination	Describes instances of covert and hidden forms of discrimination because of the caste identity. According to the AHRC when prejudice – whether individual or institutional – is accompanied by the power to discriminate against, oppress or limit the rights of others it amounts to discrimination/racism. ¹⁹ We use this definition	16	33
Microaggression	Microaggressions are the casual expressions that perpetuate racist stereotypes and ideas. ²⁰	8	15
Covert prejudice	Covert or hidden prejudice in thought or	26	77

¹⁹ Australian Human Rights Commission, *What is Racism?* <https://humanrights.gov.au/our-work/race-discrimination/what-racism>

²⁰ Australian Human Rights Commission, *Key Terms* <https://itstopswithme.humanrights.gov.au/commit-to-learning/key-terms>

Name	Description	Sources	References
	action which doesn't amount to discrimination but is negative bias based on caste identity.		
Asking indirectly what is your caste	Covert or hidden way to identify an individual's caste and define the future relationship that is negatively biased and prejudicial based on caste identity.	8	9
Attitudes	Covert or hidden biases and attitudes towards caste oppressed communities	5	7
Caste in mind	Covert or hidden biased and prejudicial thinking that has been expressed as psychological	11	14
Denial of casteism	When participants denied existence of casteism/racism in Australian society	4	5
Denial of prejudice and discrimination	When participants denied existence of prejudice, differential treatment and discrimination based on caste in Australia	2	2
No discrimination	When participants said they have not faced discrimination based on caste in Australian society.	17	30
Education lived experience	This captures the range of lived experiences in the education sector, prejudice, bias, differential treatment, discrimination, exclusion	14	21
Primary and secondary	This captures the range of lived experiences in the education sector, prejudice, bias, differential treatment, discrimination, exclusion in the primary and secondary level education	7	9
University	This captures the range of lived experiences in the education sector, prejudice, bias, differential treatment, discrimination, exclusion in the University level education.	9	14
Employment lived experience	Captures the systemic and structural casteism ('Structural racism is a term often used to describe inequalities and barriers that prevent people from accessing equitable opportunities within a society. It refers to the kinds of	16	31

Name	Description	Sources	References
	racism that operate deep within the social structures of society. ²¹) in the employment sector. It also some subtle/covert forms of differential treatment experienced by employees.		
business	Same as above but specific to personally owned business	2	4
Exclusion	Refers to exclusion in each major area of life based on caste identity.	16	41
Self-exclusion	Refers to the instances of participants from caste oppressed groups excluding themselves from upper-castes people in the Australian society	13	19
Avoidance	Refers to the instances of participants from caste oppressed groups avoiding interactions and connections upper-castes people in the Australian society.	6	11
Hiding low caste identity	When participants hide their low caste identity to protect themselves and cope with discrimination	21	62
humiliation	A form of casteism which violates individual's dignity through humiliation.	6	6
Impact	The impact of discrimination, prejudice, differential treatment and casteism on caste oppressed groups.	3	4
Effect-relationship	The impact of discrimination, prejudice, differential treatment and casteism on relationships (platonic and non-platonic) on caste oppressed	7	11
Family life	The impact of discrimination, prejudice, differential treatment and casteism on family life of caste oppressed community participants	5	9
Fear	The impact of discrimination, prejudice, differential treatment and casteism manifested as fear in the minds of caste oppressed community participants	16	42

²¹ Australian Human Rights Commission, Key Terms <https://itstopswithme.humanrights.gov.au/commit-to-learning/key-terms>

Name	Description	Sources	References
Friendship breakdown	The impact of discrimination, prejudice, differential treatment and casteism manifested as breakdown of friendships of caste oppressed community participants	17	32
Impact of Discrimination on career	The impact of discrimination, prejudice, differential treatment and casteism manifested as negative impact on the career of caste oppressed community participants	6	8
career impact	Same as above	4	7
effect-career opportunities	Same as above	5	6
Impact of Discrimination on Personal Experiences	The impact of discrimination, prejudice, differential treatment and casteism manifested as negative impact on the personal life experiences of caste oppressed community participants	12	23
Impact on education	The impact of discrimination, prejudice, differential treatment and casteism manifested as negative impact on the education of caste oppressed community participants	2	2
Impact on well-being	The impact of discrimination, prejudice, differential treatment and casteism manifested as negative impact on the well-being of caste oppressed community participants	10	13
alienation	As an impact, this is to capture when individuals felt alienated from the society.	3	4
Marriage	This theme captures the lived experiences of breakdown of marriages due to caste identity in Australia.	10	20
Important quotes	A crucial way of capturing important quotes that depict the lived experiences in all aspects of life of caste oppressed community participants in Australia. It expresses the story of what is the lived experience of these community members in Australian society	30	217

Name	Description	Sources	References
Intersectionality	<p>‘Intersectionality refers to the way that different aspects of a person’s identity intersect with and impact one another, and how the combined experience of multiple forms of discrimination is often greater than the sum of those discriminations alone.</p> <p>It means that people’s experience of a certain form of discrimination, such as sexism, is impacted by other features of their identity, such as whether they are of a particular race, a member of the LGBTQIA+ community, and/or someone with a disability. Understanding this is important in understanding racism, because it allows us to see how a person’s experience of racism can be compounded, or transformed, by other forms of discrimination they face.’²² This theme captures intersectionality in their lived experiences <i>based on caste, gender and religion</i>.</p>	14	23
Gender lived experience	Intersectional lived experience of prejudice and/or discrimination based on gender and caste.	5	14
Miscellaneous	Are some quotes which did not fall into any of the above themes but were nonetheless considered important for the analysis in this report.	3	7
Navigating caste identity and coping mechanisms	Provides instances of how participants navigate their life in Australia with their caste identity and what are the coping mechanisms to address caste-based prejudice, differential treatment and discrimination.	30	111
Strategies	Instances of the strategies used by participants to navigate their caste identity and experiences of discrimination and prejudice in Australia.	22	42

²² Australian Human Rights Commission, Key Terms <https://itstopswithme.humanrights.gov.au/commit-to-learning/key-terms>

Name	Description	Sources	References
Assertion of Autonomy and Individual Identity		0	0
Passing off	When caste oppressed group participants change their last name and identity to that of an upper caste to 'pass off' as them to avoid being discriminated	5	13
resilience	Instances where caste oppressed group participants have been resilient in fighting caste-based discrimination, differential treatment and prejudice.	18	37
No police action on complaints of discrimination	When the Australian police refused to take action against complaints of caste discrimination.	3	3
non-south Asian asking caste identity	When non-south Asian individuals did microaggression by asking caste identity of individuals	4	5
Overt discrimination	Overtly or outrightly manifested forms of discrimination based on caste identity in Australia which is equivalent to racism as explained by AHRC 'Racism is the process by which systems and policies, actions and attitudes create inequitable opportunities and outcomes for people based on race. Racism is more than just prejudice in thought or action. It occurs when this prejudice – whether individual or institutional – is accompanied by the power to discriminate against, oppress or limit the rights of others.' ²³	29	121
Boycott overt	Instances of where caste oppressed persons were boycotted because of their caste identity.	7	10
Caste slurs	Instances of the usage of caste slurs by upper castes in Australia	18	40

²³ Australian Human Rights Commission, *What is Racism?* <https://humanrights.gov.au/our-work/race-discrimination/what-racism>

Name	Description	Sources	References
Differential treatment	Instances of being differently treated because of caste identity (largely covered by overt discrimination theme)	2	2
Harassment and Bullying	Instances of being harassed and bullied because of caste identity (largely covered by overt discrimination theme)	2	2
Physical Assault	Individual instances of being harassed and bullied because of caste identity	4	7
Untouchability	Experiences of untouchability experienced by children and adults in Australia. For the purposes of this report the definition of untouchability is borrowed from the judicial interpretation of the prohibition of untouchability in the Constitution of India (Art. 17) to mean ‘The (untouchability prohibition) guarantee against social exclusion based on notions of “purity and pollution”’ ²⁴	8	17
Overt Prejudice	Overt or outright prejudice in thought or action which doesn’t amount to discrimination but is negative bias based on caste identity.	21	46
Asking directly what is your caste	Overt or an outright way to identify an individual’s caste and define the future relationship that is negatively biased and prejudicial based on caste identity.	19	39
Attitudes	Overt or an outright biases and attitudes towards caste oppressed communities	1	1
Psychological Impact	Instances of psychological impact of discrimination, prejudice and the overall lived experience on individuals.	21	68
Mental health	Same as above	8	12
Recommendation	Recommendations made by caste	26	67

²⁴ *Indian Young Lawyers Association and Ors. v The State of Kerala and Ors. (2019) 11 SCC (Para 355)*; Also see, Wankhede, Asang, and Alena Kahle. “The Human Dignity Argument against Manual Scavenging in India.” *CASTE: A Global Journal on Social Exclusion* 4, no. 1 (2023): 109–29. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/48728108>. ‘This linkage between the anti-exclusion principle and dignity is foundational to the court’s analysis of Article 17 on untouchability, as it recognises graded inequality and the theory of ‘purity and pollution’ on which the practice of untouchability is based.’

Name	Description	Sources	References
	oppressed community persons to address casteism in Australian society		
Advocacy for Legal Protections and Policy Changes	Recommendation for advocating legal prohibition and policy changes	8	9
Legal prohibition	Recommendation for advocating legal prohibition	19	34
Awareness	Recommendation for spreading awareness about caste discrimination in the society and if the participants perceive if there is any awareness in the society	9	15
Awareness about caste	Recommendation for spreading awareness about caste discrimination in the society and if the participants perceive if there is any awareness in the society	10	15
Promotion of Cultural Awareness and Inclusivity	Recommendation for promoting cultural awareness and inclusivity in the Australian society	9	10
Social life lived experience	Lived experiences of caste oppressed community in their daily social life in Australia	23	70
Food choices	Participants reporting discrimination because of the food choices of consuming meat.	3	5
Religion	Participants reporting discrimination, prejudice and exclusion because they don't follow Hindu religion and for not celebrating Hindu religious festivals. It is also a mode of caste identification.	18	55
Social Media	Instances where people have reported discrimination, prejudice and exclusion on social media.	12	18

This Code Book describes the various choices of codes and the underlying description and thoughts that went into coding something as such. The codes in bold letters are the parent code and the ones which follow it are child codes that indicate sub-themes within

the parent theme. These themes broadly capture what the ‘participants have to say?’ and the following thematic analysis will explain in detail each of these broad themes and sub-themes to provide credible evidence in the form of lived experiences of the caste-oppressed groups to substantiate the argument. The analysis will go beyond mere descriptive exposition of the themes and the codes to provide readers with an in-depth analysis of the rich data set, moving from description to interpretation.

By mapping onto a spectrum, the lived experiences of participants based on their caste identity vary from the high levels of discrimination, where participants have been physically assaulted and have experienced untouchability by being socially excluded, based on the notions of purity and pollution. Children face high levels of discrimination. This forms the one end of the spectrum. The other end of the spectrum consists of covert prejudice in the form of microaggression due to caste identity which did not have a significant impact on the individual. Other ranges of experiences that cover the field in between these two extremes include the breakdown of marriages, friendships and employment relations; caste oppressed individuals leaving their jobs due to caste discrimination; usage of caste slurs etc. and outside this spectrum also are those experiences where participants were confused about their experiences of discrimination at first instance (during the first few questions) and thus reported that they have not suffered any form of differential treatment or prejudice, let alone discrimination. Many such participants opened up later in the interview to express their own experience of covert prejudice. There has been a minuscule number of people who said they have not suffered *any* adverse experience based on their caste status and who also deny the existence of prejudice and discrimination based on caste in Australian society. This range of experiences will be analysed in-depth first, by using short quotes and long-quote-case studies that describe the nature of such prejudice and discrimination. **(Sub-part I)**

Then the discussion moves to the analysis of each significant aspect of life in Australia, education, employment, social, education etc and discusses covert and overt forms of discrimination in each of these categories. It will also use short quotes and long-quote case studies that describe the nature of such prejudice and discrimination. **(Sub-part II)**

The report then discusses the various *impacts* that such experiences have on an individual's career, social life, relationships, marriages, psychological and education.

(Sub-part III)

Thereafter, the discussion will turn to the strategies and coping mechanisms adopted by caste-oppressed groups to navigate their caste identity and their intersectional identity, by highlighting various strategies and coping mechanisms adopted formally and informally to respond to and mitigate casteism. **(Sub-part IV)**

The discussion will then be followed up by the last part of the report, Recommendations and Conclusion, addressing what is it that the caste oppressed community individuals think should be the way to address deep rooted casteism in Australian society. **(Part V)**

The discussion now turns to **sub-part I** to discuss the experiences of physical assault, untouchability, and boycott (over discrimination) experienced by caste oppressed communities in Australia due to their caste identity.

5.2 Sub Part I-Physical Assault, untouchability, social boycott based on caste identity in Australia

The lived experiences of individuals from Caste Oppressed Communities (COC) in terms of their journey in Australia an arduous one. As an immigrant diaspora community, South Asian people migrate to Australia either for education or for employment opportunities. These are first generation South Asians, predominantly from India, who come to Australia with the hopes to secure world class education and then also seeking employment into Australia's culturally diverse employment market. The existing second-generation and third generation (current) also came to Australia as migrants with the above two underlying purposes, education and employment. It could be seen from the reported experiences in our study that the worst manifestations of casteism, physical assault, untouchability and social boycott have also migrated with the migrant population.

The following case study demonstrates how a young budding student from India's Dalit community faced the worst form of casteism within the first 2 months of moving to Australia:

Like I just stayed for four days, and I don't know and later when after fighting, he mentioned that you people always show your caste, like you people always show your blood. That was he mentioned like you show your blood. But in reality, he was a Brahmin, and he showed his arrogance of being a Brahmin. I didn't do anything wrong, and all people already knows it.

He did this on like out of the house like there was a bus stand and there he slapped me, and I just tolerated it because I was in shock. I just arrived two weeks ago and this type of incident happens with me and how would you feel like any new people any new person who came here in Australia will feel really shocked and I was like I was respecting him like my elder brother and he did this to me. Like I always you know treat with respect and I always give like respect to like an elder brother.”

Source: Australia Online Focus group.

“I would like to only share the experience with me before two months. When I arrived in Australia, I was looking for accommodation, and I thought if I lived with Gujarati people and communicated in the Gujarati community, it would be better for me to find familiar people who belong to the same place. So, but I didn't know that people even here people have still that thinking like about the caste and so I have asked people for accommodation, and they have asked my caste because they couldn't understand my surname. So, then I didn't continue with them about my accommodations. And through Facebook, I have posted in this Gujarati community that I am looking for accommodation and one person there, he came to help me like I will give you a room. And after that, I moved to his place. So, he was really being nice to me, and he was like already Australian citizen now, he was Gujarati and he behaved really, really very well. And then a couple of discussions happened, and he asked me about my caste, and I told him honestly and he said he doesn't have any problem with me. But then his behaviour started to change little by little and he started nit-picking me in little things. And in just four days, he kicked me out of the house, he slapped me, he kicked me. And you already know the story I shared in a group. So, then I had to call my mutual friend and I had to move out from his place and then he didn't even give me half of the money.

The above experience demonstrates the physical assault on a Dalit student which was done with impunity by an upper-caste man (Brahmin) after getting to know the caste of the student, which was asked directly in the first place. The physical assault was followed by a casteist comment and the usage of caste slurs against the student. This describes the discriminatory action undertaken by the upper-caste man was done so with a sense of caste power and impunity.

This experience, of course, left the student in a state of shock and confusion as to why is this happening in Australia where he notes,

“I expected Australia to be really like you know safe for international students and there are still people like this here in here so it was shocking for me but now I am moving on and I am focusing on my studies and I realized that I should focus on my studies and I should not be hurt by this incident because my parents didn't send me here to tolerate all this nonsense and you know be traumatized by these things. So, I am trying my best to move on, and I am trying my best to you know focus on my studies.”

Despite the intensity of the experience, the Dalit student was resilient, and the only coping mechanism that they adopted was to divert their mind from the assault incident and focus instead on the studies at the university. Just to ‘move on’ was the only option left with them as the police complaint against the casteist perpetrator failed:

“I have complained in police station, but the police said like it's your words against his words and we cannot find any evidence.”

The police had no idea how to respond to the complaint and it was not only his complaint which was dismissed but he himself was failed and dismissed by the law enforcement mechanisms. This indicates that in this experience, government too had a role to play in the experience and ignorance of this experience of casteism was something that should have had governmental redressal through law enforcement mechanisms.

This was not just one of event, multiple instances of physical assault and threat of rape and other forms of assault have been reported by the participants.

For instance, one participant noted

Yes. One of my friends has this experience [of caste discrimination]. They end up having physical assault. When they went to the police station, the police charged the other person with physical assault. In this case he (upper-caste person) said it directly that *Chude Chamar sade nal barabari karne lage* means Chamar people are trying to compete with us or trying to be at same level as they are. They fought on this issue.

When he said to police that he said these disrespectful words to me, which we call caste discrimination. The police officer said it directly that you are Punjabi, he is Punjabi. I don't have caste discrimination in the law. He said that I have charged him with physical assault because he has the car's camera recording. He has the evidence. That's why he got charged for assault. But because there is no caste discrimination in the constitution, even the dash cam has the audio message, but you can't do anything about it because it's not in the law.

Source: Melbourne Focus Group Interview

The above instance demonstrates that in another case the charges of physical assault were registered against the upper-caste person by the police but the caste angle to the whole issue was ignored. The usage of casteist slurs "*Chude Chamar sade nal barabari karne lage means Chamar people are trying to compete with us or trying to be at same level as they are*" by an upper-caste man was the reason for the dispute which was followed by a physical assault on the lower caste person. The ignorance and dismissal of the caste identity is a commonality across cases and police just don't know what to do with such cases. The dismissal also came with a validation of the interpersonal (Indian vs Indian, Punjabi vs Punjabi) angle by the police and in the process the law enforcement agency invisibilised the whole caste identity and caste-based reasons for the physical assault. Further, the hesitancy from the police side was also because of the lack of 'law' or legal recognition of caste within the anti-racism legal framework.

In another instance of domestic violence based on caste, a woman participant explained how she and her children were victims of physical assault by the husband/father because they didn't agree to pass off as upper castes.

“What is not right (hiding of the caste identity) isn't right. We live in a society and how can we call ourselves ethical when we hide our identity? He would do wrong (be violent towards us) and then cover it up...”

Source: Adelaide Individual Interview

This account explains the intersectionality of gender and caste and a small introduction to the world view and lived experience of a Dalit woman, a topic we will come back to in the upcoming sections.

Apart from the actual instances of physical assault, there has been promotion of violence against Dalit women and recitation of some texts that call for 'beating' of women and lower castes.

“One more thing was said there (in a group discussion comprising of upper-caste men and by upper-caste men), which was very shameful, it was said there that, ‘we catch the women who belong to the ‘chamar’ community and we do this or that to them’ (the participant was shamed to say it out loud but the recording explains the interpretation of the words ‘we do this or that to them’ should be committing rape and sexual harassment with ‘Chamar’ (a Dalit caste) women.”

Source: Canberra_Focus Group 3

Such remarks by upper-caste men actively express the state of their mind—to commit sexual violence against Dalit women and also point at the impunity through which such words are said in a social group setting.

In another setting, a Hindu priest taught in his preaching that Shudras (Dalits and OBCs) and women should be beaten—

“When we reached there, the priest said he had a Shabda(word); he said it was Dhol, Shudra, Nari, Yeh Sab Tadan Ke Adhikari. (Dhol (drum musical instrument), Shudra (lower castes) and Nari (women) deserve to be beaten.)

So, when we heard this, it was very shocking for us. When we entered, he was saying this. So, we have heard this from the beginning. And we knew the meaning of this. So, now we are Shudra, we are women, and he is saying that they are Tadan Adhikari. Meaning, we need to beat them. They deserve to be beaten.

So, their own women were also there at that gathering. Upper-caste women were also there. And they were having fun, they were clapping and deep into that.

So, I appreciate that. So, they were not understanding what the priest was saying. So, when we heard that, maybe the host also didn't know.

He must be very busy. But the preaching that the priest was giving, he was teaching to those people. So, when we heard that, it came to our mind that they are saying this if their thinking is of this level. Now, everyone knows Shudra in India. Everyone knows the word Shudra. So, now, if they come to know that we are Shudra, they are already thinking that they deserve to be beaten.

Beat them, crush them. So, obviously, we were very, very careful from that day.”

Source: Sydney Focus Group 5

The above references indicate the prevalence of acts of caste based physical assault and the existences of caste-based attitudes that call for such physical assault and sexual assault on Dalits, especially Dalit women.

Untouchability

The practice of untouchability denotes the social, economic and cultural exclusion of Dalits because they are considered impure and hence polluting in the caste system. Dalits are condemned and excluded from all aspects of their lives because even their shadow is considered as polluting. Expressly banned in the Constitution of India and made into a constitutional offence under art 17, untouchability, as a practice manifests as the worst outcome of caste-based discrimination. In 16th and 17th century Maharashtra ‘As Peshwa’s gained effective control...untouchables faced worst kind of persecution

during the Peshwa's orthodox Brahminic rule, where the untouchables were *made to tie brooms behind their backs to sweep up the dust of their footprints and to tie pots in front on their necks to collect their spittle.*²⁵ This was based on the notion that all bodily aspects of an untouchable are ritually polluting, hence justifying the total exclusion of Dalits.

The existence of this practice was seen on multiple instances in Australia, especially among children.

²⁵ Countercurrents, *Pot and Broom Battle of Koregaon: Its Significance and Rattling Rhetoric* (2017) https://countercurrents.org/2017/12/pot-broom-battle-koregaonits-significance-rattling-rhetoric/#_ftn1

In Sydney one of the participants broke down sharing the experience of her children facing untouchability in Australia:

“Kids (Dalit kids), when they go to other kids(upper-caste) birthday parties, and they (upper-caste) follow Hinduism and their own rituals so sometimes what happens is that they are not allowed to enter that time when they follow the ritual. So, the children say why we are only going for the cake cutting time. (Note: the birthday cake cutting ceremony is usually follows the Hindu ritual prayers which are held at the beginning of an occasion)

R2: “Rituals like the way they pray. So uss time par unko lagta hai ki choti jaati ka usme nahi hona chahhiye (Translation: at the time of their vedic/Hindu rituals they feel that lower caste (adults and kids) should not be anywhere closer)

“because we they think we are Shudra not like we are untouchable like untouchable people to huss wajah se humare baccho ko same time par jaise baki bacche join kar rahe hai same ceremony humare bacche nahi kar paate hai Jinko pata hai hum kis jaati se belong karte hai toh jaise ke unko lagta hai hum Shudra hai hum unke ritual me jayenge toh woh bhang ho jayegi.” (Translation: With a sad face, our children (Dalit children) are prohibited from joining at the same time as other children and are made to wait outside of the place where ritual is undertaking. Our children are not able to do the same ceremonies. They know which caste we belong to and that's how they think we are (polluting). We are Shudras/untouchables. If we attend their rituals, they and the ritual will get defiled/polluted.) Source: Sydney Focus Group 4.

“So, kids gone through the same thing so most of the time it’s part of my house discussion as well. That “Mummy why we don’t go on the same rituals” so have to make them understand that we are not stopping them but the other community people are stopping you other background people are stopping you because they are not comfortable with us, as it may affect their rituals.”

R3: “Toh R2 ji mera aapse hi ek question hai yahibaat pe ki, jab aapka bacha jo ritual ko who family follow nahi karne deti hai toh aise condition me sirf aapka hi bacha exclude kiya jata hai ki baki communities se aare bachhe jaise Chinese, English woh bhi usme enter nahi kar paate hai?”

Translation: When your child's family is not allowed to follow the ritual, then in such a condition only your child is excluded because the children from other communities like Chinese, English are also not able to enter it? (this question was asked by another participant to see if it such exclusion is only with Dalit kids or any kids from any other culture)

R2: *Toh humare peoples logo me kya hai ki show karna hai ki we are very high qualified people agar hum English baccho ke saath baat karenge aur Chinese bhi they are still equal for them (Translation: So Indians like to show off that they are very highly qualified by engaging in friendship with English and Chinese families (‘English kids’ used to describe White Australians kids) and hence have no problem kids from other backgrounds to attend those rituals) but still jaati according like Schedule caste hai they feel so sad they don’t allow us to enter their own rituals. Especially in Hinduism. (Translation: “and yet they exclude my kids from the same Hindu rituals because they are Dalits/Scheduled Castes) “My kids most of the time I have seen that their teary eyes. They feel like cry because kids can’t express much but at that time they cry.”)*

To be 100 percent sure about what was being told, the mother was further asked another question by the interviewer *(Translation: “I really feel for this so I am very curious about your scenario because when we came here, my kids had completed his primary education in India and I didn't know much about this situation. Also, as we Indians have a slightly brownish identity. Have you ever asked your child like this, “Tell me when that the Chinese, English and Thai kids are going to the rituals so, did they not allow Dalit kids to enter the prayer?”)*

To which she responded that kids are taught untouchability in some schools.

R2: *“Haan mein iss cheez ka answer dena चाहित hu because mere bacche uss age me se jaa rahe hai ki they can understand things now toh school me kya hota hai ki especially in public schools they have a curriculum you have to follow your own religions as well there is no mention about our religion there is the Hinduism Sikhism but we not from both this religions right toh mere bacche mummy me kya join karru toh I was also like thode time ke liye chup hogayi, what do I need to tell him? because he don’t have any option in a school as well so they choose the sports section, sometimes they have to choose the option which they don’t want to go.”*

Translation: I would like to respond to that because my kids are now going through that so they can understand things now. What happens in schools here, especially in public schools they have a curriculum you have to follow your own religions as well there is no mention about our religion there is the Hinduism Sikhism but we not from both this religions right to so my kids ask me as to what should they sign in for? I froze for a second So, I don’t know how to answer them ? what do I need to tell him? because he don’t have any option in a school as well so they choose the sports section, sometimes they have to choose the option which they don’t want to go.

Here the children are told that just like they were told about Indian culture in school also, when they said that they are touchable untouchable religious then the children suddenly asked me that “We belong to untouchable religious, you never tell us” I just told. It is this is from long time back and they wanted to know why they were not told before.

*Yes, at the school. They learned these two words touchable and untouchable.
Interviewer: So, they must be asking you who are we*

R4: *“We are untouchables, but you never tell us”*

Sydney_Focus Group 4

The above experience demonstrates two things. First, the narrative of children facing social exclusion and untouchability because of their caste status. This is through overt discriminatory practices of the upper-caste families who still sometimes practice untouchability in Australia. The second thing is that some schools teach about the caste system without outlining the harms of it or don’t engage in anti-caste sensitization. This is evident from the children feeling rejected and confused about their caste identity and being caught by surprise.

Such experiences are also not a one-off experience. There have been experiences related to rejections and aversions to accepting food from Dalits and prohibiting Dalits from touching food belonging to the upper castes:

“For instance, when sweets are brought to celebrate Dr. Ambedkar's birthday, some hesitate to partake, unlike during Diwali celebrations where everyone eagerly indulges. This may not be outright discrimination, but rather a form of subtle teasing or marginalization.”

Sydney_Focus Group 6

“But once my friend told me, Who has been here for a long time. One is my friend. So, he told me about the house where he lives. Apart from that, there are 3 housemates, and 4 people live there. So, till they didn't know his background, Say around 6 to 8 months, Everything was going well, But as soon as they came to know About his background, After that, They started to see a significant change in him. In his behaviour.

Totally. What sort of behavior? I mean, they used to cook food separately, Which used to be cooked together. So, they didn't include him together. He used to feel excluded. Okay. In activities. Anything. Okay. When the housemates used to stay, It was a weekend, and They used to go out somewhere. So, they excluded him. So, they kind of ignored him.”

Adelaide Focus Group 2

That's why she doesn't even eat from his house. This is a new experience. If you don't want to say anything, go to Patel.

Canberra Focus Group 1

I would like to talk about my experience when I first came to Australia in 2008 for studying. I lived in a shared apartment with a girl from an upper caste. When it was the birthday of our Guru Ravidass, she said, “it's Ravidass birthday” and I told her to say it respectfully as Shri Guru Ravidass. So, she got to know about my caste and that I belong to a lower caste therefore she separated all of her things from mine. First, we used to cook together but after that she separated her food as well, she totally ignored me even after this incident.

Canberra Focus Group 3

[1:0]

He did not want anyone else. Third person.

[Respondent]

I did not understand. I did not understand. They did not allow me to touch the bread.

[Respondent]

They are not allowing me to come close to them. I did not know what was wrong with me. But.

Canberra Focus Group 1

“They hired a student named (Redacted for confidentiality), to assist with daily tasks. During her work, (Redacted for confidentiality), asked about their community, and upon learning it, she remarked that in her own community, they wouldn't even enter houses like theirs, let alone the kitchen. “This attitude reflected a lingering stigma, suggesting that despite being in a helping role, (Redacted for confidentiality), still viewed herself as superior”. It's disheartening to see such outdated beliefs persist, even in modern settings.”

Sydney Focus Group 7

The above quotes indicate that untouchability in the form of completely separating cooking and food is the major way in which the practice is undertaken in Australia, immediately when the caste identity of an individual is disclosed. Prohibition from touching food and complete exclusion from cooking food together occurs when the

caste identity of the individual is disclosed and marks the point when untouchability begins.

Social and economic boycott

The close issue related to untouchability is *social and economic boycott*, hints of which could be seen in most of the overt discrimination experiences where there is some form of boycott in exclusion of individuals after their identity is revealed.

The experiences of boycott are differential, with boycott happening on business and of individuals and of the social and religious events celebrated by Dalits.

“just want to say that when they get to know about the caste that you belong to their behaviour totally changes. First, they behaved so well, they shared things with me. As soon as they got to know about which caste I belong to they completely alienated me in that house. I spent a year alone in that house as they also stopped talking to me.”

Canberra Focus Group 3

“Yeah. I don't get invitations anymore. No. Since I started circulating (Ambedkar's) posters.”

Sydney Focus group 5

“when I am talking about social blocks, okay, generally people don't come to your shop, okay, they generally don't take services from you and that's really hampers, and to avoid that you know, it's a shame that you know we need to hide our caste.”

Sydney Focus group 1

“So the one of the upper caste guy came and he literally asked the reception lady why the Buddha's statue is there, who is the owner? and he tried to identify and when the lady told all the things to him and all he told we should never come to your café, that was shocking and if you really wanted to grow your business, put Ganapati photo, which is another elephant God of Hinduism. Then I can come back to you.”

Sydney Focus group 1

“There was a poster for Diwali celebration from the Indian community, and in that poster, there was a bottom line, there was one quote, “SC, ST not allowed” in somewhere, I think it was foodstuff or something like that. So, the thing that I saw, I think that fellow was from the Sanskriti family.

Actually, I was doing my internship there, but he shared that poster with me. So, there was a note that SC, ST not allowed. So that's why I am recalling that one. It was written, SC, ST not allowed.”

Melbourne Focus Group 1

“It is, it is like my husband is running a restaurant today, his friends who are the same age group I think they were more than thirty people we do have a big group. When people found out that we belong to this caste, I'm telling you we don't have anyone today tSo, we like we don't have we don't have my friend my husband doesn't have any friend since we found out that we belong to this caste. Because no one spoke to my husband when I got into the taxi, and they did not listen, and it was hurtful. Because they have come to know that my husband belongs to this caste. “

Sydney Focus group 1

“where I may have been excluded from certain social gatherings or cultural rituals within the Maharashtrian community. For example, I noticed that I was not invited to events like Lakshmi Puja or Haldi Kunku, despite others in the same social circle being invited.”

Melbourne online focus group 6

“Since then, not a single referral has come my way, resulting in a loss of business opportunities. Despite this, I believe in openly expressing my cultural celebrations and rights on social media, as it serves as encouragement for others in the community.”

Sydney Focus group 7

“One of my well close friend family friends is there. She is uh living in the suburb, where most of the Marathi people and people from the upper community are there. I think they are only they are the only family among their group, which come from our community, like a lower caste or we can say in our community. So, they always force to involve or take part in their festival celebration, but I never see their friends coming to our Jayanti or any kind of our programs. So, when I ask her why do you go then? She says no, they are friends, we have to go. There is only always one side that if you are making a friend with other community people who is coming from upper caste, there is always a thing, you have to follow their things to keep the relationship, they will never follow you. So, keeping in that mind if you want to be if you want to keep your relation good with them, you always have to involve. You always have to take part in their activities, keeping in mind they will never follow yours. So, they will never come to your festival.”

Sydney personal interview 7

The above range of experiences on boycott describes both overt and covert attempts to boycott business owned by Dalits, individual social boycott and boycott of the festivals covertly. The commonality of experience in the boycott is also of caste identity, whenever the caste identity is disclosed, boycott happens based on such low caste identity. How

then is caste identity disclosed? What are the methods of identification of a lower caste person's identity, and how does the journey of caste discrimination begin, in the first place? These questions will be discussed in the next sub-section.

Before concluding this section, however, it is crucial to put in context of the theme of 'No discrimination,' 'confusion or uncertainty about the experience,' 'denial of casteism' and 'denial of prejudice and discrimination,' to which this discussion turns.

Accounts of no discrimination and confusion about the experiences

Apart from the above-mentioned overt discriminatory attitudes of caste discrimination that indicate Dalits being physically assaulted, experiencing untouchability and social and economic boycott, the participants also shared the experiences that they have *not* suffered any discrimination, prejudice or differential treatment based on their caste identity. There were many participants who showed a great deal of confusion and uncertainty about their experiences with caste identity. There was a miniscule number which denied the existence of casteism and denial of prejudice and discrimination in Australian society.

The instances of pure no discrimination was shared by an insignificant number of participants and are reproduced to give readers a sense of their response,

“sorry to interrupt you here but in my experience like again the Australians who are not coming from the country where the caste is prevalent like so in my again in my experience like forget about the intensity they don't even know the word of caste or anything like that that is my experience they don't even know the word of caste(“caste hi nahi pata kya hai”)”

Australia Online Focus Group 2

“And whatever job I have done here, I have never faced it in the workplace. No. I have not seen that. Everyone is living together. In the back end, I can say that, But I have never felt that. Okay.”

Adelaide Focus Group 2

These are the only instances where a participant had completely denied the existence of any form of caste identity-based discrimination and prejudice in Australian society.

Some other instances included not denial of the existence of such prejudice and discrimination throughout Australia but their individual experiences of not facing discrimination,

“I have been in Australia for two years, And whatever job I have done here, I have never faced it in the workplace. However, the reservations that have been given to us in India, which is also discussed here, So, people here talk about certain things. So, these things happen, in general, In the group, or in the workplace, If you are sitting somewhere while working. But, as such, no one has discriminated against me, Or anyone around me, about caste. So, I have not observed this, nor have I faced it. Okay.

It has not happened to me. I have not felt that I have been treated differently. Okay.”

Adelaide Focus Group 2

“Okay. I don't have any experience directly in Australia. I have never felt excluded or discriminated against during my time abroad. I felt welcomed and open to engaging with any group I chose to join or not join. Discrimination was not a part of my experience, and I felt comfortable and accepted wherever I went.”

Australia Online Focus Group 2

These instances of participants facing no discrimination or prejudice in their lived experiences has to be nuanced from the observations recorded in the field notes. From the thematic analysis and field notes of the lead researchers, it was seen that participants who expressed no discrimination did so many a times initially and later changed their narratives to opening up and sharing stark experiences of discrimination that they have faced. This was the case for a significant number of participants who first said they had not faced any forms of prejudice based on their caste identity usually in the first three questions of the questionnaire and only later towards the middle of the focus

group interview they opened up. As the existing literature informs us that ‘Experiences of racism are complex and difficult to quantify: Lived experience of racism can be difficult to put into words, let alone summarise in a survey question. An in-depth qualitative process creates time and space to articulate experiences.’²⁶ Similarly, for any individual, it is difficult to identify and share the lived experience of casteism and any participants expressing that they have not suffered any prejudice or discrimination or their lived experience in Australia has been casteism free needs to be construed accordingly. This is to, however, not dismiss the experiences of no discrimination shared with the researchers and the following analysis will substantiate the above points.

Case study 1— Melbourne Women’s Focus Group

In Melbourne, the lead researcher (as included in his field notes) noted about the scuffle that broke out between participants while conducting the interview. The main reason was for this dispute was because a senior citizen stopped other participants from sharing their lived experiences based on caste. This fight was recorded on audio and transcribed in verbatim which is reproduce as under, Participant x is the senior citizen who was telling off everyone from sharing their lived experiences of discrimination—

[Participant x]

“Caste discrimination never happened with me. Nobody asked my last name, no discrimination at all.

What do they know (calling out the lady sharing their experience)? They don't know who they are. They don't know who they are.”

[Participant 7]

“Calm down.”

[Speaker 8]

²⁶ Welsh Government, *Towards Anti-Racist Further Education: Qualitative Research on the Lived Experiences of Learners and Staff* (GSR Report No 91/2023, 2023) 15. <https://www.gov.wales/towards-anti-racist-further-education-qualitative-research-lived-experiences-learners-and-staff>

“Some people ask me, they don't ask me what caste I belong to. They ask me, what is your surname? Because all our surnames are mostly not our surnames.”

“We don't use our surnames. But their question is, what is your surname? Because they are judged on the basis of their surname so that we can find out which caste they belong to and judge your history.”

[Participant x]

“If it's your surname, then it's common. What are you (speaker 8) saying? If it is your surname, then it is common.” (for people to ask)

(It has here that the lead researcher interrupted and said,)

“I would like to say something. If someone is sharing their narrative then, we won't interrupt them. We will let them speak openly.”

The above experience was the first attempt from Participant X to interfere in prohibiting people from sharing their experiences. The lead researcher observed that Participant x continued to deny the existence of any forms of discrimination in society. It was after 44 mins into the session that Participant x completely opened up about the worst form of exclusion that she and her husband faced due to their caste identity, which made them establish a separate Gurudwara or Guru Ghar in Melbourne separate from the Sikh Gurudwara. Participant x mentioned that she and her husband were *compelled* to establish a separate Gurdwara because her husband faced caste-based exclusion in Sikh Gurudwara.

“40 years. 35 years. My husband and children used to do this. (give Seva or volunteer in Gurudwara)

We used to serve them (Sikh Gurudwara). They didn't know how to wear a turban. Later on, they used to say, my husband used to serve them a lot. (Seva is volunteering in the day-to-day activities of Gurudwara, cooking, cleaning, washing up etc)

I used to do it as well. They (Sikh members of the Gurudwara Management Committee) used to say, he (Participant x's husband) is a Chamar.

We used to serve them. They used to say, he is a Chamar. My husband was sad.

He was a Chamar. He used to take me to Gurudwaras. He used to take me to Gurughar.

He used to say, we are Chamar. We will become Chamar. We are Chamar.

He used to say, we will establish our own Gurughar. He was my husband.”

[Lead researcher]

Can you expand on this? You told me, you served them for 35 years. Of course, You must be aware that you are coming here to serve.

[Participant x]

“Yes, this gurudwara (Separate Ravidas Gurudwara or Gurughar) was established since about last 25 years.”

[Speaker 2]

“Oh, 25 plus years.”

[Participant x]

“Mr. redacted for confidentiality had set up this place.”

[Speaker 2]

“Okay, okay.”

[Participant x]

“When he used to go to the Sikh Gurudwara, he was called caste names and they used to call him ‘he is a Chamar’

This was because the last name was not Singh but Ram. Ram was behind the name.”

[Speaker 2]

“Oh, of course.”

[Participant x]

“It was a big problem.”

[Participant x]

“No, there, he used to say, do a lot of service. He wanted to become a member of the Gurudwara management committee. I want to make Mr. redacted for confidentiality a member.”

[Participant x]

“When there were few people, few people, few families from lower castes in his support he said, I want to be part of the management committee. Great. Yes.”

[Participant x]

“In the committee, they objected the usage of his last name ‘Ram’ which indicated lower caste status as against Singh.

Yes. So, those few people said, there is no Singh behind his name.”

[Participant x]

“Ram is there.”

[Speaker 1]

“He will not become a member.”

[Participant x]

“Yes. He will not become a member.

Ram is there. He is not a Sikh.

He is a non-Sikh. Okay. So, he said this officially.”

[Participant x]

“After that, he stopped going.

He used to say to everyone, I am a Chamar.

I will remain a Chamar. Why do you keep going to the Gurudwara? I am a Chamar.”

The above case study indicates the arduous journey of people from Chamar community and their resilience against overt casteism being denied a place on the management committee of Sikh Gurudwara because of their low caste identity. The membership of

the management committee of Sikh Gurudwara would give power in the hands of the lower caste individual and hence was denied the place because of their caste per se. The caste study is also an example of how Participant x started by not only completely denying any experiences of discrimination, but also engaged actively in stopping others from sharing their experiences to the extent that the lead researcher had to intervene. The same participant x later expressed the worst forms of exclusion based on caste identity that compelled her and her husband to establish a separate place of worship because of the constant usage of caste slurs and discrimination in being excluded from the positions of power within the committee.

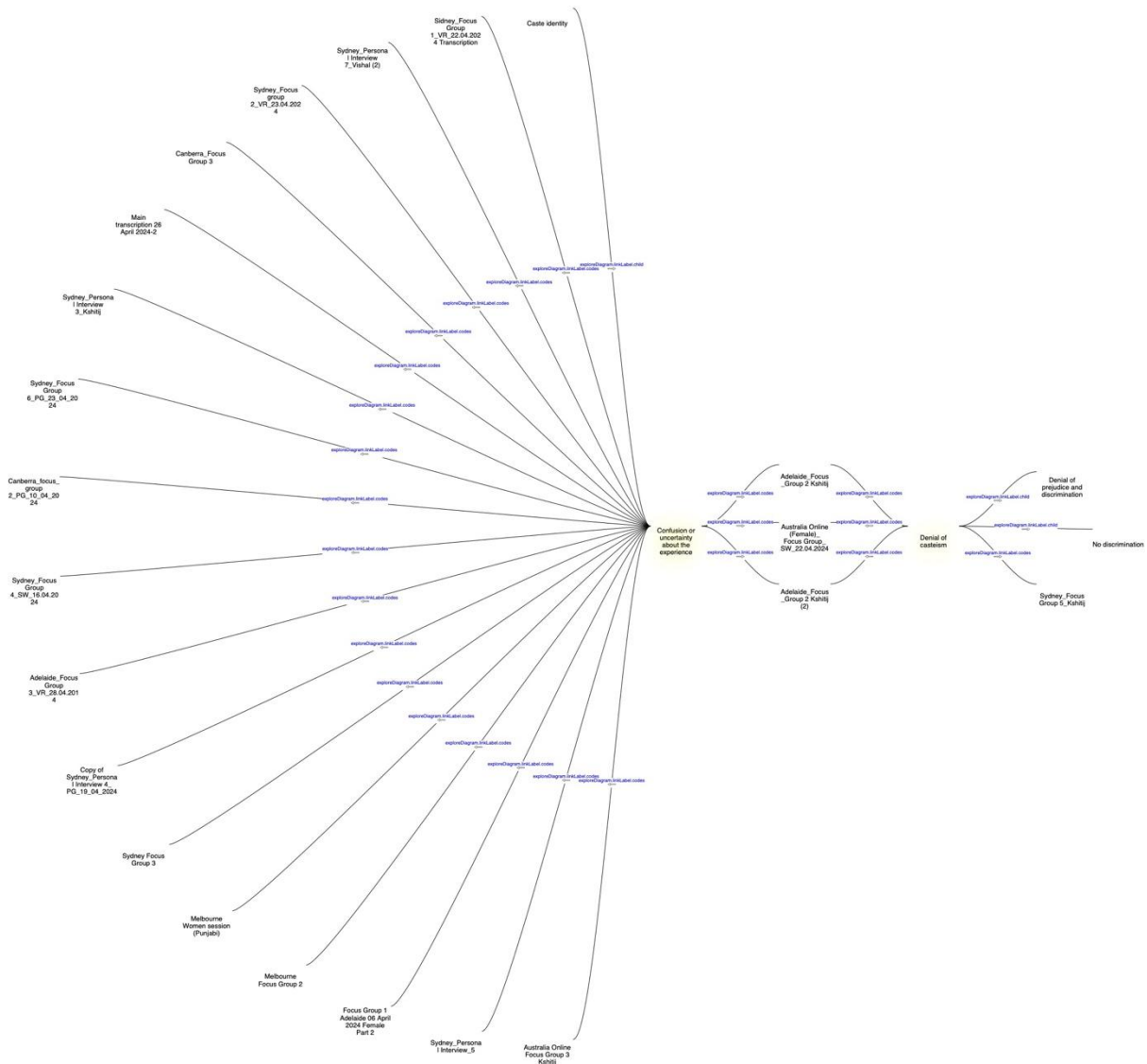
This was not a one of observation or response as many participants opened up about their experiences later in the interview, after listening to other participants openly sharing their experiences of discrimination and then also by breaking those mental barriers that made them first say they have not suffered any forms of discrimination based on caste identity. This was expressed by one of the participants,

“When we when we started asking these questions when you were here, personally, and I started asking these questions, before that, I could not think of any incident. But as we were talking, everyone was sharing their experiences.

Because I lived, I stayed here with my roommates were Brahmins and North Indians. Yeah, but I told them, see, I don't believe in your God. I'm Buddhist, and I've never had any issues with them. But this is this is the incident. I remember now that this is what has happened. So that was 2007. Right.”

Online Consultation 24 April 2024.

The following diagram shows the correlation between confusion about the experiences of discrimination and prejudice and individuals indicating no discrimination.



Apart from the above case study one can find that people have often started with saying that they have not faced any discrimination and then going ahead and describing an instance of covert or overt prejudice and discrimination. Following are some examples,

“It has not happened with me too, But there was an incident, When I was with my good friends, And they brought up the topic of scholarship. And they tried to talk about it, That you are from Scheduled caste, And your other friends know, That you have come from scholarship. Okay. That's

why you don't know the importance of money, And we work here, That's why we need more money, And you don't need more money. That's what they showed me.”

Adelaide Focus Group 2

In the above the participant despite facing casteist slurs and microaggression based on their caste identity said that they have not faced any prejudice or discrimination based on such identity.

In another instance one participant noted,

“I haven't (faced any prejudice or discrimination) but in a hidden way we are limited to Australia only So in a hidden way. Where I used to live before my housemates when they came to know when they came to my room, when they saw Buddha's statue, when they saw Ambedkar's portrait Then they started asking and when they did not get the answer then they started behaving something different and it eventually ended wild.

A week before. When I was at my house and my housemates had a fight over cleaning, they came to the caste like they said you belong to a lower caste, you have to do the cleaning.”

Adelaide Focus Group 1

This proves that the nature of experiences of discrimination are normalized to the extent that in the face of overt discrimination caste oppressed community individuals are confused about their experiences and instead construe overt discriminatory attitudes as covert or hidden. This is supported by an example, when a person narrated the instances of untouchability, it was remarked by other people that it is a subtle experience,

“But once my friend told me, Who has been here for a long time. One is my friend. So, he told me about the house where he lives. Apart from that, there are 3 housemates, and 4 people live there. So, till they didn't know his background, Say around 6 to 8 months, Everything was going well, But as soon as they came to know About his background, After that, They started to see a significant change in him. In his behaviour.

Totally. What sort of behaviour? I mean, they used to cook food separately, Which used to be cooked together. So, they didn't include him together. He used to feel excluded. Okay.

In activities. Anything. Okay. When the housemates used to stay, It was a weekend, and They used to go out somewhere. So, they excluded him. So, they kind of ignored him.”

[Speaker 6]
“Subtle, sort of.”

Adelaide_Focus_Group 2

In another instance, the person also ignored the microaggression experience of being directly asked about their caste identity and said that they have faced no discrimination or prejudice because of their identity:

“And to me, I am in Australia for twelve years, I have not faced many of such situations, never in workplace, because I work for American or UK based companies, so Multi-national companies. So, I don’t get that sort of, sort of experiences

I really didn't feel any student experience what these guys are talking about. My professional career had been in Bangalore. So there also didn't face any issues. So not going back in history, but in Australia, I never felt social issues. And if I have to answer it, I just tell that I'm a Buddhist and that's the end of it. (The instance where he indirectly shares how he was asked about his caste identity) I don't entertain any further question on that.”

Australia Online Focus Group 1

The above analysis provides a nuanced understanding of participants responding no discrimination (personal and nationwide) and the underlying confusion that caste oppressed community members face when it comes to articulating and sharing their experiences based on their caste identity. In the lead researcher’s field notes it was noted that there was an argument against openly studying caste, as this study does, as even uttering the word ‘caste’ for some of the Dalit members perpetuates it. It provides it visibility. This was the rhetorical opposition from a minuscule number of people who were deniers of any form of presence of caste identity and the underlying discrimination based on it in Australian life.

However, such deniers and group of people were well known among the larger community of Dalit people who pointed out the ‘cost of denial’ of caste-based prejudice and discrimination by some Dalits themselves,

*“and where is the where is the ability to talk about that or to eat or even to be heard and it's like and that's why I really get **it astounds me when people don't know what caste is or other Indians are like you know but I don't follow caste because it's like how can you not know something that's affected so many people yeah and then and then not validate or even recognize that this** I think that there's something to be said of just the this year out of confusion frustration anger sadness and just there's so much like. **I mean how can a history like that not be talked about or even validated you know or even said like yes what you've experienced is not expected this is how we can help you and I think that** it's more like where are you from why oh really how did you oh why are you talking about it you're only in Australia you know it's just like there's so much questioning just do as whereas I feel like you look around the world where globally so much trauma is being recognized and talked about and when it comes to caste it's like no one's even willing to talk about it except it's the essential first kind of print like step is just to go yes it exists it's like even that's **a question I think that's the biggest I feel like Gaslighting is the most significant danger and frustration, and I think it's dangerous because what it says is all the feelings that you have and what you've heard, what you've heard from your family, and your experiences. They don't exist. They don't equate, and there's no place for them to be acknowledged.**”*

This experience of being gaslighted through denial of the existence of caste in Australian society has a significant impact on individuals from caste oppressed communities, even when such denial can come through from within the community. It causes further invalidation and confusion about the experiences of caste among the community members leading to feelings of frustration and has a negative psychological impact on them.

In conclusion of this sub-part, we discussed caste identity-based physical assault, experiences of untouchability, social and economic boycott through inductive analysis, relying on the transcripts of the interviews. It was to demonstrate the structural aspects of worst forms of overt discrimination based on caste identity, as they manifest and as perceived by the caste-oppressed groups in Australia. The theme of no discrimination was also discussed and various nuances that the inductive thematic analysis showed, were also discussed. The nuances pointed towards normalization of overt and covert

prejudices to the extent that participants felt *confused and uncertain* about their experiences and ended up expressing ‘no discrimination’ and instances of microaggression and overt discrimination in the same instance. This crucially denoted lack of linear understanding of discrimination and lived experiences in general as such experiences are much more convoluted and layered and may have some inconsistencies and contradictions as the existing literature points out.²⁷

The analysis in this section also rightly pointed out that instances of no-discrimination and denial of caste-based prejudice and discrimination, despite being few, exists as part of lived experiences of caste oppressed communities in Australia. Thus, it is not just the worst forms of casteism but also very few instances of no-casteism that constitute community’s lived experiences, and either set of these experiences cannot be used to deny the existence of the other.

The discussion now moves to the provide readers a deeper glimpse into What are the methods of identification of a lower caste person’s identity, and how does the journey of caste discrimination begin, in first place? After which I will discuss the lived experiences of caste oppressed communities in all significant aspects of life in Australia, education, employment, social, psychological etc and discuss covert and overt forms of discrimination in each of these categories. It will also use short quotes and long-quote-case studies that describes the nature of such prejudice and discrimination. **(Sub-part II)**

²⁷ Ali Rattansi, *Racism: A Very Short Introduction* (1st edn, Oxford University Press 2007) <https://doi.org/10.1093/actrade/9780192805904.003.0008>

5.3 Sub-Part II: Where the journey starts: Modes of identifying caste oppressed communities in Australia

The analysis in this sub-part follows the previous sub-part and doesn't precede it for the reason that it was crucial to open up the thematic analysis with the most crucial finding of the study, of persistent overt caste based discrimination among caste oppressed communities in Australia in form of physical assault, practices of untouchability and social boycott. It also discussed the nuances of the whole experiences of people sharing that they have not suffered any form of caste-based prejudice and/or discrimination and the confusion about articulating and then expressing their experiences of caste and identity.

It is crucial to consider how does the journey of caste identity experiences begins for a caste oppressed community individual in Australia, as all the diaspora communities from South Asia to Australia are migrant communities, and within it the majority caste oppressed community are new migrants to Australia. This is the world view of the caste oppressed community that explains the increase in number of persons from caste oppressed community coming to Australia. Especially from India, where the first- and second-generation beneficiaries of the Indian affirmative action policies who now have manage to secure governmental affirmative action-based scholarships to study postgraduate degrees in Australia. Apart from the education sector, caste oppressed communities also travel to Australia for employment opportunities. In this context the journeys to Australia for South Asian caste oppressed community majorly have always begun as a first-generation migrant. The caste oppressed community who are second or third generation Australian citizens, born and raised in Australia are also a significant part of this study as the participants have reported suffering significant levels of prejudice and discrimination despite being born in Australia. Especially lived experiences of reconciling low caste identity and addressing covert and overt forms of prejudice and discrimination faced by young children indicates the intergenerational manifestation of casteism in Australia.

As against racism, which is predominantly determined through the colour of the skin, the lower caste identity of individuals is not immediately expressed through the colour of the skin. Since within South Asian diaspora, the overall permanent migrants characteristics

provide an interesting insight into the demographic composition of the ‘3.0 million permanent migrants in Australia who arrived since 2000’ as of 2021.²⁸ According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics, ‘India was the top country of birth among permanent migrants (439,700 people) or 15% of the 3.0 million permanent migrants in Australia.’ Out of which, ‘one in five Skilled migrants were born in India (20%).’²⁹ This explains why most of the people who signed up for the community consultations and study came from India. These statistics also indicate that Indians are the largest diaspora in Australia in terms of sheer number of increases in last 20 years, corroborating the insights from the caste oppressed communities who have reported increase in casteism in Australia,

“Once a month, there used to be ten people (who used to migrate). After that, the number of people increased so much that you can't imagine, ten times of that.”

Melbourne Women’s FDG

The above statistical data was used to corroborate the fact that majority of the migration from South Asian Diaspora occurred from India, the caste identity of such Indian-Australian permanent residents is not obvious from the looks or the colour of the skin when compared to race classification. Then how does the largest diaspora in Australia identifies the other persons in the societal setting? Through the assessment of all the transcripts, the inductive analysis explains a fairly easy process of deploying various modes of identifications outlined as under, often indirectly—

1. Last name identifier—is the first point of identity assessment undertaken by individuals from South Asian diaspora to ascertain caste and background of the ‘other’ person.
2. Inquiries about religion, cultural observances and associated practices—if the last name doesn’t make an individual’s caste obvious, then the usual question is to ask what religion one belongs to. Celebration or non-celebration of Hindu festivals is an important marker for caste identification.
3. Other modes of identification and indirectly asking someone’s caste—

²⁸ Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Permanent Migrants in Australia* (2021) <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/people-and-communities/permanent-migrants-australia/2021>

²⁹ *ibid.*

- a. Place of Origin or Residence
 - b. Social Circles and Interactions
 - c. Behavioural Responses
 - d. Scholarship or Government Support
4. Directly asking someone’s caste

The following tables outline some excerpts from the interview that substantiate the above point:

Last Name Identifier	Extracts from Interviews
<p>Australia Online (Female)_Focus Group</p>	<p><i>"Punekarite has the very common attitude to ask your last name and once you say like now it's the modern people, but they still ask your last name and what your thoughts in mind. I have no idea what they think but they always ask your last name."</i> "where are you from I said Nagpur oh Nagpur. Okay I am from Nagpur as well and the oh what's your surname [Redacted for confidentiality] <i>surname sometimes they can't so what's your mother's surname, Khobragade oh Khobragade okay. In Nagpur, people know Khobragade surname is from our community right"</i></p> <p><i>(Reference 2)"...they try and ask surname they try to guess what surname you has."</i></p> <p><i>(Reference 3)"...they just asked what's your name and I just tell him name and he said what's your surname and we say that is first time it is shock ()for us till the time nobody asked surname but he asked me fir the first time and he got very surprise like they are like after that told him name and other day Ramanavami that happened</i></p>

	<p>and he said that's a message now am really () this thing has happened and we were very shocked we said we are not Hindu we are Buddhist after that there is no message so"</p> <p>(Reference 4) "...maybe that impact and all people have that strong feeling and people started judging you and you know curious to know your surname whether you are belong to the same caste so indirectly this is the first time experience we had somebody asked us surname and we were like both of us [Redacted for confidentiality]and I were shocked what's happening in Australia but"</p> <p>"...last time when I () my daughters friend friend's daughter () asked surname and it was very shock for all like it's how you coming back like it's already you know people are educated and they don't consider all this thing and it was really surprising for us and ..."</p> <p>(Reference 5)</p>
<p>Australia Online_Focus Group 3</p>	<p>"Yes, please I worked as a CSA as a customer service attendant in a fuel station before we start communicating like we see Indians and then we say hi how are you and where are you from and then we go on in detail but isn't my name enough to tell them who am I so they'll often ask oh you're from Mumbai okay what's your name so what's your full name. That full name basically tells me that they want to know my caste or where I belong from Why is that [Redacted for confidentiality]?" (Reference 1)</p>

	<p>"That would indicate my caste, where I come from and if I'm some Brahmin I don't know I'll get different treatment or if my caste is represented by my surname then it would be easy for them to say okay he's from that kind of thing though that is kind of a hidden it's not upfront" (Reference 2)</p> <p>"...we introduced each other by name and then I don't think he got it by name because it's very unique name he was keep on insisting what's your surname actually yeah so it's a common tendency among the Indians actually to gauge what is the caste after from your last name basically" (Reference 3)</p>
<p>Australia Online_Focus Group 2</p>	<p>"But still, he was speaking Marathi. So, that was appreciating. And then, he asked where is your wife from ("misses kuthun ahe?")? Responded, from Nagpur. Okay. What is your surname ("tumcha adnav kay ahe")? Ingole. I got the sign. But I was not responding to his sign. So, how do I know you? Then, I told him, we have been friends for so many years. He is a good friend of mine?" (Reference 1)</p>
<p>Canberra_ Focus Group 1</p>	<p>"First they ask your name. Then they ask your last name. You tell them your last name. Then they ask which caste you belong to. You never sleep. When you are afraid to tell your caste. That is also a caste discrimination. I have come from that." (Reference 1)</p>
<p>Canberra_Focus Group 3</p>	<p>"The people that I used to live with were all from the upper caste and they always used to talk about casteism. First of all, they tried to search for my name to know about my caste," (Reference 1)</p>

<p>Canberra_focus_group 2</p>	<p><i>"The interrogation often progresses to the topic of surnames ("Pehle surname se pata lag jata tha"), which can be a complex matter." (Reference 1) "My name is redacted for confidentiality, and I recently moved to Australia from Mumbai. Their individual obsession is such that they try to discern a person's caste even from their surname." (Reference 2)</i></p>
<p>Focus Group 1 Adelaide Female</p>	<p><i>"So I can't remember Like The last time But this was my last job When I was working with one of my Workplace They was like Asking about your surnames Then I have a surname which belongs to general caste They said okay This is not important If you have this surname." (Reference 1)</i></p>
<p>Main transcription 26 April 2024</p>	<p><i>"they have a son I think he was maybe in school he was in school, you know first or second standard and what they did was they changed his surname, they changed his last name, so these guys they are Solanki and they changed his last name to Patel so why? Because they told us that he'd got a lot of Indian Gujarati students kids in the school and if he told them that he is Solanki and he belongs to, you know Scheduled caste, they might not play with him so this guy the friend my friend so that guy's dad he actually changed his last name to Patel just so that they should not face any discrimination so this is again while Name redacted for confidentiality] was saying about school and kids that reminded me of that example and yeah, I think as he said, you know being open to" (Reference 1)</i></p>
<p>Melbourne Focus Group 5</p>	<p><i>"Their mentality is the same. These days, they don't directly discriminate against you. But indirectly, they</i></p>

	<p>try to know your surname, how much land you have." <i>(Reference 1) "Here as well, people try to find out whether you belong to Sharma, Verma or any other caste. What is your sub-caste? What is your surname?"</i> <i>(Reference 2)</i></p>
<p>Melbourne Women session (Punjabi)</p>	<p>"Some people ask me; they don't ask me what caste I belong to. They ask me, what is your surname? Because all our surnames are mostly not our surnames. We don't use our surnames. But their question is, what is your surname? Because they are judged on the basis of their surname so that we can find out which caste they belong to and judge your history." <i>(Reference 1)</i>
"Yes, they become Sikhs. But it's a small community. Whether it's Chamar or... If there is a Singh behind the name, then they don't have any problem. Yes, if there is a Singh behind the name, then they say, yes, he is a Singh.</p>
<p>Melbourne_Focus Group 4</p>	<p>"They all ask for surnames, just to know your caste." <i>(Reference 1) "he asked for the surname. And I asked why do you need the surname, do you want to know about my caste, name can be anything, if you just want to call someone, you can call them by their just first name. There is no point in knowing the surname. He was satisfied with my answer and left. But according to me, the purpose of him asking my surname was just that."</i> <i>(Reference 2)</i></p>
<p>Sydney_Focus group 1</p>	<p>"I knew she didn't want my name but wanted to know about my caste, then I told her my last name, but because my last name is also from Hinduism, she didn't have any idea about my caste, so then she asked about my work profession and I told her that I</p>

	<p><i>come from potter caste and she said that a person who makes clay idols etc. is good." (Reference 2)</i></p> <p><i>"House owner asked my identity, and he gave me the room. There was a good discussion about where I come from, what I do, what I studied, and he was emphasizing on my last name." (Reference 4)</i></p>
<p>Sydney_Focus Group 2</p>	<p><i>"I would definitely agree with your point, caste is being identified with your name, specifically last name." (Reference 1)</i></p>
<p>Sydney_Focus Group 4</p>	<p><i>"I completely agreed with R2 ji that whenever you go somewhere, you write your name on the form, even when you go to any doctor, after seeing your surname, they confirm that you are Punjabi but say that never heard that such a surname. For them you are a Punjabi means you are a Sikh, or a Jat, you are a gill and there is no caste in Punjab. So, people start judging you by your surname." (Reference 1)</i></p> <p><i>" R3: Haan surname se pata chal jata hai Translation: Yes, he got to know from the last name." (Reference 2)</i></p> <p><i>
"Toh woh zyada deep digging karte the ki "Tum kounse ho Gautam "Agar Brahman Gautam ho toh Gotra kya hai aur Buddhist Gautam aacha tum Buddhist Chamar ho Ki baatein humare school time me fine kar lete the lekin yaha bhi jaise surname hai toh google pe aap daliye woh easily nikalke aata hai." Translation "So, if you do more deep digging that "Who are you, Gautam?" If you are a Brahman Gautam, what is your Gotra and you are a Buddhist Gautam, you are a Buddhist Chamar, then you can do it well in your school time, but here also you can find the surname</i></p>

	<p><i>on Google. Whatever you put in comes out easily."</i> (Reference 4)</p>
<p>Sydney_Focus Group 5</p>	<p><i>"And they just start digging out, so, what's your last name, where do you live, like, what's your parents do, what's the occupation, they start digging out, so in case they, they just try to make the relationship with you based on your caste." (Reference 1) "I don't know. Maybe my surname doesn't belong to this caste. But still, I say it. Because once I joined college, my friend asked me my full name. I said, [Name retracted for confidentiality]. He said no, you are from Jat. I said no, I am not. Gill is from Jat. I said no, I am from a Scheduled caste." (Reference 2)</i></p> <p><i>"Actually, I feel that even in the kids' schools, they ask my kids to like Kumar because they use Kumar. You know, Kumar could be anyone. You know, Kaur could be anyone. Singh could be anyone. It was a good thing, the back day, you know, the Sikh gurus given us, like, single Kaur, so you don't need to put your surname, but now everyone is saying, like, Kaur and then plus surname." (Reference 3)</i></p>
<p>Sydney_Focus Group 6</p>	<p><i>"But slowly, slowly, when we get used to those people, they start asking, what's your last name? What's your surname? The way they are asking about your surname, they want to know what's your caste. So, this is not the way they are asking." (Reference 1)</i></p> <p><i>"As for surnames, they can sometimes reveal caste affiliations, influencing social interactions. However, relationships evolve naturally over time, transcending superficial judgments based on</i></p>

	<p>surnames (“wish we had one surname”). Consider the hypothetical scenario where I introduce myself as Khan. Your immediate association would likely be influenced by societal perceptions associated with the name Khan.” (Reference 2)</p>
<p>Sydney_Focus Group 7</p>	<p>"Once, while dropping my daughter off at school, a Marathi grandmother of a friend's mother asked me about my daughter's last name, (Redacted for confidentiality), When I confirmed it, she repeated the name with a particular emphasis. Despite her inquiry, I refrained from divulging the caste aspect. It's not something I felt inclined to disclose. However, her question left me wondering about her intentions. "I chose to disengage from the conversation, feeling uncomfortable with the direction it was taking". It's disappointing when encounters like these make you question the worthiness of further interaction." (Reference 1)</p>

The evidence in the above table proves that asking last name is the first point of entry into the series of ‘background questions’ which are the modes of identification for caste identity of the individuals. The above data indicates that in the beginning of most social interactions caste identity triumphs as the determinative first question to judge the caste affinities or animosities. This first inquiry then later defines the future of the encounter to the extent that to protect children in Australian schools against exclusion parents have changed their last name **‘so these guys they are Solanki, and they changed his last name to Patel so why? Because they told us that he'd got a lot of Indian Gujarati students kids in the school and if he told them that he is Solanki and he belongs to, you know Scheduled caste, they might not play with him’**

The above analysis also points out the extent of the problem where multiple instances/references could be seen in focus group interviews from multiple participants.

The inquiries about religious and cultural observances in form of Hindu festivals mark another set of experiences which are an indirect way of asking someone's caste identity,

Through Inquires about religion, cultural observances and associated practices with Hindu religion, the upper castes predominantly ascertain the caste identities of caste oppressed people in Australia. The following table denotes that—

Inquiries about religion, cultural observances and associated practices	Extracts from Interviews
<p>Sidney Focus Group 1</p>	<p><i>"Thank you, even though some people now are getting smart even though they won't ask your name, they have your social media. They go through your Facebook as soon as they check your Facebook, it's done. They change their attitude. All posts are there, Babasaheb Jayanti, Buddha Jayanti these are the things there. Even WhatsApp, where Dhamma Chakra is my profile. That's something direct or indirect way they will identify you." (Reference 1)</i></p>
<p>Sydney Focus group 2</p>	<p><i>"I know whenever you come in a group, they start their conversation around religion, around the festival, around the cultures and they force you to get that information from you, how you are celebrating, how you are celebrating this festival, how you have spent your day on this festival, are you fasting and all those</i></p>

	<p><i>things, which makes you very uncomfortable."</i></p>
<p>Sydney Focus group 4</p>	<p><i>"Yes, like people in Indian community have that curiosity to know what from religious you are I never hide. I am like I say I am from Ravidasia community. Sometimes people ask so like they say what is Ravidasia they just want to pretend what is Ravidasiaas if they knew it but woh aisa behave karenge ki woh jante nahi hai Agar unko Ravidasia dharam ke baare me nahi pata toh unko kuch bhi nahi pata"</i></p>
<p>Sydney_Focus Group 7</p>	<p><i>"What (Redacted for confidentiality), and (Redacted for confidentiality), said is a mix. During my time working in Canberra and Sydney, I had encounters with Australian colleagues who asked if I was Hindu. Upon clarifying that I was not Hindu and belonged to the Buddhist community, they made assumptions about caste, stating that Brahmins are considered superior in India. This interaction" (Reference 1)</i></p> <p><i>"In one instance, during a casual office conversation, Australian colleagues asked about my Hindu identity and made assumptions about caste based on that. Similarly, my manager, who is not Indian but from Maharashtra, indirectly tried to ascertain my community background by</i></p>

	<p>mentioning his relative from the Raut community. These instances left me feeling unsure of their intentions and made me feel uncomfortable, as if my caste was being indirectly probed." (Reference 2)</p>
<p>Sydney_Personal Interview 7</p>	<p>"I hail from Buddhist community, I am Buddhist so people get confused and ask is it really existing in India though as we know the foundation of Buddhism is in India still, they get astonished hearing that I hail from Buddhist community, then they ask so many questions: Whom do you follow, how do you follow, are you not following any Hindu gods and goddesses." (Reference 1)</p>
<p>Sydney_Focus group 1</p>	<p>- "I want to share one more incident, as you know, I used to work as a testing officer, there were 5-6 people from upper caste, they told they want to celebrate Diwali. They invited all, but I said I don't celebrate Diwali. They ask me directly which caste you belong to? They used to think I am upper caste. They ask me why you don't celebrate; it is like a Christmas for Hindu religion. I was aware about casteism, I said I am Chamar. They may have been bitching me, so I stopped to meet them. If you are celebrating Diwali, we are not good for them." (Reference 2)</p>

If the last name doesn't make an individual's caste obvious, then the usual question is to ask what religion one belongs to. Celebration or non-celebration of Hindu festivals is an important marker for caste identification, as can be seen from the table above.

For the other modes of identification, the following theme explains the various ways in which it is undertaken,

Themes	Excerpts from Interviews
<p>Place of Origin or Residence</p>	<p>- <i>"I hail from Buddhist community, I am Buddhist so people get confused and ask is it really existing in India though as we know the foundation of Buddhism is in India still, they get astonished hearing that I hail from Buddhist community, then they ask so many questions: Whom do you follow, how do you follow, are you not following any Hindu gods and goddesses."</i> (Sydney_Personal Interview 7) - <i>"In 2018, I went to Melbourne for Jayanti (Birth anniversary of Dr. Ambedkar). They said that he went to Jayanti, then asked which Jayanti is here now, they said that it is Babasaheb's Jayanti. So those people had a guess about my so-called lower caste."</i> (Sydney_Personal Interview 8)</p>
<p>Social Circles and Interactions</p>	<p>- <i>"Yes. In the park, they say, I said, we are going to Gurdwara. I am going to her house. She said, which Gurdwara are you going to? I said, we are going to Guru Ravidas Gurudwara."</i> (Melbourne Women session) - <i>"Because the questions they ask you directly just because we are giving</i></p>

	<p>them indirect answers. Yes. That's another thing." (Sydney_Focus Group 5) -</p> <p>"In one instance, during a casual office conversation, Australian colleagues asked about my Hindu identity and made assumptions about caste based on that. Similarly, my manager, who is not Indian but from Maharashtra, indirectly tried to ascertain my community background by mentioning his relative from the Raut community. These instances "left me unsure of their intentions and made me feel uncomfortable", as if my caste was being indirectly probed." (Sydney_Focus Group 7) - "So, it was so unusual that second question somebody asked you, what's your caste? It's very unusual and I was very uncomfortable to tell him that what my caste is. And I took a small pause. And then I said, I'm Buddhist. He did not realize that what Buddhist and what is there inside. Then he said, Buddhist and what kind of Buddhist? Maybe he knew something about some kind of caste distribution. Then I said, I'm Buddhist, I follow Ambedkar and then he reacted like, oh, so you're Ambedkarite, right? So, you're low caste." (Sydney Focus group 2)</p>
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	<p>- "Khobragade incident happened and that's when the whole media erupted with this schedule caste or a Buddhist diplomat in America who was being stripped naked and cavity searched and then essentially that's that was played quite a bit on the media and that's how being identical surname this consultant actually put two and two together and my name being Khobragade and then that's how it came to this conclusion that I belong to this particular community." (Australia Online Focus Group 3)</p> <p>- "When some of my friends visit my house, they see the Buddha statue and would ask, "Why is the Buddha statue here" (hesitancy in their voice). The deeply ingrained nature of caste discrimination is evident in various social interactions, whether it's having tea with someone or occupying higher positions ("they don't expect people from this communities sitting there")." (Sydney_Focus Group 6)</p>
<p>Behavioural Responses</p>	<p>- "When they could not find out about my caste, then they indirectly started to discuss it with me, for example they asked me questions like how much property do you have in India, what business did you do in India? where do you live in India so</p>

	<p><i>that they could guess what my caste is."</i> (Canberra Focus Group 3)</p> <p>- <i>"Queries about one's place of origin in India serve as a gateway to assess social status and background, perpetuating the underlying caste-based distinctions ingrained in Indian culture ("Tum India me kaha se ho? Konse state se ho? What do you do?")" (Canberra focus group 2)</i></p> <p>- <i>"Over the years, as more people immigrated, interactions increased. Interestingly, discussions about caste usually begin with inquiries about names and origins. This allows individuals to gauge each other's backgrounds and initiate conversations accordingly."</i> (Australia Online Focus Group 2)</p> <p>- <i>"Yes, like people in Indian community have that curiosity to know what from religious you are I never hide. I am like I say I am from Ravidasia community. Sometimes people ask so like they say what is Ravidasia they just want to pretend what is Ravidasiaas if they knew it but woh aisa behave karenge ki woh jante nahi hai Agar unko Ravidasia dharam ke baare me nahi pata toh unko kuch bhi nahi pata."</i> (Sydney Focus Group 4)</p>
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<p>Scholarship or Government Support</p>	<p>- "Yeah for me it was like two years before and it wasn't direct so I came to Australia on a full funded Maharashtra Government Scholarship as an Assam so when I first started we met few friends in the department and the questions that I was like somewhere telling like I have a business and my father works here and all so I was being silent but then eventually it come up and then I said that okay I came on a scholarship so once we say scholarship in India it's everyone know that like SC, ST and OBCs gets study scholarships and other types of scholarship so they got the scholarship they kind of got the idea okay so I am from a particular community but they were not sure whether I was SC or ST or OBC so they were like oh which scholarship does it pay like full funding so they knew we are coming to abroad mostly they know that if you are on a scholarship what kind of scholarship so I told them it's not a university scholarship it's funded by Government of Maharashtra so they got the idea and then just not like for them it's just not the caste even the category which belongs to like even if it's like the holistic community or ST community there are many caste in the community so even that is fine for them to get the idea that okay so</p>
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	<p><i>such and such person is from a different community and what caste he or she may belong to." (Australia Online Focus Group 3)</i></p>
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When these mechanisms either fail or deemed unnecessary to enquire about the caste identity of the individuals, many instances have been reported where the caste identity is asked quite directly. Both hidden and overt forms of asking about caste identity amount to microaggression based on caste, as it is the questions and responses that are prejudicial based on the identity (known and to be known) about the other person.

Directly asking caste identity	Extract from Interviews
<p>Adelaide_Focus Group 3</p>	<p><i>- "They were talking to each other, and they didn't know about my background. So, he called me and asked, what are you? I said, I am a Majhabi Sikh. Then he stopped talking." (Reference 1)</i></p>
	<p><i>- "...and asking about caste identity? First of all, today I came to know, after so many years, that it is illegal to ask the caste. I really didn't know. But this is very common. It has happened many times with me. It has happened once or twice. We met and he didn't even ask me the name first, you were asked about the caste. This is also one experience. This happened, because whoever is asking, in his mind, he doesn't think that he is doing something wrong. He is like what's wrong in asking the caste. Not a big deal! Nothing wrong to ask about caste." (Reference 2)</i></p>

	<p>- "When I came to Australia, I came on a study visa. There was a boy with me. He was from Jat-Sikh community. My surname is [Redacted for confidentiality], he didn't know my surname and caste identity. He started asking me, who are you? I have never heard this surname. I told him that we are from Chamar (Ravidasia)." (Reference 3)</p>
<p>Australia Online Focus Group 3</p>	<p>- "I don't know it was based on my caste but the person who did that to me he already knew my caste because he asked me and people in Gujarat like they always they never hesitate to ask your caste directly upfront so." (Reference 1)</p>
	<p>- "Straightforward he clearly asked me what caste I belong to because he was a consultant in the Royal Brisbane Hospital he was looking for a guy to hire and then I told him that I am a Buddhist by occupation I actually invited him at my home for a dinner and all that he did not there but at some later stage he did ask for what caste did I belong to he was looking for ICU registrar</p>
<p>Australia Online_Focus Group 2</p>	<p>- "R: Once, outside of my university life, I had a particularly shocking experience during my first job as an engineer in Sydney. I was residing in Ingleburn on the west side, and my landlord, who hailed from Nepal, invited me to join his family for</p>

	<p><i>a festival dinner. During the conversation, he suddenly asked about my caste. Despite being from Nepal, he inquired directly about my caste.</i></p>
<p>Canberra_Focus Group 1_SW</p>	<p><i>- "And then, there were fights between husband and wife. Because his wife is upper caste, and his husband is lower caste. But he is not both. He is lower caste in his own caste. So, in their fights, they pulled us also. In their fights, they were also asking us, what is your caste?" (Reference 1)</i></p>
	<p><i>- "After that, brother personally asked us, what is your caste? So, we told him that we are Buddhist. So, he listened to us." (Reference 2)</i></p>
	<p><i>- "What caste do you belong to? I told her that we are from Chamar. She said that they don't have land. She asked me about my caste." (Reference 3)</i></p>
<p>Canberra_Focus Group 3</p>	<p><i>- "When I felt these things, I felt very tortured and one or two of them asked me directly what my caste was, what my religion was which was why I felt like I was threatened." (Reference 1)</i></p>
	<p><i>- "So, people started to ask me about my caste in a casual conversation. They asked me what my caste is. I didn't want to tell them, so I hid my caste." (Reference 2)</i></p>

<p>Canberra_focus_group 2</p>	<p>- "Hence the surname is disclosed, the interrogator may proceed to inquire about one's caste ("phir puch hi lega tumhara gotra kya hai? Tumhari jaat kya hai?"). This interaction is emblematic of a broader phenomenon where individuals assess and categorise each other based on caste affiliations. Upon learning of one's caste, the interrogator may proceed to define their own identity and form perceptions accordingly ("jab use pata lag jayega ki aaap uske sath k hoy a uske neeche k ho wo us hisab se apna perception define kar lenga")." (Reference 1)</p>
<p>Main transcription 26 April 2024-21</p>	<p>- "And I was called in the office and asked what this is all, how can I write something regarding to their caste. They asked me Indirect questions like do I read books? What caste I belong to?" (Reference 1)</p>
<p>Melbourne Focus Group 5</p>	<p>- "Yes, of course. They do ask about our caste most of the time, and we know who can ask us about caste. The one who is of higher caste than you will ask your caste. So, they ask, which caste do you belong to?" (Reference 1)</p>
	<p>- "In the park, in the evening, I went. There were 5-7 ladies. And first we asked each other's name. Then we started asking, which caste are you from? [Speaker 1] Okay. [Speaker 5] And then, after</p>

	<p><i>listening, I did not feel good." (Reference 2)</i></p>
<p>Melbourne Personal Interview 1_SW_20.04.2024</p>	<p><i>- "I'm with that particular society and it isn't the same way when I'm with other group of people who are Indians as well so I have a very good friend of mine in masters of data science itself only once she asked me to what caste do you belong I directly told him I'm Buddhist." (Reference 1)</i></p>
<p>Melbourne Women session (Punjabi)</p>	<p><i>- "She asked me all the questions. At the end, she asked who I was. What is your caste? I told her directly that I am from the Chamar caste. Then she said, it's okay. God has made you. It's okay." (Reference 3)</i></p>
	<p><i>- "He came to my house to live on rent. When he came to see me, he asked my caste. [Speaker 2] He came to see you? [Speaker 7] Yes. He came to my house to live on rent. He asked my caste." (Reference 4)</i></p>
<p>Sydney_Focus group 2</p>	<p><i>- "I literally remember that. I was sitting in the classroom in my university. It was my very first day. And in my classroom, we are so many Indians, international students. So, one of them asked me that, [Redacted for confidentiality] where are you from? And I said, I'm from Maharashtra. And I asked him the same, that we are you from? And he said, I'm from UP. It was, it is</i></p>

	<p><i>very general question that we are you from and these things. And then again, suddenly he asked it, what's your caste?"</i></p> <p><i>(Reference 1)</i></p>
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The above narratives explain the whole idea behind asking the caste identity, overtly and covertly, of the opposite person. It is put across very aptly by one of the participants,

After probing about various aspects like location, occupation, family, and 'dietary habits' that is non-veg, the interrogation often culminates with an inquiry about one's caste. Whether posed directly or indirectly, this question seeks to uncover the individual's social status. Despite the diverse dietary practices across caste lines, the focus eventually shifts to the surname, which historically denoted caste affiliations. While surnames may not always accurately reflect one's caste in contemporary society, they remain a common point of inquiry in conversations, particularly among Indian communities abroad. This persistence highlights the enduring influence of caste dynamics in social interactions, even in settings where such distinctions may seem out of place.

Canberra Focus Group 2

The focus on individual's social status and now caste is a marker of the same, indicates the migration of the casteist attitudes among the Indian dominated South Asian diaspora that wants to begin any form of social interaction with a literal stranger. The social relationships and conversion from the status of a stranger or an acquaintance to that a friend or more than that is largely caste dependent.

This outlook into the beginning of the journey of a caste oppressed individual brings us to the question of how caste identity interacts and functions in major aspects of Australian societal life. In other words, what is the lived experiences of caste oppressed communities in major areas of life:

1. Children experiencing caste discrimination,
2. Education,

3. employment,
4. social life,
5. Usage of caste slurs (overt discrimination)
6. marriage,
7. children’s experiences of caste discrimination,
8. intersectionality and religion.

Each of these major themes will be approached systematically to highlight the nature of lived experiences in each of these broader areas of life which indicate pervasive overt and covert casteism manifesting in all aspects of Australian society life.

Children experiencing caste discrimination.

“This issue hits close to home for me, as “my daughter faced bullying based on her caste identity” when she was in Year 7, a decade ago. This underscores the urgent need to address such discriminatory practices. So, I had reported this in writing to the school principal. But she did not take any action. She was in discrimination. So definitely, we can say that this is against discrimination.”

A mother, Sydney Focus Group 7

Many such shocking instances of discrimination faced by children from caste oppressed groups was shared by the parents in the consultations. At the beginning of this thematic analysis, we saw how a parent expressed their children being treated as untouchables by other families as an overt act of discrimination in its worst manifestation. With over 50 references of children experiencing prejudice and discrimination because of caste, it is important to look at the nature of the prejudice and discrimination that children face and is at play in Australian society.

The inductive analysis informs us that the lived experiences of children from caste oppressed communities can be categorized broadly into the following sub-themes—

1. Overt and covert discrimination directed directly towards children.
2. Overt and covert discrimination directed directly towards children’s families.

3. Parent children dynamic of reconciling and navigating the caste issue.

The overt discrimination faced by children were instances when children were harassed and bullied in the schools because of their caste identity; when they were given the treatment of untouchability and directly asked which caste do they belong to?

Adelaide_Focus Group 1	<p><i>“So, this comes in their behaviour (vyavhar), when you talk to their children they will ask you about your caste. Like you said, the children asked. Why did the children ask? Because their parents must have told them. Why did the parents tell? Because the parents must be afraid that their children will forget their identity here”</i></p>
Australia Online (Female) Focus Group	<p><i>R3: “That's what I felt like last time when I () my daughters friend friend's daughter () asked surname and it was very shock for all like it's how you coming back like it's already you know people are educated and they don't consider all this thing and it was really surprising for us and ...”</i></p>
Melbourne Focus Group 5	<p><i>“Like people tell their children. Brahmin or Pandit. We are Pandits. They tell their children that we are Jats. They tell them from the beginning. They tell their children in school. They ask other children as well. [Speaker 6] Who are you? [Speaker 2] They ask in the school as well. Even though we have never told our children this. They don't even know what this is.”</i></p>
Melbourne Women Session	<p><i>“But they ask us what our surname is. If they don't ask us, then they ask us what our last name is. Because nowadays, we don't use our last name. They ask what last names our children have. Because indirectly, that is the way of finding out caste.”</i></p>
	<p><i>“He used to play in the Gurudwara. So, Parthi called him and asked him, son, why is there no Singh behind your name? So, the children didn't know. The child</i></p>

	<p><i>was 7-8 years old. He said, there is no Singh behind your name. What is your mother's name? What is your father's name? The child got scared. So, the next day, he said, I won't go with you. I said, no, child, I will take you to McDonald's. I will take you to the park. He said, mother, Parthi is asking me, why is there no Kaur behind your mother's name? Why is there no Singh behind your father's name? Are you Punjabi? Because the elder son doesn't look like Indian. So, the child got scared. 7-8 years old."</i></p>
	<p><i>"He started asking in his childhood. Yes, in his childhood. And when the younger son went to the park to feed the child, his parents started asking, son, which Gurudwara do you go to? Which Gurudwara do you go to? My son told me, do not call this woman anywhere, not even for tea."</i></p>
	<p><i>"But it is very difficult for the children. The children of Australia who are born, they don't know anything. But when they grow up, that's when the problem arises. [Speaker 2] Because they are asked, what is your caste? [Speaker 1] Yes, they are asked. But the girls of the other caste, the girls, those children are also born there. But when they want to get married to each other, that's when the problem arises. Yes, the child doesn't know. But the children who are born in Australia, they are very disturbed."</i></p>
<p>Sydney Focus Group 7</p>	<p><i>"My daughter encountered discriminatory remarks from another child at the park, who mentioned that Dalits and Muslims often visit there. It was disheartening to see such prejudices being passed on to young children. These attitudes are learned from home and reflect broader societal biases. It's evident that discriminatory perceptions based on religion can easily translate into caste-based prejudices. This highlights the</i></p>

	<i>need for concerted efforts to address discrimination at its roots.”</i>
Sydney Personal Interview 4	<i>“Where this girl who was new to us, she was like, I don't know, I don't know, I don't we were like 14 or 15 joined our group and she was Indian and I was the only other Indian and she in conversation or whatever introduced or brought to the conversation the fact that she was a higher caste Indian, to which I guess I experienced a lot of anxiety about what does this mean for me do I need to now reveal my caste are people in my wider circle of friends who are not Indian and have no understanding of caste will they understand or will they now treat me as less than because someone has put a label on me” and also not knowing how to navigate that when you're 14 15 to be like you know you can have that conversation as an adult sometimes even adults struggle to say this is the big picture and it's a load of maybe bullshit if I could say that but when you're young you're like oh no like you know these are the rules and I have to live in these rules and I guess you you're already unsure about what you're doing and you're not sure what you're doing and you're not sure who you are so it kind of just brings a lot of anxiety a lot of like even a lot of like self-hatred of like why am I this what if like can I escape it, how can I like detach myself from this identity maybe I can just be Australian or maybe I could just be Indian but not be this caste or you know a lot of yeah a lot of questions that go through your mind but not a lot of answers that come through.”</i>
Sydney	<i>“like their kids being told why they are sitting like a chamar or why they are eating like this or why they are eating, and those facts are given.”</i>
Sydney	<i>“I'm a Mum of two kids as well one is 8 years old, and one is 10 years old so what</i>

	<p><i>kind of school are you going to or where the kids discuss that “Which caste are you?” “Are you Punjabi? Are you Hindu?” sometimes kids are stressed and they ask “Mummy why we are not following the same culture the way how people are following like the other they are going in a temple we are going to a gurudwara some of the people the way we have to go so that is sometimes I feel like we find it difficult to understand what the children have because they have heard from the children of their same age and they are questioning us that It means what are the children of other communities learning from home, what are their families teaching them?” (The mother could not hold her tears back as it was a painful experience for her)</i></p>
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The above insights inform us that overt and covert forms of caste discrimination is pervasive among caste oppressed community children. Children as young as class 8 and 10 are asked what is their caste and find themselves confused, as a second generation children born in Australia some of their families don’t engage in making them aware of the negative aspects of their caste identities, and rightly so, as in a multicultural society there should not be any disadvantages or microaggression based on any historical identities ascribed at birth.

Overt and covert discrimination directed directly towards children’s families

“This incident happened two or three months ago, my daughter, who studies in the school, she had a friend and they used to play at the park as well. Because of their friendship both of our family started getting acquainted too. Both parents of the girl were introduced to us and on that girls’ birthday party we all went. They greeted us very well. My mother-in-law who came from India also accompanied us to that party and somehow both of our family found that we are related and when they found out

that we are from Dalit community they stopped communicating with us and they stopped calling us because we are from Dalit community.”

“Yes. My son was 4 years old. We went to the park to roam.

A husband and wife came there to roam. We talked to them for a couple of days. It was very good.

One day, as soon as we left the car, they called me and said hello and asked which Gurudwara I go to. As soon as my son came out of the car, he said, Aunty, I am a Chamar.”

[Speaker 2]

“Your son is 4 years old?”

[Speaker 3]

“Yes. We have been telling them which caste we belong to.”

Melbourne Women's session.

“They know this just keep hi-hello otherwise, they would have called me at home. It is now impacting our kids, their friends and all those things, so it is getting nastier.”

Sydney_Focus Group 1

“When we reduce going to the house once they organised a party and they did not invite us, my son asked me why we are not going to their house anymore. We did not have any answer to give even after coming to Australia then did not change the mentality about caste it has impacted our kids also.”

The discriminatory attitudes and prejudice are not only directed at the children directly but also towards the families. The common experience in the narratives is that of exclusion and breaking of all social relations and ties with the family, once their children’s and family’s caste identity is disclosed.

Parent children dynamic of reconciling and navigating the caste issue

“There's a significant raise in this sort of conversations happening around in schools, around the grounds, social get-togethers and gatherings and all those sorts of things. And I think even, and how do we know which are good people and which are not? Now

this is some of the elite people coming to this school and these are all so-called really good apples in that sense. How do you really know that these people, even if they know, now they know, they won't talk to me like that in front of me. But are we sure that these people are not giving the same thinking to their kids and their kids won't say anything to my kids?"

"yes she did but we could not answer her that it because we are from Dalit community we made excuses like we are busy and stuff this is the reason that I gave her but the real reason was that they didn't want to communicate with us anymore so caste discrimination was the sole cause of it it's not something that happened a long time ago it happened two or three months ago."

"However, it can quickly turn into questioning about our eating preferences ("Do you eat non-vegetarian?") and other potentially delicate subjects. I'm sensitive to the effects these talks can have on my children and the people I'm speaking with, so I have to navigate them with extreme caution."

"And I retaliated against the reservation policy. And they said, and we said, fine, if you don't want to be friends, we are not going after you for being a friend. Our kids used to ask, their kid used to ask them why we can't go and play with [redacted for confidentiality]. [redacted for confidentiality] used to ask me why we can't go and play with [redacted for confidentiality]. But that's, that's okay."

"they have a son I think he was maybe in school he was in school, you know first or second standard and what they did was they changed his surname, they changed his last name, so these guys they are Solanki and they changed his last name to Patel so why? Because they told us that he'd got a lot of Indian Gujarati students kids in the school and if he told them that he is Solanki and he belongs to, you know Scheduled caste, they might not play with him so this guy the friend my friend so that guy's dad he actually changed his last name to Patel just so that they should not face any discrimination so this is again while Name redacted for confidentiality] was saying about school and kids that reminded me of that example and yeah, I think as he said, you know being open to"

"hoping connections all the time like oh you know yeah make sure that it doesn't happen that's appreciative like how you've got different you know thoughts at one point"

of time you mentioned that when you're you know one of your family members is having conversations about you know very unpleasant topics like reservations and all it's just a direct attack on your mind yes um and that impacts the family as well yeah absolutely you carry it home it has an effect on your family your kids are learning about absorbing it and then you know kids also learn from coping this happens I know so they are mentally and emotionally prepared for that and it is such a need practice not only to prepare your kids for absorbing that we should be preparing them to have a very free society which we look for in Australia okay no great.”

“I think the biggest thing is like in universities as well because there are these Indian societies of you know within in within universities that's like the Indian group and it's all fun you know but I think somewhere underneath that there is also in my experience in what I have seen there's also there's still caste exists in in children in in the next generation.”

“Our children are more afraid that why should we tell anyone? I said to me why don't you think like this. So, children do not know where they are, they are born here born and brought up here, where do we know all these things, we do not tell people where we are from this caste, we are scheduled caste,”

Parents from caste oppressed communities have found it very difficult to navigate interacting with caste identity in the dynamic of their children involved in prejudicial and discriminatory treatment. There is a sense of fear and confusion among families and young children who often find themselves caught off guard to tackle microaggression and sometimes even overt discrimination based on their caste identity. The families have reported that such children don't even know what their caste identity is in first place and only some families have resorted to explaining their children the politics of caste identity at play in the Australian society.

Education

As noted above the migration to Australian of the caste oppressed communities from South Asia happens primarily to seek higher education and/or for employment opportunities. The Thematic analysis indicated pervasive prejudice and discrimination

in primary, secondary and university levels based on caste identity. Such high levels of prejudice and discrimination result in complete exclusion of caste oppressed community students who earlier were part of the south Asian student groups and circles leading to a breakdown of the sense of community among them. The following analysis will first explain the experiences of discrimination faced by children in primary and secondary education levels and then undertake assessment of what happens at university levels.

Primary and secondary education—Teaching of casteism in school

A number of parents informed us that casteism and literature on promoting caste system or Varnashrama Dharma was taught in many schools and describe it as a significant issue that hinders their children’s progress.

Participant 3: “It’s unclear what the teachers are teaching; no one knows if they’re in favour of the caste system or not.”

Participant 2 (clarifying the above confusion): “It’s been taught in NSW Schools, Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) Australia runs classes. In NSW schools. The four varna system is on their (VHP) website. It’s right there. It’s public information.”

Sydney Focus Group 5

“I’ve observed a concerning trend where certain groups are establishing schools under the guise of Marathi education but are actually promoting casteism. These schools are expanding rapidly, spreading their influence. Unfortunately, this expansion comes with the propagation of caste-based discrimination.”

Sydney Focus Group 7

“Something which is really troubling. Recently in New South Wales, they are also starting Hindu school and they started teaching Manu and the things like in Hindi subject. If you read, see that background, the school

curriculum, all these Australian born Indian origin kids are getting learned and training about how the structure is, the Hindu caste structure is and how the hierarchy works and things like that. So, they naturally get that benefit of their higher caste. So, when they say Brahmin, you really say it with pride.”

Australian Online Focus Group 1

*“Look, the children who are taught in the Catholic school, what category have they been given? The lower castes are called Poor Hindus. This is taught in Australia. Poor Hindu, Rich Hindu. So, my son asked the question, mother, what is Poor Hindu and Rich Hindu? So, I came to know that we are Hindus, but in **the poor category.**”*

Melbourne Women Session (Punjabi)

The instances describe that casteism is promoted through schools which are for a particular linguistic group from India and also that the so-called ‘catholic schools’ used to describe public schools. Caste is part of the curriculum teachings but the method of teaching the Hindu caste structure is regressive when it labels lower castes as Poor Hindu and upper-castes as Rich Hindu.

Bullying and harassment of young students based on caste and

It has been reported in the preceding analysis that children also faced bullying and harassment in their primary school years due to caste.

Microaggression

The preceding analysis also points out at students are asked what caste they belong to by their counterparts which amounts to microaggression based on caste.

Isolation and exclusion of children

Many instances of children facing isolation and exclusion from other children and their families was mentioned by the participants.

“She(the daughter of the participant) is having a Tamil brahmin friend(from her school) so we used to go for birthday party to their home and one of

times to our home and when they saw Babasaheb and Buddha's photo, so they started some questions and from that day I have noticed, they stopped sending their kid to you know, play with my daughter and so what shall I say, even though my daughter always asks why (redacted for confidentiality) is not coming to play? I don't have any reason, but I can see the main reason just because of my caste they identify, and you know they don't want to give... allow their kids to come and play with our things.”

Sydney Focus Group 1

University—

The caste oppressed community participants reported the common experiences of—

1. Sense of community being broken
2. Being isolated and excluded
3. Facing resentment and casteism
4. Separate groupism and breakdown of relationships

All branching out from caste identity of caste oppressed groups who predominantly come from India availing benefits of Affirmative Action Scholarships to study post-graduate courses in Australia. As noted above, the journey into Australian life starts, for most postgraduate students, through getting admissions at the Australian universities for PG and PhD courses. The participants have described, how at the very beginning of their journey in Australia they come with a fear of being identified as a student from the Scheduled Castes and that there is a constant anxiety among many participants that once their caste identity is somehow disclosed they may be excluded and ostracised because of their caste identity.

Participants have also described these fears becoming reality when their identity is disclosed. They are met with contempt, exclusion, untouchability (see the preceding analysis), physical assault (see the preceding analysis) and total exclusion from the student community groups which are upper-caste centric groups.

Indian affirmative action-based scholarships as a marker for exclusion—

*“In our conversation, **“he advised me not to disclose that I was on scholarship”**. He shared his own experience of facing discrimination after*

revealing his scholarship status, as it was specifically for scheduled caste students & I, too, was on the same scholarship. “His honesty led to him being ostracized by fellow Indian students”, an experience that left him feeling isolated and discriminated against. This eye-opening conversation occurred within my first month in Australia, challenging my assumptions about the absence of such discrimination in developed countries.

He explicitly advised me against disclosing my scholarship status and caste identity, marking my first experience of discrimination in Australia. It was a stark realization that such attitudes persisted even in Western countries. As a proud Ambedkarite, I've always been forthcoming about my identity, unashamedly declaring my affiliation.”

Canberra Focus Group 2

The above incident is only one of the many instances where students have been ostracised and discriminated against which were narrated to us by the students. The *Indian affirmative action-based scholarships* to study for post-graduate courses in Australia thus have been the direct identification marker of their caste identity and the exclusion and discrimination that follows. Following table denotes commonality of those experiences across Australia, in all states, which are discussed hereinunder—

Source	Excerpt	Narrative
Australia Online Focus Group 3	It is like it is a common understanding among the scholarship student, be it a state or central government scholarship, that we tend to avoid saying that we are on scholarship and 90% of the students are like first generation graduates in their family	Avoid mentioning scholarship status
Adelaide Focus Group 2	Same for me, I have also come here because of a scholarship, Which I had previously, That I have got for Scheduled caste. So, it is a 100% scholarship, and for that, when some friends got to know about it, Their behaviour changed a bit. As such, no one has spoken to me face to face or back because no one has spoken to me. But I have felt their absence, Gradually, in the friendship. So, that's it.	Participants express feeling excluded and marginalized after disclosing their scholarship and caste identity.
Adelaide individual interview 3	Yeah, of course. That's one main thing. And then, they will connect these things. If you got a scholarship, you are definitely from the Scheduled caste or another caste. Because they have a tendency, the scholarship and all these things. In	Modes of identifying Dalit identity

	India, all the Scheduled caste and lower caste people get. So, they have the interconnection like that, if you get this one. Then, they try to relate things and avoid talking to me	
Australia Online (female) Focus Group	yes I was going to saying same thought as [Redacted for confidentiality]she mentioned that people hide their caste or scholarship if they getting because other caste people think if we are getting a scholarship or we are getting and admission oh we are not good enough we got in a position and we got that scholarship because of reservation they don't think they think we are here because of reservation so people there views totally change even in IIT our caste people face the same kind of experience that's why they hide their caste hiding is the biggest mechanism people use it	Participant discusses the tendency to hide caste or scholarship status due to fear of discrimination.
Australia Online Focus Group 2	Even my friends on scholarships advised me not to disclose it, as it might not be well-received by others from India or other communities. They felt people might resent that I had the privilege of receiving a scholarship.	Participants advise against disclosing scholarship status to avoid resentment from others.
Canberra Focus Group 1	[The upper-caste students said] We will do this project semester together by changing the group by excluding me (Dalit student). Because I was Buddhist. Just because they are in scholarship and reservation, there might be discrimination. That is why we were advised that you hide this. So, now we have not told them (other students) that we are on scholarship.	Participant discusses experiencing discrimination after peers learned about their scholarship status.
Sydney Focus group 1	Indian students here came to know, that I came here on scholarship, they started isolating me, they started dissociating from me, they used to group together and sit separately, and I used to sit alone... we used to share lab work, we used to go out for lunch but after that incident, then I think he came to understand that I somehow probably is a person of a different background or lower caste community and since then, our friendship did not last long. His	Participant recounts facing discrimination after peers discovered their

	<p>attitude towards me changed. We used to help each other in preparing presentations and managing lab works and stuff. But that changed, so that's I think I would say indirectly I experienced caste discrimination.</p>	<p>scholarship status and caste identity.</p>
<p>Australia online focus group 1</p>	<p>When they came to know that I was from NOS Scholarship, National Overseas Scholarship for SC. At that moment, uh like I was a bit discriminated at times. They get to know I am SC, and I come from a certain category, and I have SC scholarship and I was kind of excluded from the that group. <i>Like they didn't say it on my face, but it was kind of by nature and atmosphere that they are bringing out to me that I was like a lucky guy, so that was something which I faced, and this is an example of caste discrimination as per me.</i></p> <p>I told her, I have a scholarship and I am a sponsor student from the Government of India and Indian government is taking care for looking for my expenses and they are covering all my things. So, she said like how, how is it possible. So, I told her like this the person or the people who belong to SC category or ST category, So the government of India is sponsoring them. So, she said that why do you guys need scholarship. So, for that time, I was like, I was speechless. I didn't know what to react and what to say at that time. Since, that time after that, we never talked on this topic, but since that time, I whenever I meet her or do any new friends, I never tell them that I am on scholarship basis, even if the person belongs to SC category or even if he's on scholarship in Australia, and I never tell them that I also get a scholarship and I am also, I am a sponsored student.</p>	<p>Experience of covert casteism and negative impact it had on the student life.</p>
<p>Canberra Focus group 2</p>	<p>When I was a student in Wollongong, I came here with three other friends, all from the same scheduled caste but different sub-castes. They had already found a place to live, so they asked me to join them because we were all on scholarship. They told me that if I reveal that we are on scholarship, I will have to leave the place.</p>	<p>Social pressure from fellow Dalit students to hide the identity.</p>

The above table discloses the commonality of the experience and also the impact that such disclosure had on students. Many participants expressed apprehension about disclosing their caste identity or scholarship status due to the anticipated negative reactions from others. They fear being judged, discriminated against, or treated differently once this information is known.

Exclusion, Separate groupism and breakdown of relationships

In the above accounts, many participants expressed isolation, exclusion. In such instances where their peers avoided or isolated them after learning about their caste identity or scholarship status. This avoidance leads to feelings of loneliness, resentment, and disillusionment within social circles. Some other instances are where students also disclosed that their friends have told another friend to stay away from him.

“But what happened was one day, she said to me that the other friends are common friends, they started telling her, not me, but they told her about me; I don't know how they got to know about my background and things like that. So, they wanted me to, or they wanted our friendship to break. And so, what they did was, these guys, they told her that redacted for confidentiality belongs to, you know, very low caste. Yeah, low caste.”

Focus group 26 April

Students have described the ‘burden’ on the mind while navigating their caste identity in educational spheres. ‘Yes, he is doing research, and he also finds that out people our community people have that burden on their mind that if they say anything wrong, they might get targeted.’ (Sydney Personal Interview 6)

Individuals’ experiences highlight challenges in integrating into social groups, particularly within Indian communities abroad. They recount incidents where attempts to join social or student associations were met with rejection or exclusion based on caste or scholarship status.

The students have also described Separate groupism and breakdown of relationships after the revealing of caste identity in the above table. The following insight also describes one such experience where the slow breakdown of a friendship has been shared by the participant,

“Despite their agreement, our discussion extended for several hours, delving into topics ranging from ancient history to the Constitution. However, the aftermath was unexpected! Following our conversation, I noticed a subtle shift in our friendship. There seemed to be a lingering bitterness, and our relationship wasn't as comfortable as it had been before. It dawned on me that perhaps they were unaware of my background as belonging to the SC category or the untouchable caste in India. Since that discussion, I couldn't shake off the feeling that our dynamic had changed.”

Australia Online Focus Group 2

In this section the lived experiences of interpersonal racism denoting casteist culture across various states in Australia within the upper-castes student community. Shockingly, children in primary and secondary education face both overt and covert prejudice in a significant degree. The discussion now turns to the lived experience of caste oppressed communities in employment that takes a systemic character leading to systemic discrimination.

Employment lived experiences.

*They (upper-caste individuals) are at the higher position so when you start working under them you always feel insecure to talk about your background, to talk about your personal and family background and experiences, so yes. **It always left you anxious or feel insecure whenever you are working under Indian managers from the upper castes.***

Sydney Personal Interview 7

The experience of caste oppressed groups in Australia in employment setting is not just of interpersonal discrimination, as seen in other areas of life in Australia, but is of systemic discrimination. Systemic racism/discrimination as defined by Australian Human Rights Commission AHRC is:

Systemic racism – refers to the history, ideology, culture and interactions of institutions and policies that work together to perpetuate inequity. It describes the way in which institutions and structures fail to provide adequate service provision and equal opportunities to people because of their racial or cultural background.³⁰

Systemic racism can be more difficult to identify than individual or interpersonal racism, because it is often so entrenched in our societies or institutions that it is perceived as ‘normal’. Systemic racism refers to the way that the cultural norms, laws, ideologies, policies and practices of a particular society, organisation or institution result in unequitable treatment, opportunities and outcomes.³¹

In employment context in Australia, the responses from the participants indicated that they have experienced discrimination in hiring by being overtly asked what is their caste identity which have had an impact on their career opportunities in Australia, both in terms of advancement in terms of promotion in the companies to higher leadership positions and rejecting hiring of persons belonging to caste oppressed communities to begin with. This was a result of systemic casteism which is manifested by *de facto* practices of rejecting lower caste candidates and/or making the employment journey more difficult for people from caste oppressed communities. Apart from the lived experiences of the individuals, I will also discuss the negative impact such systemic casteism have had on individual careers where people had to leave their jobs and find

³⁰ Australian Human Rights Commission, *Racism: No Body Wins – Definition of Key Terms* (2021) https://humanrights.gov.au/sites/default/files/ahrc_sr_2021_4_keyterms_a4_r2_0.pdf

³¹ *ibid.*

alternative employment or suffer psychologically due to the ongoing discrimination in the employment setting.

To provide proper evidence for systemic discrimination/racism in form of casteism in employment context in Australia, the following *three case studies* will provide insight into the in-depth character of the exclusionary and discriminatory practices based in caste cultural norms. It will indicate such casteism in employment setting has an effect of negatively affecting caste oppressed community's individual's career opportunities, treatment and life outcomes amounting to systemic racism/casteism.

Case study 1- Systemic boycott of caste oppressed community person's business

In Brisbane group, one individual from caste oppressed community who was the business owner in Queensland state described his experience of systemic boycott once his caste identity was revealed because he celebrated a Dalit icon Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, who is revered by millions of Dalits:

R: "Caste-based discrimination as you know, there is a lot of casteism here. I think it is more than in India. See, I opened a market on Sunday. When I opened it, all the Indians were coming. Everyone was coming. All the Brahmins and others were coming. But, when I put up a banner of Babasaheb on Babasaheb's birthday, all the Indians (upper castes) stopped coming.

Earlier, they(upper-castes) used to ask for a stall, we need a stall and when they(upper-castes) came to know that these belong to SC caste, these Ambedkari people.

We are lucky. Here, mostly white people (used to refer to Australians in general) come. They get good facilities and there is no casteism here from their side. But all upper-castes people stopped coming. You won't find a single Indian upper caste among our thousand people.

[Speaker 5]

Yes, [Redacted for confidentiality] Yes, what is the impact?"

Speaker: *“Indians still are not coming; Australian White people are coming. But in initial days I had a loss. Now I am doing well.”*

[Speaker 5]

“Yes, no problem. I am just starting a new business. Okay.”

Brisbane group 1

In this instance the business owner was systemically punished through a collective boycott by upper castes once he celebrated a Dalit Icon’s birthday. It negatively impacted the business order from caste oppressed background through financial losses. He then later remarked that he is starting a new business to handle and cope with that impact.

The above is study this however not a one-off instance of systemic racism/casteism in the employment context. The following instances bring out the true systemic character of economic boycott on businesses owned by caste oppressed community persons:

*“Uh, since I'm in business, the moment you say you are from the scheduled class, or you know the lower caste and if you run any business. The straightforward, social blocks and financial block accounts, when **I am talking about social blocks, okay, generally people don't come to your shop, okay, they generally don't take services from you and that's really hampers, and to avoid that you know, it's a shame that you know we need to hide our caste.** We never say... we just always talk about our first name or father name, but we hesitate to share you know, our surname and that's how I believe you know, the cast discrimination whoever my friend has shared, that is there, but additional point is, we can't even survive. **If you own your business or anything and that's a taboo, we have and that's the blockage of these higher communities you know put on us.**”*

Sydney focus group 1

*“Recently, on Facebook, I connected with new friends through Name redacted for confidentiality. As an active user, **I openly shared my celebration of Guru Ravidas Jayanti at the Gurudwara, a tradition I***

observe every year. However, after this post, “I noticed a change in behaviour from one acquaintance who used to provide me with business referrals regularly”. Since then, not a single referral has come my way, resulting in a loss of business opportunities. “

Sydney Focus Group 7

It has to be noted that there is a commonality in terms of blocking businesses 2 boycott in all of these instances. The moment low caste identity of the business owner is disclosed add that very moment the boycott begins. As the above quote signify religious festivals and cultural events mark the point of identification of the low caste identity of the business owner and thereafter the systemic boycott of the branded low caste business begins.

There is also, thus, an intersectional angle to such experiences, where apart from caste, religion plays the central role in this systemic racism in employment context. Following excerpt further substantiates this point—

*“I have to give one more example like one of my friends. He owns the cafe here and he's from our community, so in front of the cafe, he put the Buddha statue and surprisingly, so you know, like we, we don't follow him because of Hinduism and casteism right? We follow the Buddha because of unity and equality. **So the one of the upper caste guy came and he literally asked the reception lady why the Buddha's statue is there, who is the owner? and he tried to identify and when the lady told all the things (about the caste identity and Buddhism that they follow) to him and all he told he will never come to your café. That was shocking and if you really wanted to grow your business, put Ganapati photo, which is another elephant God of Hinduism. Then I can come back to you.”***

Sydney Focus Group 1

Apart from the business, casteism is also systemic in professional services. The following two case studies signify the extent of discrimination based on caste identity and the impact it had on careers of professionals from caste oppressed communities in Australia—

Case study 2—

*“Yes. I came in 2008 to Australia that's when I started working with this gentleman who was a consultant and he was fairly good and cooperative and considerate about my the cultural differences in the medical practices and the living environment so it took me some time to get adjusted to the not so much to the living environment but the working culture which actually revealed that I need to needed quite a bit of catch-up for doing on the on the professional front which I was doing. And then in those days until then it did not matter with this particular consultant and then **the Devyani Khobragade incident happened and that's when the whole media erupted with this Schedule Caste or a Buddhist diplomat in America who was being stripped naked and cavity searched and then essentially that's that was played quite a bit on the media. and that's how being identical surname this consultant actually put two and two together and my last name being Khobragade and then that's how it came to this conclusion that I belong to this particular community (caste oppressed community).”***

*He never actually spoke to me or asked me about it at any point but I did **definitely notice this sudden change in the behaviour and things started getting very difficult for me then and there however in that and the gaslighting kind of increased quite a bit the professional work and the bullying increased quite a bit and the camaraderie vanished all of a sudden and the cordiality in the relation totally broke down so I had to kind of go on to this workplace harassment for almost about a year and a half** or so I was having a that time I couldn't leave as I had some commitment back home. So, I was kind of stuck in that situation but essentially, I endured and eventually came out of that during the same time.*

*There was yet another consultant (from upper-caste background) who was more or wasn't that subtle as he was like fairly straightforward **he clearly***

*asked me what caste I belong to because he was a consultant in the (name of the hospital redacted for confidentiality) he was looking for a guy to hire and then I told him that I am a Buddhist by occupation I actually invited him at my home for a dinner and all that he did not there but at some later stage he did ask for what caste did I belong to he was looking for ICU registrar and I was in that position where I was actually applying for a place in the (name of the hospital redacted for confidentiality) to work as an ICU registrar yes and he when he was prospecting me being working again under his consultant friend and so he saw me he knew me from there he's he had seen my work and then he was prospecting me for a likely registrar under his consultancy in the (name of the hospital redacted for confidentiality) before hiring me he actually asked me what is what caste do you belong to and I told him that I am from a Buddhist community and then that proposal never came through and then I realized okay this is what is happening because he is a Brahmin I am a Buddhist so for that reason it did not materialize eventually some other guy got that job and I knew that he was a Brahmin so he was actually working in the same hospital with me he got that job and I had no way of proving that it was the it was the it was not the interview performance or the work performance that actually got him the job. And I am definite that it was the caste working in the background **that a caste picking up the person from his own caste who was relatively junior to me so that's how I had actually gone through that so I believe certain kind of this kind of incidences also are happening all over the world you know with the expatriates** so yeah this is the new experience two of those that I can count sure there are quite a few but then these are the more important”*

Impact—definitely the work relationship definitely got affected it practically broke down as soon as this guy came to know about my caste my background (as a Buddhist and erstwhile untouchable caste) not my caste I don't have that anymore of being a Buddhist (and renouncing

officially my caste) but yeah as soon as I came to know about my background the heat and that work **relationship totally broke and it was actually the nurses the white the Caucasian nurses in working in my unit who stood up with me in the time of crisis practically supporting me in all this type of tormenting that was going on day-to-day almost a year opportunity-wise it did affect me in the way that was pushed back by say almost two years but the main issue would be the main effect would be the way it kind of plays havoc with your own belief system it's to affect you in that way that okay uh first of all it frustrates you that even after coming out of Australia out of India you think that you have probably left everything behind(the caste identity behind) and here probably you would get a playing field and a level playing field but that is not the case as long as you have a person of Indian origin sitting in front of you will always be exposed to the horrific practice of caste number one(1) the other way it plays with your brains is that it kind of makes you doubt your capacities or capabilities it erodes the inherent belief you have in your own capacities that tends to affect you more in the long term rather than an immediate loss of opportunities you miss one opportunity here you might get something there but if you start feeling that you are no good to take or whatever opportunity come your way then it will probably affect you more and that what tends to happen **if you are exposed to a long-term bullying work environment and caste becomes a very important factor um in workplace environment it affects the workplace environment in a way uh that uh the cordiality is lost and the genuine assessment of a person's capacity doesn't happen there which is what the Australia.****

uh Australian workforce kind of prides on itself that we do a very nice assessment but you have to understand wherever **there is a consultant Indian origin or a work person of an Indian origin uh judging a person of an other person of an Indian origin in that situation caste consideration has to be included because Indian mindset cannot function without a caste** he will do all the assessment if he is if he is very honest and very

honest in his capacity but the consideration of a caste will definitely play in the background and that is one something that they cannot shut away because that's the upbringing that is the that is the upbringing that is the what do you call it uh that is their Sanskar that is their teachings Sanskar teachings that is the that is the way they are actually made ideology not ideology but it's just how that it's the makeup of a person that he a Indian person cannot upbringing that he uh every time he judges the person in front of him not on his capacity alone but also his caste so that is something that uh the Australian lawmakers need to very seriously look at and probably put it in all the legal measures that are required.”

This extensive study provides an account of a caste oppressed community person’s life experience of working in Australia. The loss that it carriers, and the preference by a Brahmin (upper-caste) consultant to his own caste member over a lower caste person shows that caste identity consideration plays a central role in employment context in Australia if the employee/consultant is from upper-caste Indian origin as ‘caste consideration has to be included because Indian mindset cannot function without a caste.’

The next case study denotes the experiences with a large multi-national corporation with Indian origins based in Australia with a significant impact of the Dalit employee leaving the job due to casteism and harassment—

“This is the most recent one. I was in [Redacted for confidentiality] for almost 11 years. So, what happens in this usually in [Redacted for confidentiality], there is a culture If a company sends you out (foreign), it will often send you out. So, it's good, that's why people join [Redacted for confidentiality], because there is no use of staying in [Redacted for confidentiality] in India

But if you join [Redacted for confidentiality] and stay out, it will be good. So, I have been out since 2010, I came to Australia for the first time, after that I went to the UK and stayed there for 5 years and came back to Australia (as an employee of that Indian-Australian company). So in

between some rules and regulations changed in [Redacted for confidentiality] but overall, the international organizations in Australia, their rules are the same according to the government. If you have PR, they will make you a permanent employee of that country.

When I moved here from the UK, I told the company that I have a visa etc. I came there at that time so I had to buy a ticket myself but after that, ticket and other transfer expenses, I had some demands like retiring benefits which you will get in your home country. You originally joined [Redacted for confidentiality] in India so you will get the same Provident fund but here you will not get the superannuation, which was bad for me because I used to get it when I was on work visa, but now I had PR So after getting PR you should not do this. **The main thing was the head of our unit was a lady, an upper caste lady. She used to work from India. Her counterpart director was also here.** They were all fine. They have approved all my three requests, my compensation, my travel expenses, my role as an Australian employee - instead of giving me Australian and Indian salary, start my Australian salary only. So, all my demands were valid, so they approved. After approving, an HR came in between who was a **Marathi Brahmin and he objected and started asking me how you got PR, so I said, I mean, it's not a recent thing. I was in Australia 10 years ago. 4 years ago, I lived in Australia. I got PR while living in the UK. I said it's a skill select visa which you get after passing an English exam.** It's a proper visa So he said, I think it will take 4 more years. I mean my citizenship is in 2 years. After citizenship, there is no other option, a person must be permanent. I mean he is an Australian citizen, and you are making him an employee of India, which is so wrong. **But he didn't agree, he said it will take 4 more years, then only it will happen. So, then I understood why he was saying this. Then I remember when I joined [Redacted for confidentiality], there was an affirmative action clause which said yes. "Do you belong to any such Class or society", it was called affirmative action, I said yes to that, and HR has all these questionnaires. They can see.** I mean in the last 12 years, I have never seen that HR. At that time, when my interaction

*was happening, then I realized he was troubling me unnecessarily. It's not like the company policy is stopping me and the main thing is Unit head had also no problem in that, there is no post above Unit head in Australia. She also approved. I had a personal talk with her, because of her I had come to Adelaide. She was very good, she said why she is not approving, just ping her. I emailed both of them, and I said he is not taking action. **Then I left the company. I was like, everything is valid, I have already spent 11 years here, what else can a person do?***

R: This is the thing, my discussion with HR from May 2021 to October 2021, in which, I got fed up. So many emails, screenshots and in this, I also suffered a loss like if I transferred things, my TV broke. There is a date clause that it should be of so and so days etc, you can't claim anything after that. It's not my fault, it should have been sponsored by the company, that you are going for our work, but it didn't happen.

I: So due to the treatment of HR in Australia, you left the company, and you think this is because of your caste?

R: Yes. Because I didn't find it fair.”

Adelaide Focus group 3

The above experience denotes how an employee was harassed by a Brahmin HR head which made him leave the company because of his caste identity which was perceived to be ascertained by diversity information submitted a decade ago. The above case studies are only tip of the iceberg and similar instances have been described and explained in multiple references that also bring out the systemic character of casteism/discrimination in employment context. The following table highlights some of them—

Location	Narrative
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<p>Canberra Focus Group 3</p>	<p><i>Reference 1: my employees ask me in which caste I belong to. And when I tell them, they feel that we are working under a lower caste person. And they try to get out of that job as soon as possible.</i></p>
	<p><i>Reference 2: about my caste, but the thing was that whenever I tried telling him about my caste, I felt scared because he often used to use derogatory terms about my caste so I could not tell him about my caste.</i></p>
	<p><i>Reference 3: They tried to find out about my caste from here and there, but they suspected that I was from a lower caste because I wasn't revealing my caste. When they found out that I was from a lower caste, they did not make me work with them, they did not give me a chance to learn how to do my work for 2 years. Since I started that work all they asked me to do was labour and I could not learn the real job. They used to work the real job and because of that I left that job because I felt bad.</i></p>
	<p><i>Reference 4: My boss there was a really good guy. He got to know that it was the people from the upper</i></p>

	<p><i>caste because of whom I left my job. For one and half year I worked somewhere else when the upper caste people from my previous painter job left the job, the boss called me and told me that the people have left and now you can come to the job and do the work under me, then I worked with him for 7 years.</i></p>
	<p><i>Reference 5: R3: my name is [Redacted for confidentiality]. I have experienced caste-based discrimination at my job. My supervisor was an Indian Brahmin who is from an upper caste. She is very interested in knowing what caste the person belongs to when a new person starts the job. If the person is from lower caste she will behave differently, if the person is from upper caste she will behave differently. She used to give overtime to people from her community but if the person is from a lower caste she might even cancel their shift. This has also happened with me because I had been working there for a long time, so I talked to my manager in order to protect myself, but it is still</i></p>

	<p><i>difficult. But if somebody new comes in the job who is from a lower caste she tries to cancel their shifts, or their overtime is not given. And even if they get the ability to be manager or supervisor, they still don't let them get to that position. Every upper caste person that I have encountered behaved like this only.</i></p>
<p>Sidney Focus Group 1</p>	<p><i>Reference 1: If you own your business or anything and that's a taboo we have and that's the blockage of these higher communities you know, put on us.</i></p>
	<p><i>Reference 2: I've experienced this in some of the conversations in my office where people are segregating themselves or may be distinguishing themselves, like we don't want to live with these people, we don't want to go into the areas where so and so people are living based on their caste prejudices. there was opportunity in offices in our particular area, so the senior sitting there was from Indian background and he was from high caste, and he inadvertently said that the candidates are from our</i></p>

	<p><i>community (Apni Community), so he mistaken my identity as a higher caste people from India and accidentally said that we have many people, our own people there, so we will interview with them.</i></p>
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The above table highlights the systemic character of casteism in employment through common thread of caste identity being the central consideration in employment hiring and relations when the ‘other’ manager, boss or employee is an upper-caste person. To conclude the argument, the final study here denotes an admixture of casteist slurs, threat to life and systemic casteism in employment context—

“R1: Brother, let me tell you one experience from 2016-17, I was working in a transport company and with Greek people. They had sold out their work to the Jat community (upper castes) who were from India. Since this new family was inexperienced, my old master sent me to work with them. He said, “(Name redacted for confidentiality) will do all the work, and train you in both outdoor and indoor work.” Then I started helping them. Gradually they came to know that I belong to Chamar caste, then, they started asking me to do more work. One day, they stopped my payment (kept it on hold). I asked them why they did that, then they told me that I am not working and stuff like that. I told them, “Sir, I am doing all my work properly. If you call me at one or two o'clock at night suddenly. I can't come. I have my family. I will work till nine or ten o'clock at night and even if you want me to work late at night, you have to tell me about a day in advance.

He got very angry and said to me, Hey Chamar, (tu aisa tadi karta hai). (A caste slur) I felt very bad, and then I didn't go to work. They held back my payment for a couple of weeks. Then later when I went to them asking for my money, they said chamar, we will not give you money, there was some exchange of words between us, whatever they said to me based

on my caste. They told me Chamar, we will come to your house and cut you into pieces and kill you. (Tere ghar aake tere ko kaat denge)."

The data showcases systemic discrimination within employment contexts in Australia based on caste identity. Employees report experiencing direct prejudice from their colleagues and supervisors upon disclosing their caste background. For instance, one participant recounts how their co-workers perceived them differently once their lower caste status was revealed, leading to attempts to distance themselves from the individual in the workplace. Additionally, individuals describe instances where they felt intimidated and fearful of revealing their caste due to anticipated derogatory treatment from superiors, reflecting a pervasive culture of discrimination that permeates workplace dynamics. This suggests a systematic discrimination of individuals from marginalized caste backgrounds from opportunities for growth and advancement within the workplace, perpetuated by discriminatory practices that undermine their professional development and well-being.

Furthermore, the narratives highlight the complicity of management in perpetuating caste-based discrimination within organizations. Instances are documented, where supervisors favour employees from higher castes, providing them with preferential treatment such as overtime opportunities, while simultaneously marginalizing those from lower castes by denying them similar privileges. This systemic bias is deeply ingrained within the organizational culture, as even individuals who have worked diligently for years find themselves excluded from career advancement opportunities solely based on their caste identity.

The discussion now turns to the common usage of caste slurs as a form of overt discrimination, which is a key aspect of daily life in Australia.

Caste slurs as a daily aspect of life for caste oppressed communities

The common character of the usage of caste identity-based slurs is an aspect of daily life, so much so that a majority of the caste oppressed community participants have been victims of this overt form of discrimination. There are over 44 references on NVivo database from the transcripts that denote usage of caste slurs. This section will not engage in providing a descriptive account of all such instances, and instead will provide the readers an overview of the nature of such overt caste identity-based abuse—

Location	Narrative
Brisbane	<i>Someone from Gurdwara told me that in Gurdwara in 2017 a lot of people came together. A lot of students came together. Someone told me that people were talking that, 'now the visa process is so easy that Chude and Chamars have also started coming here'. That's why I never go there. That's why I never go there.</i>
Brisbane Focus Group 1	<i>For example, I work in Bulwork. So, when it seems that this person has come there, how to get rid of him? So, to demoralize, they will do something like this. It is the same life. Earlier, our problems were many more. But what I have experienced is at our competition level, whenever our people start competing anywhere, whether it is socially, politically or economically. Suppose we are moving forward economically, they call you any caste-based/caste suggestive derogatory term (Jati Suchak), then it can be used to demoralize him. If I can do nothing harm to him, at least the only thing I can do is upset him mentally. So, it is increasing for this. Secondly, one person, in one meeting, he was drunk, he said it directly that you are chamar chude, in fact, they do like this, when they don't drink alcohol, they are fine, otherwise, they say whatever in their mind, they express it. A lot of things happen, when I went to one house to have food, they didn't sit with me. In front of him, his son was crying, and his wife was saying to that crying son, I will send you to Chamar's house, you are a boy like Chamars. So, I saw him, he quickly took him inside.</i>
Australia Online Focus group 1	<i>Something someone said that he is dhed (derogatory term for SC), you know those who come to class with the help of reservations. They do not have any knowledge (unke akal wakar toh hoti nahi hai), these sort of things. But in our normal day to day life, I talk to my son, like, how come the little kids in like a five-year kindergarten knows the casteism? How come the kids like in a primary school, maybe like under 10 years, you know about the Chura Chamar? Where this word come from? It's very tedious. So, the way is that there's a two way that when we're thinking where this word come from. So, there is two ways. One, parents teach them intentionally about the casteism. One, they're teaching them intentionally. For example, I am, my kids do not look good. Why? Why you look like a Chura Chamar? Why are you wearing like a Chura dress? All right. This is happening. When have they come to ask, what's a Chura Chamar? All right. So, in their</i>

Location	Narrative
Canberra focus group	<i>It's something I've kept buried for a long time, only now opening up about it within this closed group. I've struggled to comprehend why, despite my abilities and achievements, I've been subjected to derogatory remarks "I was been called Chamar" by the people who don't even know me and I don't know why they used to call me because I'm "Mahar", mistaken for someone I'm not. This confusion has haunted me, prompting numerous conversations with my family seeking clarity.</i>
Melbourne Focus Group 2	<i>Should I say something? I work here, not now, around one year ago, there was my senior and another man below him. I was sitting in the depot. There was a footy match between Collingwood and Richmond, and the middle guy, the one below the senior, he commented that, these Collingwood guys, these chure [caste slur], they're together.</i>
Melbourne Focus Group 5	<i>For example, I was sitting in a restaurant with my friend who was a so-called Brahmin. It has never happened before. There was a waiter who was serving us food. Waiter had a little dark skin and a thin build and looked like an Indian. My Brahmin friend said that to me, the waiter looks like a Chamar due to his appearance. I said to my friend, "Do you know that I am also a Chamar. Then my brahmin friend was shocked and very embarrassed. Then I came to know that these people always think low about us. I said, who are you? He said, I am also a Brahmin. He was very embarrassed at that time. So, once at work, we were in a group of ladies. Someone compared a house with an example of Chamar people house. According to them, Chamar people's houses are always dirty. If they have to explain that someone is not looking very good, then they will explain it by giving an example that she is looking like a Chamari. So, they compare Chamar people with the bad things. [Speaker 2] Okay. They think that chuda, chamar is a normal word.</i>
Melbourne Focus Group 4	<i>And both of their wives fought with each other, and the other woman's husband verbally abused my aunt using a derogatory term for our caste which is "chamari". He said that "I will see (handle) you chamari" (tume chamari ko to mein dekh lunga) because he got to know about their caste.</i>
Melbourne Online Focus Group 3	<i>Now I will tell you about my third experience. My wife was standing at the station and an old gentleman from India came and stopped beside her. He asked her about where she works, and she looked in a hurry. Then my wife said that she works in a hospital, in the food department. He told my wife that the cleaning jobs and sewage jobs are done by all the chamar people (ye saare choode chamar hote hai). My wife was shocked. These are the experiences that happened with us. There was a girl living, she was married and had two children. She didn't know our caste identity. Women there used to say some things and then there used to be fights etc. Then she said, "Why do they talk and fight like Chura-Chamars? They are the same as they were in India." So, in that conversation, he said something mentioning about chamarand sir, they don't even call us Chamar, they call us Chamarli. For example, if the Chamar community lives in a village, they are not called Chamar, they are called Chamarli, like this place is Chamarli area like that.</i>
Sydney_Focus Group 5	<i>When someone says some, you know, derogatory comments, they make really bad comments to us based on our caste. I can share an experience here. So, I was actually invited to a party years ago, maybe around 15 years ago. And my kids were</i>

Location	Narrative
	<p>very, very little. And when, you know, there are a lot of people, usually we tell the kids to sit on the floor and eat, you know. And my son was sitting with their son, and there were other kids as well. So, the host actually came to the area where kids were sitting and eating, and he said this. And I heard it. He said, I'll say in Punjabi, right? He said, oye, tusi ki chamara vangu bethe ho? Means, why are you sitting like chamars? So, in his mind, this is how chamar people si</p>
<p>Sydney_Focus Group 6</p>	<p>Like they say, they use some words (“chamar keh dete hai”). So, that's very unbearable. An incident from office work. So, we were in the night shift, we were discussing what happened yesterday, what work was there. So, one of ours was colleague, ‘Pandey’, also he is a temple trustee. Krishna temple trustees. Now he said that he left work yesterday, so he did not do this either. He straightforwardly said that if you hire Chamar chudo (“agar chamar chudo ko hire karoge to aise hi result ayege”) such results will come.</p>

The above analysis indicates the daily experiences of usage of casteist slurs against persons from caste oppressed communities. The following case study will be crucial to round off the discussion in this session that indicates pervasive and daily character of caste slurs being used in the Australian society—

*“I live in Queensland, and I was in NSW Sydney last year for my graduation and few of my friends were also there and **it was just at the start of winter we were three friends and one of my friends was wearing a stool like just to cover his ear and the other friend very easily passed the comment saying like why you dressed like bhangi (caste slur) dressed like? why you dressed like bhangi yeah so at that time I was really shocked but I don't know how to respond** and also it was our graduation, I didn't want to ruin that moment so I just kept quiet and even the other person took it very lightly because he didn't belong to that category, so they were both of the similar category and so they were very easily passing comment, it was like nothing for them, it was just a general comment but I knew this is not right but I didn't know how to respond so I kept quiet and...okay if I don't know how to respond I could at least tell him that this is not right and see such and such event has been happening and she has apologized **so I sent him the news link as well as a little snippet message like bro what you did, I don't feel comfortable and it may not***

be comforting but I feel it's not comforting what you did was wrong and I told him it's not anything between our friendship, I just want to make our friendship still okay I thought I should let you know that this is not right

and then the next day or the next after we were hanging around Sydney and my other friend was still like walking weirdly and he(the first person again) passed the same comment again on his walk this time so I was like bro I'm still here and I told you just two days before that this is not right and you are saying this again so this time I thought that this is not a mistake or it is a genuine comment just to let me know that yes I know what you are saying but I would still say it so I thought it may happen like it is still his usual tone because he has been saying this thing in India definitely and the second time also it came out like normal passing but he should have been more careful it's been just two days that I responded to him that this is not right”

Australia Online Consultation Focus Group 3

Marriage

When it comes to marriage life, caste identity and the concept of endogamy are prevalent across various Australian states within the South Asian Indian Diaspora. Almost all the participants that shared experiences about marriage have describe occurrence of the endogamy concept. The emphasis on marrying within one's own caste, the consequences of disclosing one's caste, and the perpetuation of caste-based preferences across generations all reflect the practice of endogamy. Endogamy is evident in the participants' accounts of marriage decisions being influenced by caste considerations and the social pressures to maintain caste purity within matrimonial relationships.

The anthropological definition of caste endogamy is,

Endogamy and exogamy are correlated terms. The first indicates marriage into a class of persons of which I also am a member; the second, marriage

into a class of which I am not a member³²...Through endogamy the caste system so regulates its reproductive and status-ascriptive institution (the family) that caste distinctions remain clear rather than become blurred in the next generation. This is why in unsanctioned inter-caste unions the offspring are illegitimate and either follow the status of the lower spouse or receive an intermediate position, while in sanctioned inter-caste unions the mates are usually made equal at the time of marriage, the lower spouse and the subsequent offspring acquiring the status of the higher spouse.³³

Apart from the common theme of endogamy across all data on marriage, thematic analysis of the revealed several key themes related to experiences of discrimination in marriage based on caste:

Caste Preferences in Marriage: Participants recount instances where caste plays a significant role in marriage decisions. For example, in one instance, a girl specifies that her brother needs to marry a Jat Sikh and excludes all other castes. Similarly, in another case, people express concerns about marrying outside their community or caste, illustrating the importance of caste compatibility in marriage.

Impact of Caste Disclosure: The disclosure of one's caste can have significant consequences for relationships. In multiple instances, relationships are strained or broken when the caste of one partner is disclosed. This disclosure often leads to conflict between families, highlighting the divisive nature of caste in marriage decisions.

Parental Influence and Pressure: Parents exert significant influence and pressure on their children regarding caste-based marriage preferences. Participants describe how parents' express preferences for partners from the same caste, leading to tensions and conflicts within families. This pressure can lead to individuals prioritizing caste compatibility over personal preferences in marriage.

Social Stigma and Discrimination: The data also reflects the social stigma and discrimination faced by individuals from lower castes in the context of marriage.

³² Footnote 2, Davis, Kingsley. 'Intermarriage in Caste Societies' (1941) 43(3) *American Anthropologist* 376 <http://www.jstor.org/stable/663138>. Accessed 2 May 2024.

³³ *ibid.* 379.

Participants recount instances where individuals face humiliation, rejection, or discrimination based on their caste during the marriage process. This discrimination can have long-lasting emotional and psychological effects on individuals and their families.

Inter-generational Impact: The impact of caste-based marriage preferences extends across generations, affecting not only individuals directly involved but also their families. Participants discuss how experiences of caste-based discrimination in marriage have a lasting impact on familial relationships and interpersonal dynamics within the community.

The above themes were inductively recognised from the data set of transcripts. To substantiate the above thematic points, I will undertake analysis of three case studies that signify the exclusion of lower castes from the marriage as an important social institution within the south Asian diaspora.

Case study 1- Together since childhood broken away by caste.

“So, I will share two examples. One example is, there is a member of our Sri Guru Ravidas Sabha. So, his son used to date a girl. He was dating a girl since high school. So, their relationship was very good. So, after high school, they went to uni together. They were together there as well. So, after that, they were in love. They started living together as well. So, their relationship was very strong. And they decided that we would get engaged. So, they would get married. So, they got engaged as well. Until then, the girl's family didn't know what the boy's caste was. Maybe they thought that it was not possible that he was of a lower caste because he was so well-educated. He was good-looking. So, maybe they didn't even think about it.

So, they got engaged. But after that before marriage, when the boy's and the girl's family came together, the girl's father asked the boy, what is your caste? What caste do you belong to? So, the boy said, I don't know much. Because my parents never told me about a particular

caste. But I've heard my parents talking to each other that we belong to the Dalit caste. So, the girl's father was shocked that he was a Dalit.

*How come my daughter is going to marry a Dalit man? From that day, the boy started feeling that the girl's family's behaviour had totally changed. And at one point, the girl's and the boy's parents fought with each other. They had arguments with each other. It went to a high level (of dispute). **Eventually, they broke up. And now, the boy is married to another girl. And the girl is married to someone else.** So, this is a big trauma for the boy and the girl. **And this is a big result of caste discrimination. So, the girl had to do it, because her parents were not happy at all. They broke up because they were from different castes. And the boy was from a lower caste. He was a Chamar.**"*

The above experience indicates the Impact of Caste Disclosure on young Australian born adults life. The parental pressures and force for endogamy influenced the final decision of the couple which led to breakdown of the marriage.

Caste study 2—Australia Marriage, India humiliation, Australia Divorce

Translation: ***"I am telling you a story in Hindi. A Jaat boy got married to a low caste girl from a community called Majhabi (which is a low caste community) in Australia. After marriage and after quite some time he visited back to Punjab to his own home and his in-law's house."***

R3: *"Toh kehti in laws de gaya saare munde te dost sige aur kehnde ki yeh te ji majbiya ida javai aagaya"*

Translation: ***"So, all his friends started humiliating him by commenting on the fact that he is the son in law of a low caste (mujbayi)"***

R3: *Te kehnde tu oh hun majbiya da javai hai mein thik bol rahi hu na*

R1? (they would humiliate him by asking him the question,) So, you are the son in law of an mujbayi? (lower caste?)

R3: majhi bolte hai Punjab me All: Majbi R3: te Majbiya da javai aagaya khedi uss ladke ne apne andar itna zyada feel kiya mentally ki mein itni neechi jaat ka damad ban gaya hu toh usne agle din hi Australia me aakar uss ladki ko divorce kr diya.

Translation: “He felt so mentally harassed by his upper-caste friends and societal pressures of the fact that he had become the son-in-law of a low caste community which violated his pride. So, the very day he came back to Australia with his wife, he divorced his low caste wife.”

Uss ladki ko divorce kar diya aur uss bacchi ke ek bacchi hai matlab uss ladkike kudiya I ladki hai uskeek betibhi hai doo saal ki toh maine kaha aacha. Toh jaatto ne uss chudi ladki ko chod diya toh jo jat ki ladki paida huyi hai doo saal ki woh majbi key aha byahi jayegi woh thik hai

Translation: the Jat boy divorced the low caste women and also abandoned his 1-year-old daughter, is this even, correct?

The sense of caste pride was violated of an upper-caste Jat man when he went back home to India to visit their family in Punjab. However, the effect of such humiliation was felt in Australia leading to destruction of a family because of wife’s low caste status.

Case study 3-Inter-generational Impact on parents and children

“ It's affected my sister a lot because she's now married to this man [Redacted for confidentiality], but before she had a relationship in university with a man by the name of [Redacted for confidentiality] and so they had a relationship for three or four years and my mother knew and **I think that they thought they would get married but then his parents, they were from Indian Singapore and so they came and they met my sister, then my mum met with them and they found out our caste (is that of a low caste) and then it was instantly like the parents of the boy wanted to just destroy that marriage and boy’s mother would meet with my sister and always disparage her.** It was just like so much tension you know like you know when obviously when two people together and they

like each other you think that would be easy but I remember those meetings feeling like we had to fight for something or you know it just felt like a really toxic space. I think that was really traumatic for my sister and you know that whole relationship was sort of destroyed because the mother and the parents of the boy had a conversation with my mother and they found out and so I think that was kind of traumatic seeing the impact of that on my sister and my mum and seeing how other people can come in and just destroy you know not even knowing who you are, not even believing what that relationship was to go and just and make us feel so small.

I think because it was a relationship that was going for three or four years between them. Hence, it was fine, you know everything was fine, but it was when the parents came, and my mum visited them. My mum said I had to disclose my caste because I think in any other Indian relationship, it's like a responsibility, so it was when that was disclosed that everything started to change. I think that was, and that also affected my mother. **Just kind of knowing that you know it was humiliating, it was humiliating for everyone in that situation.** I think for my mum, my sister especially. It does. Especially when you have to say something and then what happened after that is, so that relationship was destroyed, and I think I saw the effect of that on my sister closely, and I've encouraged her to come and speak out, but- I think I'm saying because also it affects everyone in the family you know when you see that closely, but I think that also

After that she met this man [Redacted for confidentiality], and his family are Brahmins from Bombay. I think that it was all fine like I knew him and [Redacted for confidentiality], himself, he's okay you know, I don't think he's, he doesn't seem to know but **I remember the time when, it affected my father a lot when my sister was getting married. Still, both my parents went to see both his parents and they said to him you know we're from this caste and they said that's fine just don't tell anyone you know...**

Yeah, I think that that's upsetting as well. It's like we're so we're the second generation of people, but this affects relationships. It affects how you- you know, I think I think when I look back.”*

This excerpt explains the intergenerational impact caste identity and the discrimination in marriage has on parents and children and families on the whole. The issue of humiliation is pressing, as with the disclosure of caste identity of one person who is a lower caste in front of upper-caste partner or their family leads to beginning of the process towards the end of marriage.

The discussion now turns to the issue of intersectionality, which is a crucial discourse to understand the experiences of caste oppressed groups in conjunction with gender and religion leading to multiple axis of prejudice and discrimination that caste oppressed communities suffer in Australia.

Intersectionality: Caste, gender and religion.

Intersectionality of Gender and Caste:

"So, for women who come from scheduled castes, there is a double discrimination from them, they have to fight the gender and the caste. Obviously, they have to make sure because their character is going to be challenged, their merit is going to be challenged, they have to be more vigilant, constantly like walking on eggshells, they have to care, they have to be careful about what the perception built is around them because they have to take care of the family as well. They might be trolled online, you know, I have been, I have been trolled online before because of certain when I went ahead and gave some interviews, and it takes a toll on your mental health, which you take back to your family."

Sydney Focus Group 5

Women from marginalized caste backgrounds face a double burden of discrimination based on both their gender and caste. They often have to navigate societal expectations and biases that intersect along these lines, impacting their opportunities, treatment in

workplaces, and social interactions. Many instances could be noted where women faced double discrimination, first due to their caste and then also due to their gender. The following table contains excerpts of the participants describing their intersectional experiences of caste gender.

Focus group	Experience
Focus Group 1 Adelaide	<i>"It happened with me when I came my partner told me you look like an Aboriginal And he was hiding his identity, and he was calling me that I look like an Aboriginal this is like treating me like I am very low, and he is high"</i>
Sydney_Focus Group 5	<i>"Particularly for the women, you know, from the discriminated, caste discriminated background, they have got intersectionality discrimination."</i>
	<i>"Because not only do they have to, you know, overcome the challenges of caste, but also of gender. So, this is a double kind of discrimination where they have to really, you know, fight. So, it's not very easy for, you know, lower caste women to fight."</i>
	<i>"So, for women who come from scheduled castes, there is a double discrimination from them, they have to fight the gender and the caste. Obviously, they have to make sure because their character is going to be challenged, their merit is going to be challenged, they have to be more vigilant, constantly like walking on eggshells, they have to care, they have to be careful about what the perception built is around them because they have to take care of the family as well. They might be trolled online, you know, I have been, I have been trolled online before because of certain when I went ahead and gave some interviews, and it takes a toll on your mental health, which you take back to your family."</i>
	<i>"So, we went to someone's house, and they had a Ramayana recitation. So, they were upper-caste people. So, we reached there very late. When we reached there, the priest said he had a Shabda(word); he said it was Dhol, Shudra, Nari, Yeh Sab Tadan Ke Adhikari. So, when we heard this, it was very</i>

Focus group	Experience
	<p><i>shocking for us. When we entered, he was saying this. So, we have heard this from the beginning. And we knew the meaning of this. So, now we are Shudra, we are women, and he is saying that they are Tadan Adhikari."</i></p>
<p>Sydney_Focus Group 7_PG_23_04_2024</p>	<p><i>"Like all forms of prejudice, caste discrimination is intrinsically evil. Discrimination has to end for the benefit of society as a whole as well as the victims. For example, discrimination based on gender damages people as well as society advancement. Thus, combating discrimination is crucial for fostering a fair and inclusive society. For example, excluding any group, whether it's women or minorities, from participation in society doesn't just affect those individuals. It hampers overall societal progress because it means excluding valuable perspectives and contributions. History has shown that countries where women or racial minorities have been discriminated against struggle to make progress because they lack inclusivity. Take the example of racial discrimination in America, where numerous conflicts have arisen due to exclusion and lack of inclusivity."</i></p>
<p>Adelaide_Individual Interview 1 (2 Persons)</p>	<p><i>Yeah, so with the caste-based discrimination, thing with including gender and equality issue. I'm not 100% sure. Because you know we do face that. I'm back in home, in India as well, there is a big gender gap issue and I think this is the ongoing issue and as in Australia coming from scheduled caste and being a girl or a woman, people yeah, people were talking to me in front of me like how I am not gonna be you know, like I said before them, I won't get any professional career here. You know you're just wasting your time, or you know. Yeah, when I was trying hard and I was doing, you know, not having a good day and I was trying to get a really good career like a professional career in home in here, Australia, so people started taking credits that she is now because of me</i></p>

Intersectionality of Religion and Caste:

“Another thing is that if you follow them, you have to follow their religion as well. You have to go with them to the temples. If they have, if they have their celebrations, festivals and then normally people invite them to their special occasions. So, when they know I belong to this caste, they stop inviting me to their special occasions. So that's the big thing. Before that, I had lots of friends, but now I think I have limited friends.”

A significant number of participants reported that they have experienced prejudice and discrimination based on their religion and caste. This happened in two contexts, first, in terms of the religion followed by the caste oppressed communities in Australia other than Hinduism. They described following Buddhism, Atheism and Ravidasia-Sikhism. This itself was an overt marker for upper-caste Hindus, apart from caste, to exclude caste oppressed communities in Australia. Second, cultural and religious context for exclusion, prejudice and discrimination was not following the same religious and cultural observances in form of Hindu festivals, as that of upper-caste Hindus. A few instances of intersectional prejudice have been shared in the context of Christianity as well. There are over 60 references of intersectional prejudice, exclusion and discrimination as expressed in the data set. For brevity, this section will only provide a brief description in form of excerpts of the lived expressed told to the facilitators—

Context	Quote
Experience with Landlord	<i>“You might find it awkward, but my landlord explained to me the reason behind it. Perhaps, in their experiences in Nepal, there were certain expectations or traditions within the Buddhist community that they were accustomed to. She mentioned something about donations and specific regions like Bihar or Chanda. Although she assured me that they didn't harbour any animosity towards the Buddhist community, I couldn't shake off the feeling of being singled out. Being the only Buddhist among Hindus in that gathering felt burdensome and somewhat isolating. It was a stark reminder of the casteism prevalent not just in India but also in other communities. This was my first experience of feeling like an outsider among family-like company, and I didn't quite know how to navigate it.”</i>

Context	Quote
Job Interview Experience	<p><i>"My first job was in Sydney as a mechanical engineer. It was with a company owned by a person from Kerala, so naturally, most of the employees were Keralites, predominantly Christians. Initially, I had a telephonic interview which went well, prompting them to invite me for an in-person interview. During the interview, I answered numerous questions confidently, feeling optimistic about my chances. However, the last question caught me off guard. They asked, 'Who do you believe in?' At first, I was perplexed and sought clarification. It turned out they were inquiring about my religious beliefs and the deity I worship ('tum konse religion se belong karte ho, What God do you believe in?')."</i></p>
Response to Religious Question in Interview	<p><i>"This question left me feeling shocked and somewhat angry, but I composed myself and asked if my response to this question would affect the outcome of the interview. They assured me it was merely out of curiosity. Despite my discomfort, I managed to navigate the situation calmly and answered their question diplomatically. Despite successfully securing the job, the issue persisted after a few months. My colleagues, who were predominantly Christians, began repeatedly inviting me to church events. While I harboured no ill feelings towards their beliefs, I politely declined their invitations, asserting my own Buddhist faith. However, they persisted, often initiating discussions about their religious experiences and attempting to engage me in conversation. As a junior employee, I felt obligated to listen respectfully, even though I found these conversations uncomfortable."</i></p>

The thematic inductive analysis indicated the following major themes that were described to us by the participants—

Based on the provided data, the thematic analysis focusing on intersectional discrimination based on both religion and caste informed us that:

1. Religious and Caste-based Exclusion:

- Participants describe instances where their religious and caste identities intersect, leading to exclusionary behaviour from higher-caste individuals or groups.
- Discrimination occurs in various settings, including social gatherings, religious ceremonies, and community events, where individuals are treated differently based on their caste affiliation and religious practices.
- Examples include reluctance to engage with individuals from lower castes, refusal to participate in festivals or rituals associated with marginalized communities, and overt displays of prejudice towards non-dominant religious beliefs.

2. Pressure to Conform and Cultural Hegemony:

- There's a pervasive pressure on individuals to conform to dominant religious and cultural norms associated with higher castes, leading to feelings of discomfort, alienation, and identity conflict.
- Participants highlight the imposition of religious practices and customs by dominant caste groups, often marginalizing or erasing the cultural heritage and religious traditions of lower-caste communities.
- The intersectionality of religion and caste exacerbates power differentials, with those from privileged backgrounds exerting influence over social norms and practices, further marginalizing marginalized groups.

3. Identity Negotiation and Anxiety:

- Respondents' express anxiety and confusion when navigating conversations about their religious and caste identities, particularly in multicultural environments where stereotypes and biases may be prevalent.
- There's a sense of apprehension about disclosing one's caste background due to fear of stigmatization or discrimination, leading individuals to carefully navigate social interactions and spaces where their identities intersect.
- The intersectional nature of discrimination complicates individuals' sense of belonging and identity formation, as they grapple with the complexities of navigating multiple marginalized identities simultaneously.

Focus Group Information	Lived experiences
Canberra Focus Group 2	<p><i>Our African, Bangladeshi, and Pakistani friends were curious about Diwali celebrations. When they asked me about my plans for Diwali, I shared that I do not celebrate it (“Main manta hi nahi hu”). This revelation surprised one of my friends in the group, who had known me for several months. Despite visiting my home previously, he had never realized this aspect of my identity. He asked me, "Why don't you celebrate Diwali?" I explained that as a Buddhist, I don't adhere to Hindu traditions (“kyu ki main Buddhist hu me Hindu nahi hu”). His follow-up question surprised me: "Are there any Buddhists in India? There are no Buddhist in India " I clarified that Buddhism has deep roots in India, tracing back to the birth of Buddha. However, he seemed sceptical and didn't engage further. Subsequently, he avoided interacting with me for about a year (“He avoided me completely”). He initially expressed enthusiasm to invite us for dinner with his family, but when we extended the invitation in return, he didn't follow through (“Humne jab unko invite kiya to wo aaye hi nahi”). This pattern continued for a year. It was disheartening to experience such inconsistencies.</i></p>
Melbourne Online Focus Group 3	<p><i>In casual chat or conversation, they ask us about our caste, from which community we come, then we tell them we come from Ravidasia or Chamar community, so they reply to us, “Oh, it means the Buddhist community that sweeps the village right? But we don't think very well of that community there.”</i></p>
Sidney Focus Group 1	<p><i>because I don't have faith in God and my perception is different, I feel that my faith should not be disturb anyone, I was not going there, but while passing by, a woman came and she performed Aarti in front of me and asked me to pray and chant the mantra. I politely told her that I don't want to do this. She said why are you doing this? I knew she didn't want my name but wanted to know about my caste, then I told her my last name, but because my last name is also from Hinduism, she didn't have any idea about my caste, so then she asked about my work profession and I told her that I come from potter caste and she said that a person who makes clay idols etc. is good. but then still I told her not to force me to do prayers. She made a very rude face and told me directly that maybe you are from a low caste.</i></p>

Focus Group Information	Lived experiences
Sydney Focus Group 6	<p><i>Sir, you won't believe that I was working with National Australian Bank in a data centre. 20 people were sitting there. Our boss was Muslim. He was from Nepal. So, I asked him a question. Shift me from this branch to the city branch. He said, your name is [Redacted for confidentiality]. In 20 people, openly he asked me, are you Muslim? There were Indians. There were white Indians. There were South Indians. He didn't just ask, "Are you Muslim?" He said, "Hey [Redacted for confidentiality], are you Muslim?" It felt like a weighty question, demanding an immediate response. I pondered over it, considering its implications.</i></p>
Sydney Personal Interview 8	<p><i>: Definitely some such things have happened. Particularly be it Ganapati festival, be it Diwali festival (both being Hindu festivals) when friends used to celebrate together, they used to avoid coming to my house i.e. during Ganapati or other such festivals. Then I got the reason because one of my friends told me, "You don't follow any festival that means you can have non-vegetarian food in your home during these festivals. That's why we avoid visiting you on festival days." Actually, these people are my friends, and they are non-vegetarians and even on festival days their kids eat non-veg etc. So, they go out and have McDonald's or something like that, but just to show me my caste and (negatively suggesting my disbelief in Hindu festivals), they were saying all this. "Maybe we come to you on those days and if you have non-vegetarian food [Vashaat], then what is the difference between veg and non-veg for us", so maybe they avoid coming to me on those days. So now I had to change my behaviour in such a way that during those days i.e. during festivals</i></p>

Social life

The exhaustive analysis undertaken until now is really of various aspects of the Australian societal life that also include some form of 'social life' within them and thus there is some overlap between themes here. Caste discrimination and prejudice is pervasive in social life in Australia, as it is in all other aspects. The story of social life is that of fear and resilience, is of navigating discriminatory attitudes, caste slurs and also

finding a sense of community among their own people, for Caste Oppressed Communities.

“It happens! It's not the first time. When we have been somewhere, we have experienced. My family has a social circle of upper caste people, wherever I go with them, I could hear the conversations and passing comments to lower caste people. So those who I live with, they knew that I wouldn't like it, so they used to keep quiet before I said anything.”

Adelaide Focus Group 3

It is also about being asked by the other friend who was visiting the lower caste individual's house, ‘that there was a photo of Babasaheb Ambedkar in my room. And he started asking, what is this in your room? Adelaide Focus Group 2.’

Many participants informed that the social culture in the society is such that upper-caste Hindus have their own caste-based associations and social groups which are exclusionary of lower-caste individuals,

*“It seems like within certain community groups, especially those like the **Marathi Mandal**, there's a clear awareness of caste dynamics among individuals who have been in the country for a longer time. These are the people who have established connections over the years and are familiar with the nuances of caste identity and history. While there may be **informal groups or networks based on caste affiliations**, it's notable that even individuals outside of one's own caste may have an understanding of one's background. This reflects the broader awareness and acknowledgment of caste dynamics within the community, even among those who may not personally identify with it.”*

Australia Online Focus Group 2

The second generation of Australian born young adults from caste oppressed communities recall their attempts to reconcile with the anxieties and fear of having to interact with another Indian, as that prospect seems daunting,

“R3: I think, I think hesitation and use the word vigilance before, which I think is, like, whenever I see another Indian, it's kind of like, if I don't know that they're in the community, there is this hesitation or it's like, oh, where is this person coming from? What do they, you know, yeah, what is it? You know, where do they stand? What will they think like? and that's in the sense of disclosing or talking about caste issues. But I think generally, in my experience from growing up in Australia, there's always this hesitation

if you don't know where the other, this other Indian person, if they're not within the community, you don't know where they're coming from or what their intentions are, what they're going to approach you with or, you know, even their political or religious affiliations. You just don't know.”

Sydney Focus Group 2

This hesitation was described by many participants as they live in a constant state of fear. However, they not only live in fear, but many are also resilient in the face of discrimination and prejudice (to be discussed in coping mechanism section).

The caste oppressed community individuals find themselves confused on the levels of discrimination and why is there caste discrimination in the Australian Society, “There was a lot of discrimination. So, we left our country. And we came here to have a good life. But when we see the same system here, you know, it's not productive at all for anyone” a common sentiment remarked by an individual. The social life doesn't end, nor does it start outside of the online realm of social media, where participants have described overt caste discrimination and sharing on problematic content which is casteist and makes derogatory remarks against lower caste individuals, to which the discussion now turns.

Social media

“For Brahmins, there are many groups and some organizations like RSS, Vishwa Hindu Parishad. They have been very aggressive in the last 4-5 years. One who is running RSS here lives on my street, he is my neighbour. I know him. RSS, Vishwa Hindu Parishad and we have not even heard of Hindu Yuva Vahini, so they are very big and their followers or Facebook page, they have a lot of content shared in Non-English or in their WhatsApp group. Now, I heard, the problem is the government cannot take any action if someone does something about non-English content. You can complain against racism but if someone does something in another language, this government cannot do anything. So this, I think when the article 370 revoked, it happened in Hindu community and Muslim community, there was a lot of propaganda on social media which was mostly non-English so

some people complained, but the government said that we cannot translate, it's about privacy also, and if we can't interpret, we can't do anything. This is a big problem and the casteist content shared on social media is non-English so I think even if such a law is made, it will be difficult to stop. Even in the existing laws of racism if I message someone in Gujarati or Hindi, the government cannot do anything even if it is racist.”

Adelaide Focus Group 3

The inductive analysis of the data set helped us narrow down on the following common themes that emerge out of participants sharing their lived experiences on social media—

Caste Discrimination and Prejudice: Instances of discrimination and prejudice based on caste are prevalent, both online and offline. Participants report experiences of caste-based discrimination in social settings, workplaces, and online platforms. This discrimination includes derogatory remarks, exclusion from social events, and even professional repercussions, such as complaints to managers or isolation at the workplace.

Social Media Dynamics: Social media platforms serve as arenas for the expression and propagation of caste-based prejudices and discriminatory attitudes. Participants highlight instances where individuals refrain from engaging with content related to lower-caste figures or events, indicating a reluctance to confront or challenge caste-based discrimination online.

Regulatory Challenges: Participants express concerns about the regulation of caste-based content on social media, particularly when it is shared in non-English languages. They discuss the limitations of existing laws and mechanisms in addressing caste discrimination, highlighting the need for greater oversight and regulation of online platforms.

Community Organizing and Activism: Despite facing discrimination and prejudice, participants also discuss efforts to challenge caste-based discrimination and promote social justice. They mention the formation of community groups, advocacy for legislative reforms, and initiatives to raise awareness about caste-based discrimination and its impact on individuals and communities.

“If I talk about my daily life, it doesn't have any effect. But if I talk about my relationships, now I want only limited friends. They don't discriminate. But if I talk about my social life as well, I don't want to meet with those people. They are posting videos of those people who discriminate. Because it's not, you know, social media. We are all on social media. You always check what they are doing. I don't want to speak with them. I want to stay away from them. If they are doing this, they have this mentality. This is the hidden way they do discrimination. I just want to stay away from them.

Focus group 1, Adelaide

*It was my very first job. And I was surrounded by all the Gujarati people at my work. They were all fundamentalist Hindus...And I was the only one who was different from them. Okay. So, they used to pass comments like I'm the only one girl here who is different from all others. **And once there was an issue on the day of Dussehra. On Dussehra they (upper caste) burn Ravan and worship Ram. On Facebook I shared true history of Ram. So, my colleagues complained my manager regarding this.***

That was very, very challenging, okay. ...and over the period I have noticed that there is a group calling “Indians in Sydney”. It is one of the largest group of Indian diaspora on Facebook, okay and I have seen one of the activities from the lower community, she post something then literally the abuse happened on that group and that is on personal level and the moderator didn't even interfere you know, to stop the abuse and I can see that poor girl has just put on comment and the reply came, almost 50 reply of people came and so many abuses was there and necessary, you know, like pulling was there, which is absolutely not acceptable.”

Sydney Focus Group 1

This instance is one of many instances when online bullying and harassment based on caste occurs, which is become almost a daily experience in the life of caste oppressed persons. Overall, the thematic analysis underscores the multifaceted nature of caste dynamics and discrimination, illuminating the intersecting influences of social, culture,

society, and individual agency. The narratives shared by participants reveal complex social realities shaped by historical legacies and contemporary struggles for equality and justice. The discussion now turns to discuss the Impact of the lived experiences of caste-based prejudice and discrimination on caste oppressed communities in Australia.

5.4 Sub-Part II Impact of discrimination

Caste identity and the adjoining discrimination and prejudice pervades all aspects of life of a Caste Oppressed Community person in Australia. The underlying impact of such persistent caste discrimination and prejudice is negative and also pervades all areas, education, relationships, family life, friendships, career, education, marriage, personal life, psychological wellbeing and mental health.

In the preceding sections and sub-sections that impact was discussed, how career opportunities in terms of promotion and leadership positions were denied to low caste persons, multiple instances of leaving jobs, breakdown of marriages and relationships etc. those impact won't be repeated in this section. Instead, the focus will be on some key areas of impact, breakdown in friendships and psychological wellbeing and mental health. Our participants have responded significantly to both these themes, indicating a common experience of loss of friendship when the caste identity is revealed and deep psychological impact of the persistent caste discrimination and prejudice in all spheres of life.

Breakdown of friendships

It won't be an exaggeration to say that almost all individuals reported loose a friendship due to the disclosure of caste identity to their upper-caste friends. The dynamic at play here indicates that friendships come to an abrupt end and/or meet with slow death when the caste identity of the lower caste person is disclosed. This is a systemic trend that is present in almost all narratives. The despair and sadness in the experience of a participant can be seen in the following narrative,

“I felt really hurt because I noticed myself gradually drifting apart from that group. Later, I learned from my friends and others that it was because of my caste, as I was hiding it.

Following our conversation (about reservations and historical discrimination which disclosed the caste of the individual to the group), I noticed a subtle shift in our friendship.”

Australia Online Focus Group 2

In another such instance, a female participant expressed distress over the loss of friendship, when all she wanted to do was invite her close friend for a Dalit centric cultural event,

“I had a female friend who was also from India. She used to live in Melbourne. This happened in 2018 when it was Dr. BR Ambedkar’s birthday I wanted to go to the celebration of the birthday when I told her that I am going there, and she told her husband about it. When I tried calling her again, she had completely switched off her phone because she got to know that I am from a lower caste. It also impacted my life because my friend who I have known for a long time left me because she got to know about my caste.”

Canberra Focus Group 3

the breakdown in friendship was also a coping mechanism adopted by individuals to avoid contact with the friends from upper-caste backgrounds following is one such instance,

*“They (upper-caste friends) didn't know that there are Mahar’s in SC. They only knew that, Chamar. SC means Chamar. **They only knew this. So, the friends used a sentence which meant that they put Chamars down on the floor. (which was a casteist slur)***

So, they felt that the scheduled caste in SC is Chamar. So, they felt that we are Chamar. So, they said that Chamars sits down. But there is nothing like this in Australia. So, they said this sentence. And we both came to know what they wanted to say.

And, after hearing that, my husband and I felt that there is no point in having a relationship with such people. No matter how good they are, they are not good. They are not good to look at.

So, our relationship ended. We didn't talk to each other.”

Canberra Focus Group 1

The narratives shared in these various focus groups and personal interviews provide a poignant insight into the enduring impact of caste discrimination, even within diaspora communities in countries like Australia. The accounts reveal a pattern where individuals, upon learning about someone's caste background, often exhibit discriminatory behaviour, ranging from exclusion in social activities to outright avoidance and ostracization. These experiences underscore the deep-seated societal divisions and biases that persist, transcending geographical boundaries. Despite efforts to foster friendships and community ties, the spectre of caste discrimination looms large, leading to strained relationships and emotional distress.

Psychological impact on well-being

*“The most difficult time I got was from my husband. **Because he wasn't interested at all in inter-caste marriage.** It caused huge fights in the family. And more than the fight, the stress level was too high. I think those years (of reconciling the caste identity) gave me so much stress, which affected on my health. You see that thing that the son later sent me an article that this stress causes cancer. And I was diagnosed with cancer during that time.”*

Over 90 references were noted in the thematic analysis which corresponded to participants noting that they had suffered psychological distress, depression and negative impact on the well-being and mental health due to persistent caste discrimination and prejudice in Australia. The following themes emerged through the inductive assessment of the extensive data on the psychological impact on well-being—

Feelings of inferiority: Individuals expressed feeling inferior due to the discriminatory behaviour they experienced. This sense of inferiority can lead to self-doubt and a diminished sense of self-worth.

Trauma and distress: The prejudices and negative attitudes directed towards individuals from lower caste communities are described as deeply traumatic. This

trauma affects individuals both personally and professionally, causing distress that hampers their ability to focus on daily tasks and impacts their overall well-being.

Mental health challenges: Participants mentioned various mental health challenges resulting from caste discrimination, including anxiety, depression, isolation, and a sense of worthlessness. These impacts can take a toll on one's mental health and well-being, leading to feelings of hopelessness and a loss of confidence.

Anxiety and fear: There is a pervasive sense of anxiety and fear among individuals when they are surrounded by dominant or upper-caste people. They feel anxious about personal discussions and fear judgment, or discrimination based on their caste identity.

Emotional and psychological impact: Participants described the emotional and psychological impact of caste discrimination as profound. They mentioned feeling isolated, depressed, and undervalued, with their sense of identity and ethnicity being challenged.

Some of the narratives are discussed below—

I was thinking the whole night, so psychologically short-term impact was there. Short term, not long term, I could not sleep then for a week or two.

Yeah, so the three factors are the psychological one definitely, and it brings the low esteem, and the third is the fear actually. These are the three factors that majorly come within us after that incident and all.

I'm pretty sure that it is it's going to be very big scar throughout his life actually. So psychologically and as Australian we always emphasis on mental health as going to be really big impact on the lower caste society within Australia.

Psychologically, we are degrading ourselves slowly and slowly. We have to make this point to all, actually. This is not the way we have to live in fear.

I feel inferior because of this. They bring the same mentality that is in India to Australia.

These are internal feelings, right? Psychologically, we start to sense them, even if no one voices them aloud. The thought process that occurs within us, the thoughts that surface in our minds—often when I talk to my friends or within the community, I

inquire about their thoughts. Some are preoccupied with earning money, others have concerns about their health, and so on.

How are you celebrating this festival and that festival? It left me anxious. So yes, it is psychologically and emotionally very impactful, and I think we have been experiencing it from generation to generation.

And also recognising that it is a psychological trauma that needs healing. That doesn't always need... It requires a system of care.

The prejudices and negative attitudes directed towards individuals from our community are deeply traumatic. Whether expressed audaciously or covertly, these biases affect us profoundly (“some people express directly and some express it has hidden like covertly”), both personally and professionally (“it affected my daily life”). They create distress that hampers our ability to focus on daily tasks and impacts our overall well-being.

It's very distressing and traumatic. Sometimes, when we don't have people to discuss these experiences with, it can be even more disturbing.

So sometimes what happens is that every day this thing targets us, and we explain to ourselves every day that this thing hurts us and stresses us mentally. And yes, it is worst. It is worst it's hard to target In Australian society it's hard to handle. It is only here that we have learned that culture is the same. We have to treat equally but somehow; I don't think so we are people are treating us equally.

It's still incredibly disheartening to witness such behaviour, especially considering that I've worked hard to establish my business here in Australia and have achieved success beyond what some individuals from higher castes have. Despite our advancements, their perception of us is distressing. Observing their mindset is truly distressing and depressing. Despite our efforts to elevate our status without flaunting it and never putting others down, they persist in viewing themselves as superior. Even when they are at entry-level as job seekers, they will attempt to assert dominance over us.

[No references as to the individual source of the above narratives have been made here with the intention to recognise and acknowledge the negative impact caste discrimination can have on individuals and the strength it takes to open up. All data above is on file with the research team.]

5.5 Sub-part IV Navigating Caste Identity and Coping Mechanism Strategies

As discussed above, on multiple aspects of how caste operates in Australia, it is imperative to delve into how oppressed communities navigate caste identity and employ coping mechanisms to address the myriad challenges that arise from being part of a caste-oppressed community. Coping mechanisms have evolved among individuals from caste-oppressed communities in response to the pervasive discrimination they face in their daily lives. These mechanisms have developed organically based on their lived experiences rather than being strategically planned, arising as a result of ongoing exposure to caste-based discrimination and its adverse effects.

This inductive thematic analysis describes multiple ways through which caste-oppressed communities in Australia navigate and cope with their caste identity. While some approaches may seem positive and others negative at first glance, both are employed by the individual depending on the circumstances and their perspectives to address discrimination and its effects effectively. The caste-oppressed community deploy these methods during social interactions and throughout the process of socialization within the community, occurring in various settings such as educational institutions, workplaces, social gatherings, and public spaces. Depending on their individual experiences, individuals employ different coping mechanisms; some choose to conceal their caste identity while others assert it openly. Ultimately, these choices are shaped by their personal encounters and circumstances.

The diverse strategies employed by the community should be understood as responses to structural oppression rather than viewed as a psychological crisis within the caste-oppressed community. It is essential to recognize that these coping mechanisms arise as adaptive responses to systemic discrimination and societal inequalities. The pieces of evidence are not pathologizing the experiences of caste-oppressed communities as a medical problem; rather, they are contextualizing the experiences within the broader context of social and structural injustice.

Through the assessment of all the transcripts, the inductive analysis explains multiple ways used by the caste-oppressed community to cope the caste identity—

A. Hiding Low Caste Identity

It is commonly used way as a coping mechanism, as around 62 references were noted for hiding caste. People don't engage in the discussion about the caste and religion and try to hide their low caste identity because of the fear of changing perspective mostly of their colleagues or friends about them or chances of being discriminated. This is supported by the example, where one of the participants shared their concerns behind hiding the caste identity,

“I also have some friends. They belong to other castes. Especially the Hindus. In Australia and Adelaide as well. I meet them. Sometimes, I also feel like that. If I tell them about my caste, what will be their reaction? So, I also try to avoid telling them about my caste.”

A few participants shared that,

1. *“I felt that if I told them about my caste, they would misbehave with me and they would discriminate against me, so I hide my caste.”*
2. *“I didn't want to tell them, so I hide my caste. Everyone started laughing at me because I was hiding it which made me feel embarrassed and mentally bad.”*
3. *“Because these things happen, we can't tell in the society that we belong to this caste because they will start to look down on us and make us feel inferior.”*

Canberra Focus Group 3

Hiding caste also includes not revealing different positions that may lead the other person to know the caste identity. Another way individuals (mostly students) deploy this strategy is by not revealing that they came to Australia on a government scholarship. For instance, one student participant shared that,

“So, when I told her, like, I'm getting a scholarship, so, suddenly, I saw some changes on her face. So, I think since that time, she had a, I don't know what to say. So, I thought she's not, she was not happy, like, I'm, like, he's getting scholarship, then why I'm not

getting scholarship? And also, you could find some behavioural changes in that person. So, mostly, I prefer not to disclose that I'm a sponsored student."

Few other student participants added that:

1. *"I kept the fact that I was on a scholarship hidden for about three to four months."*
2. *In our conversation, "he advised me not to disclose that I was on scholarship". He shared his own experience of facing discrimination after revealing his scholarship status, as it was specifically for scheduled caste students & I, too, was on the same scholarship. "His honesty led to him being ostracized by fellow Indian students", an experience that left him feeling isolated and discriminated against. This eye-opening conversation occurred within my first month in Australia, challenging my assumptions about the absence of such discrimination in developed countries. He explicitly advised me against disclosing my scholarship status and caste identity, marking my first experience of discrimination in Australia. It was a stark realization that such attitudes persisted even in Western countries. As a proud Ambedkarite, I've always been forthcoming about my identity, unashamedly declaring my affiliation.*

Canberra Focus Group 2

There is also an intra-caste social segregation, where individuals within the same oppressed caste group distance themselves from others within the group due to fear or reluctance to openly identify with their shared caste identity. Reflecting on this a participant shared that:

"Just thinking, directly or indirectly, I don't understand. But a few of our friends, since they discovered we are from the same caste, don't want to be part of our group anymore. They stopped coming to our house. They formed a separate group themselves. They don't know how to be in a group called "Ambedkarite". That's what they're scared to disclose, calling them "Ambedkarite". And they don't want to be in our group."

(Australia Online Focus Group- Female)

Though the act of hiding the caste identity is a coping mechanism, but it must be viewed as a reflection of systemic discrimination, because the caste- oppressed individuals are compelled to hide aspects of their identity to avoid prejudice and discrimination from the upper caste individuals. Because, once the identity is revealed one has to face its impact as discussed in the above part.

B. Avoidance and Self- Exclusion:

Individuals choose the ways of avoidance and self- exclusion from the upper caste in terms of engaging them in conversation (specifically about caste and religion), not participating in social gatherings etc. Some adopt these strategies from the outset upon arriving in Australia, based on knowledge they received from others, while others resort to these measures after experiencing discrimination firsthand. So, it is not because they don't want to build relationship or engage in conversation with them, but to avoid the chances of getting impacted or discriminated. One participant discussing on deploying this coping mechanism noted that:

“By distancing myself from such environments, I avoided many potential encounters with caste-based discrimination.” (Australia Online Focus Group 2)

Furthermore, another participant shared that:

“The reason we don't meet is because of caste discrimination. If we don't meet these days, I feel comfortable meeting my community.”

Another person deploys this strategy after someone used a casteist slur towards them. He narrated that,

“So, when I was talking about the party, the people at the party were unaware of my community. While conversing, they referred to me as 'Chamarli,' saying, 'he is acting like a Chamarli.' After that incident, I stopped talking to them, ceased contact with the people we were living with, and distanced myself from the community.”

C. Engaging with Non-Indian Communities:

Individuals from caste-oppressed communities prefer engaging with non-Indian communities rather than with Indians (upper caste community), as the chances of experiencing discrimination based on caste are significantly lower. Some resort to these measures after experiencing discrimination firsthand. They believe that they will be treated equally in relations with them. One participant while sharing personal experiences on the experiences faced with the Indian community specifically Gujrati community, and which led to the decision not to live with the Indian community noted that:

*“thank you [Redacted for confidentiality] yeah, I would like to say that uh after that incident has happened with me uh you know uh one person from our caste [Redacted for confidentiality] bhai he has helped me even though he didn’t have a spare room he I was living in his living room and uh it was a great help and for the one week uh that was the time I didn’t have any accommodation I was living in his living room and so that one week was really very difficult for me **I was really mentally disturbed like I have left everything behind in India and people are still uh raising issues about our caste here and discriminating us uh based on our caste so that was really disturbing and shocking for me so and as I said I have completely lost my trust for Indian people and Gujarati people like I will never uh find any accommodation or work uh with that kind of people I will never look into opportunities with them** so and as uh [Redacted for confidentiality] said we should always uh you know multi we should always practice multicultural and we should grow with the Australian people like it will be helpful for our career so that and after that **now I am living here with African people so it is really they are really nice and there is no nitpicking in smaller things they are they treat me like own blood you know uh they are couple and uh her mother and there is also one kid so they are treating me like a family and I don’t have any problem and if I uh you know if I think if I imagine myself living with an Indian family I know that there will be nitpicking based on little things there will be issues based on my caste and that I cannot tolerate anymore and that’s why I’m really happy here and I’m trying my best to move on from the incident.**” (Australia Online Focus Group 3)*

Furthermore, another participant shared the experience at the workplace,

“I always see the hierarchy in higher management. If I see all local people, Australian people, I feel very comfortable to reach out to that team. If I see any Indian people, I feel a bit hesitant to reach out to them. So, yes, this is what happened at office when you are searching for the opportunity. These things always stuck in your mind.”

Another participant narrated that:

“When I came to Australia, I made a conscious decision not to associate closely with other Indians. I felt it was important to immerse myself in the international community and culture to truly benefit from studying abroad. I believed that staying within the Indian community, especially one dominated by upper-caste individuals who may have been conditioned to discriminate against lower castes, would not provide me with the diverse perspectives and experiences I sought.”

(Australia Online Focus Group 2)

D. Passing off as an upper caste:

Individuals also employ various strategies to present themselves as members of a higher caste in society. These strategies include changing surnames, using other caste names, behaving as if they belong to an upper caste when interacting with them, or simply denying their lower-caste identity. It's crucial to understand that these strategies are not motivated by a sense of pride in belonging to the upper caste, but rather by a desire to avoid potential discrimination. As discussed in the earlier part, surnames serve as direct indicators of caste identity, so changing them can help individuals avoid discrimination. Additionally, the perception of pride, dominance, and privilege held by the upper-caste community in Australian community contributes to unequal treatment with the other groups, prompting caste-oppressed individuals to adopt these strategies.

Some individuals deliberately pass off as an upper caste, while others do so unknowingly. One participant shared their experience, stating,

“I totally concur with what [Redacted for confidentiality] said. I have been in the same position myself. My surname is also [Redacted for confidentiality], looks like a Brahmin.

I have always been with Deshpande's and Kulkarni's, so never, I don't know why I always behave like them, or I don't know if that's the right thing to say."

(Australia Online Focus Group 1)

Another notable example where a participant shared instances about changing names, stating,

"Many people who are Scheduled Caste here, they hide their identity, they put some other caste names such as Jat in their names thinking that it may increase their reputation, and they think that if they show their real caste, it may hurt their reputation."

(Melbourne Focus Group 4)

Another incident of changing the name of a child belonging to the Scheduled Caste was shared by one of the participants. The surname of a school-going child was changed by his parent out of fear of being excluded and discriminated by other Indian Gujarati students. She state that:

"they have a son I think he was maybe in school he was in school, you know first or second standard and what they did was they changed his surname, they changed his last name, so these guys they are Solanki and they changed his last name to Patel so why? Because they told us that he'd got a lot of Indian Gujarati students kids in the school and if he told them that he is Solanki and he belongs to, you know Scheduled caste, they might not play with him so this guy the friend my friend so that guy's dad he actually changed his last name to Patel just so that they should not face any discrimination so this is again while [Name redacted for confidentiality] was saying about school and kids that reminded me of that example and yeah, I think as he said, you know being open to."

(Australia Online Focus Group)

E. Resilience, and fighting actively against identity-based marginalization:

Individuals from caste-oppressed communities demonstrate resilience by bouncing back from adversity and maintaining a strong sense of determination in the face of discrimination. The ways they participants have adopted are:

- asserting identity,

- direct confrontation,
- educating and engaging in discussion with others,
- building confidence,
- creating network support
- symbolic resistance etc.

Some individuals choose not to conceal their identity and assert it directly. Sharing their experience on this matter, one of the participants expressed

“What is true, I say them. If they ask me what caste I belong to, I definitely tell them I belong to this Scheduled caste. And if they ask how, you are here, I tell them I did the hard work. Even I proudly feel I am the son of a farmer. My father is a farmer, and my family did the hard work, and I also did the hard work because of that, I am here. Because of that, I am here. Because of my hard work, I am here. So, I have just decided not to hide my identity. Just fight with them with the logical reason. Giving the logical reason.”

Another participant shared the personal experience of building confidence to deal with such situation,

“Yeah, it was like already one and a half month has passed and like I expected Australia to be really like you know safe for international students and there are still people like this here, so it was shocking for me. But now I am moving on and I am focusing on my studies and I realized that I should focus on my studies and I should not be hurt by this incident because my parents didn’t send me here to tolerate all this nonsense and you know be traumatized by these things. So, I am trying my best to move on, and I am trying my best to you know focus on my studies.”

As discussed earlier, this strategy might be seen as a positive attempt at first glance and other above in the negative sense. However, it cannot be categorically distinguished in such terms, as all the mechanisms adopted by the community are aimed at coping with discrimination.

Lastly, it is alarming to observe that caste is deeply rooted in Australian society to the extent that issues of caste are seen as something that happens routinely and is culturally accepted as inevitable. This sentiment is echoed in a discussion where a participant shared,

“And I think this happens very casually. And I somehow think we have understood this. And we have now accepted culturally, look, this is going to happen.”

The tables below outline some excerpts from the interview that substantiate the above discuss points:

Hiding Caste Identity

Hiding Caste Identity	Extract from Interviews
<p><i>Adelaide Focus Group 3</i></p>	<p><i>I used to feel that whenever I used to go to any function Initially, I used to hide it initially, that I don't want to reveal that I belong to this caste. But they used to ask me, definitely, they used to ask me. So, caste, it does exist but not to that extent or intensity.</i></p>
<p><i>Adelaide Focus Group 2</i></p>	<p><i>The complexity of caste dynamics, I mean, Since I came in 2019 Like, I have never talked to people about religion, about caste, I have never asked them; most of the time, I have not been asked, But I have been asked once or twice, That, did you come on scholarship? I told them, no, I didn't come on scholarship, I came as a normal person.</i></p>

<p><i>Adelaide Focus Group 2</i></p>	<p><i>I am realising now, that I was still a normal person, but who knows if I had told them, that I was on scholarship, their behaviour could have changed.</i></p>
<p><i>Adelaide Focus Group 2</i></p>	<p><i>I told them, When I heard about my friend, Then, I met 2-3 more friends, Who, This thing of ours, However, They are not Buddhists, They are Hindus, But, They are considered in the lower caste, So, They don't disclose their identity, They are hiding it, Coping, So, When they shared with me, That, We don't tell, That, We are this, We are that, So, I told them only one thing, That, Why do you hide, Why do you talk, What is wrong in this</i></p>
<p><i>Adelaide Individual Interview 2</i></p>	<p><i>How do I fight caste discrimination? I mean, just like, people also judge if you don't follow the religion. They also try to identify that if you are not following the religion, it means you are from a different caste. They think like that. So, if I go somewhere, if I go, I visit anyone's house, and they try to push me, just worship with me, and also try to offer the worship to God. Sometimes, they ask me, if you are not doing this, what's the reason for that?</i></p>

<p><i>Adelaide Individual Interview 2</i></p>	<p><i>they are from that Ramdasia community, and they are currently renting out in the property, and they said, look we haven't revealed our caste yet because a first thing first because they asked first caste here.</i></p>
<p><i>Australia Online Focus Group (Female)</i></p>	<p><i>Maybe few people they still think if they disclose their caste people especially Indian people, they will change behave will change looking towards them maybe because of this they are afraid to disclose their caste you know it will consider themselves as Hindus and celebrate all their festivals and going to attend their festivals telling them you know same other people saying they are from Hindu background. I think you will our people celebrate all the festivals keeping all god and they don't want to disclose our caste because they are still scared maybe so Indian you know background you know whatever history we have hierarchy caste hierarchy we do have that implies still they have in back of mind maybe that's the reason they are afraid and we didn't push them.</i></p>

Australia Online Focus Group
(Female)

Yeah, I have spoken to quite a lot of people here, and they are not only from the Buddhist Mahar community but also from the Chamar community, Ravidasia community. One of the biggest mechanisms is not sharing. We have developed also the students. Lots of our students in recent years, many students have been coming here. They are on the scholarship. I was talking to a few students, and they were told when they come in the first year not to tell people about their caste identity, particularly because of this scholarship. Because it was interesting. One student was saying for other communities or other countries, if the student comes to Australia and they get a scholarship from their country or somewhere, they post about it, "Oh, scholarship." But the sad thing is if our student gets a scholarship, they will say merit is required to get a scholarship. You are from scholarship.

<p><i>Australia Online Focus Group (Female)</i></p>	<p><i>So, I just want to add, I really liked, we don't want the caste to come back and haunt us in this country, at least. Because when we left, we thought that the caste around, but as all of us know that Babasaheb said that wherever the Indians will go, they will take their caste with them. So yeah, one of the main things, I think, is probably helping. Yes, we don't want to mention caste here, we can probably come here then how do we handle the Indian discriminating against another Indian. So, all that somehow in some forms. Some kind will have to mention caste. It's hard to hear but bitter truth but () hear that word and mention it somehow that's what I think.</i></p>
<p><i>Australian Online Focus Group 1</i></p>	<p><i>But I never show anything that will tell them that oh this guy belongs to Dalit community. Here also in Australia, I work on a senior position, never ever was asked for a caste or anything always treated as an India, so they do, they might ask like do you celebrate Diwali.</i></p>

<p>Canberra Focus Group 1</p>	<p><i>Just because they are in scholarship and reservation, there might be discrimination. That is why we were advised that you hide this. So, now we have not told them that we are on scholarship</i></p>
<p>Canberra Focus Group 1</p>	<p><i>The first day we stepped into the accommodation, we met couple of seniors. They told us that this is your first day but keep it in your mind that you don't have to tell them that you are a sponsored student and which scholarship you have got.</i></p>
<p>Canberra Focus Group 2</p>	<p><i>I remain calm and listen to their opinions. Later, the same person confided in me that they place their surname before their name to appear as a Jatt ("main naam k aage apna surname lagata hu, katwal"). When I questioned if this meant they hide their caste, they denied it. Nonetheless, I accepted their response.</i></p>

<p>Sydney Focus Group 2</p>	<p><i>I have a real-time example of mine that we were talking about. Do not disclose to anyone. I'm living with an Indian family, and it's what happened here. I did not tell them who I am. They're very nice people. They're very nice, loving, caring. They do everything. But I was living with them 24 x 7. I do not want to have them another thing at that time. That's the insecurity that I have. And it's really true. That's the real-time example of mine.</i></p>
<p>Australia Online Focus Group 3</p>	<p><i>I think I should adapt the coping mechanism techniques of other people who said here. Like, I should not tell my caste openly. And about socializing, I am very introvert person. I don't socialise. And after this incident, I don't think I will never engage with Gujarati community. Because there is always a casteism.</i></p>

<p><i>Sydney Personal Interview 7</i></p>	<p><i>So, I always prefer to keep myself away from any kind of activity where I have to reveal my identity, where I have to talk about my cultural background. This is why I never go with them. I never reveal my identity and I maintain my relationship limited to my work itself and I do not know if someone, because I never, even myself personally, never discussed these things with any other Indian person so, I do not know if someone has been discriminated on basis on the caste because I do not discuss anything related to around the caste, religions anything. If there is someone discussing that, I just go away from that discussion.</i></p>
<p><i>Sydney Personal Interview 5</i></p>	<p><i>So, I think that I think my parents also made us quiet until very recently, you know, like don't tell anyone, don't tell too much like you know people will find out, so it's almost like I think that this is the natural coping mechanisms is just to kind of retreat to protect against to protect it from not engaging don't talk to them you know yeah. I even being here now it's like I think many of these instances are like. A lot of that hiding kind of stuff I think that's</i></p>

	<p><i>the enormous coping mechanism I've learned from my parents is just to withdraw, and I think. I think that that also makes sense in this scenario.</i></p>
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Avoidance and Self- Exclusion

Avoidance and Self- Exclusion	Extracts from the Interviews
<p>Australia Focus Group (Female)</p>	<p><i>Canberra is a very small place right as compared to metro cities that you live in, So the community is very close here particularly Indian community you can know someone and they will know someone else and they will be very close so it's very difficult to hide your caste here but apart from that what I have noticed is the people here they how to say it how it has affected my daily life is I tried to stay away from Indian people I know it sounds bit too...</i></p>

<p>Sydney Focus Group 7</p>	<p><i>I strive to maintain respectful dialogue, disagreements sometimes arise. Unfortunately, this has led to discomfort for both me and the host of the event. As a result, I often “choose to remain silent to avoid further conflict”. So then “I decided. Not to go. Better stop. Attending those functions</i></p>
<p>Sydney Personal Interview 7</p>	<p><i>So, this happens at office, in office as well, where I’m working with most of the Indian people and I do not hang out with them because I do not want to involve in any kind of conversation with them with respect to religions or caste or cultures or festival and so on.</i></p>
<p>Canberra Focus Group 3</p>	<p><i>They didn’t call after that. They justified it by saying that they were just making jokes, but I prefer to not keep contact with them because I felt that even if my old friends do this then it will be better to find someone from my same caste and be friends with them it’s better to keep distance from the people from upper caste.</i></p>

<p>Adelaide Focus Group 1</p>	<p><i>We are all on social media. You always check what they are doing. I don't want to speak with them. I want to stay away from them. If they are doing this, they have this mentality. This is the hidden way they do discrimination. I just want to stay away from them.</i></p>
<p>Melbourne Women Session</p>	<p><i>He said, I want to tell you something. I told him, we are Chamar. you are feeling shy. I am feeling proud. I told him, we don't want to meet you. After that day, we left him.</i></p>
<p>Sydney Focus Group 4</p>	<p><i>We are more comfortable with our community because we don't get inequality. When we go closer to other castes, we have to explain ourselves again and again. If we find out that then what will be our attitude. That is worst to handle.</i></p>

<p>Sydney Focus Group 5</p>	<p><i>And that was always in the back of my mind, that, okay, if I meet with this family again, or if I continue meeting with them, if they know that we belong to this community, chamar, definitely their behaviour is going to be changed. So, that was the fear. And I think we slowly stepped back from that relationship. And it did, obviously, affect our relationship with our friends.</i></p>
<p>Sydney Focus Group 7</p>	<p><i>I've noticed that even within Maharashtra, there's a tendency for people to group themselves based on their religious or caste identities. Despite being from Maharashtra myself, I find it difficult to tolerate this division when I encounter it. Consequently, I've made the personal decision to "refrain from participating" in such gatherings, "as this segregation affects my daily life and activities"</i></p>
<p>Sydney Personal Interview 7</p>	<p><i>I have not learnt any strategies yet because I have only one strategy for now to keep myself away from them, not to get involved with any kind of conversations and activities with upper caste people.</i></p>

<p>Sydney Personal Interview 8</p>	<p><i>Avoid as much as possible, let's get isolate from that thing. If you go to that, obviously you will feel inferior. (Interviewer: so, you try to avoid) Yes, I try to avoid that about the people who already knows the caste system.</i></p>
<p>Sydney Personal Interview 7</p>	<p><i>But whenever things come like we celebrate Ambedkar Jayanti, Buddha Jayanti, so whenever these things come, we don't invite them because we know they will never accept the invitation. They will never involve in our festival, in our celebration. Because, somewhere they know that they don't see us because they always see us as a someone from lower caste and they don't find it valuable to take part in our celebration, though they are close friends, or they are family friends.</i></p>

<p>Melbourne Online Focus Group 3</p>	<p><i>So, the thing is sir, when there are such bed people who believe in caste and all this, then I leave them, they are around me only to take benefits from me and I do not stay with them. People run after me but then I don't go to them. I keep a distance from them.</i></p> <p><i>Whoever asks about my caste, I don't meet them again. Because he will go ahead and tell ten people about me, then those people will come to me and ask me or will look at me with derogatory eyes.</i></p>
<p>Sydney Personal Interview 8</p>	<p><i>So now I had to change my behaviour in such a way that during those days i.e. during festivals, I myself started to avoid contacting them. Then I started being kind of isolated on my own, I mean, your festival is going on, if you understand it in your mind, then let it be ok.</i></p>

Engaging with non- Indian community

Engaging with non- Indian community	Extracts from the interview
Canberra Focus Group 2	<p>No, I wasn't bothered by that because I strictly told them that. However, they changed and even asked me to stay away from their group. So, I always stayed with my Arabic friends, who didn't have any issues with caste or background. It was nicer staying with them. So, you prefer to stay with people from non-Indian backgrounds rather than with those from Indian</p>
Australia Online Focus Group 2	<p>I've covered this topic extensively, but I'll reiterate my points. Firstly, it's advisable to distance oneself from Indian and South Asian communities, as there's limited learning potential there, But I assure you that definitely you will learn much more than what you, there is nothing to learn probably. There is nothing to learn from the Indian upper caste people. So that's it. Second thing, I think, knowledge is power as Babasaheb also said. The goal of being abroad is to broaden horizons, enhance knowledge, and develop personally, which is best achieved by engaging with the international community. Breaking this barrier may be challenging, but it's worth it in the long</p>

	<p>run. Additionally, "international" doesn't equate solely to white individuals; connections with people from diverse backgrounds, including Chinese, can be equally enriching.</p>
<p>Melbourne Focus Group 2</p>	<p>There is nothing like this amongst Australians. We prefer to work with Australians than Indians. It is safer corner for us because they don't believe in religion and caste. There is a soft corner for us somewhere which is safe as well.</p>

<p>Sydney Focus Group 1</p>	<p>Everyone is there in my social circle. So, I try to not get into the details of it, of the caste dynamics, particularly I do not associate any celebration or any religious gatherings or any belief which any particular individual has. I do not try to associate that with any of the caste prejudices that that is available... that is prevailing in the current thought process that we have in my social circle, so I try to avoid those questions. That's how I navigate through the caste dynamics.</p>
	<p>So, the strategy that I have employed personally is I do not try to get into the discussion of caste because I know that if I talk about that I will be discriminated later on. So that's one of the strategies I have employed, and I also ask this someone who is close to me to not reveal unless it is which is very necessary.</p>

Passing off as an upper caste

<p>Passing off as an upper caste</p>	<p>Extract from the interview</p>
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<p>Australia Online Female Focus Group</p>	<p><i>I was just going to add to what [Redacted for confidentiality] said and yes, we one of the coping mechanisms is yes to hide and the other coping mechanism people are doing is changing their surnames even here in Australia. I heard recently found out one of the families who have been part of this sessions as well and they were in one my session they were saying that they had changed their surname.</i></p>
<p>Australia Online Female Focus Group</p>	<p><i>They only have most of the people also have adding Kumar to their surname so then they kind of no its kind of generalizes them so it's very hard for people then to guess what community they are from so called less lower community</i></p>
<p>Sydney Focus Group 4</p>	<p><i>Yes, I know because one of my really good friends they come from Punjab they move in a as a permanent residence here and they started going in a Nirankari gurudwara and but there were all different communities like Pandit, Sharma surnames as well.</i></p> <p><i>When they started following the rituals of Nirankar then they find boys who were Brahmin and then they get married and on the second day on the Facebook they changed their surname to Sharma. They changed their surnames just to fit it. They</i></p>

feel that as they changed their surnames, they will get the equality which they were not getting before.

Resilience, and fighting actively against identity-based marginalization.

Resilience, and fighting actively against identity-based marginalization	Extract from the interview
Australia Online Focus Group 2	<p><i>Personally, my approach to addressing caste issues has evolved towards prioritizing the identity I want to present for myself rather than solely focusing on caste. At this stage, I'm vocal about my beliefs and affiliations, proudly identifying as a Buddhist and aligning with the ideals of Ambedkar's, particularly within educational contexts. In social interactions, I make it clear that I am a Buddhist, ensuring that conversations acknowledge this aspect of my identity. For instance, when discussing cultural practices or customs, particularly in diverse communities where Hindu culture may be assumed, I assert my identity as a Buddhist, emphasizing my distinct perspective. This approach forms the basis of my strategy for navigating societal dynamics and asserting my identity.</i></p>

Australia Online Focus Group 2

Sorry, but I completely do not agree with all your thoughts in there, [Redacted for confidentiality]. Because the reason why, I mean, we cannot, I mean, you said, you know, like, do not talk to them, you know.

But at the end of the day, we need the community as well, right?

We have to have the harmony between, because at the end of the day, Australia is very famous for cultural aspects of shared cultural aspects of our country.

So somehow, somewhere, I may not agree on that one, that we should stay away from upper caste and all those things. I may not strongly agree because when I came to this country, many of the upper caste men, Brahmins, have actually helped me.

So we cannot generalize and categorize that, okay, we are Brahmins, so we cannot. Sorry, I might defer. Okay. So, I will stop from the topic here.

But what happens is, it might be a good opportunity for us to educate them in that sense, what I feel like.

For example, yes, I have a couple of friends who are very keen to understand and know how you guys gather. How you guys gather together for 14th April, you know, all those kinds of aspects.

In fact, I have one of my friend's wife here, she was asking, hey, we were told that Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar is a Brahmin. So, what is happening is with this, if someone is asking, sometimes you have to find out what their background is. Probably, they are not educated enough in that aspect. What exactly happened? So, this is our opportunity to explain to them exactly this is what has happened. This is where the history is. And why do we deserve the reservation? Mostly, yes, it comes back to reservation, most of the topics. And we have to explain them why we are getting all this privilege and stuff like that.

So, from an educational perspective, I understand entirely these days you guys are coming and you are directly affected by that particular atmosphere. I am with you, with most of the students, which is happening, which is a very big topic inside the topic we are discussing now. I think that's another topic of discussion.

But for me, we should, I don't think so. We should be generalizing as such, because at the end of the day, we have to live in this country. We have chosen this country. So, I would not go.

<p>Australia Online Focus Group 2</p>	<p><i>In my experience, embracing Ambedkarism and Buddhism has provided strong foundations, offering answers to many questions. Proudly identifying as a Buddhist and an Ambedkarite enhances my confidence and leaves a lasting impression on others (“mala te proud feel hote as a Buddhist Ambedkarite”). This pride is palpable and makes a difference, especially when faced with challenges or opposition (“tyna disu yete ani counter karnya madhe farak padto”)</i></p>
<p>Australia Online Focus Group 2</p>	<p><i>As rightly said by [Redacted for confidentiality], I agree with him that we need to establish our own independent identity here. And I think we should establish ourselves as an Indian Buddhist. It would be having two benefits. The one thing we will be having a wider international Buddhist community support.</i></p> <p><i>And the second thing is that will also kind of help us to cope up with the caste discrimination thing, because that will refine our identity from, you know, from the beginning. You know, so-called Indian untouchable to an Indian Buddhist. So that will also be one of the coping mechanisms we should resort to.</i></p>

<p>Canberra Focus Group 1</p>	<p><i>If someone asks me something, I tell them that I am Buddhist. And if they ask me which festival, I tell them, that on 14th April, I am Ambedkarite, and I celebrate that. And my Hindu friends also know that.</i></p>
<p>Adelaide Focus Group1</p>	<p><i>So, we never hide. We just openly tell them what we are. Then, if they have an issue, or if they want to maintain a relationship, then they can. If they don't want to, then we don't do that. But we never hide our caste. And if someone has an issue, and we feel that this person has an issue, then we don't maintain a relationship with that person.</i></p>
<p>Adelaide Focus Group 1</p>	<p><i>I have 3-4 friends who are from, let's say, according to them, they are in the upper caste. They come to my home; I have photos of them all. If they don't want to meet me, that's their problem. But I don't want to take down photos like the Babasaheb and other photos as well at my home. And if they don't want to, that's their issue. If they are not coming to my house, I will not go there. They don't have any issues. They know what they are. But maybe at the end of the day, I don't know what they are thinking. But I don't have any. But from my point of view, if I am</i></p>

	<p><i>here, I behave similarly. And with them as well, it's their behaviour which is changing. It's not me.</i></p>
<p>Australia Online Focus Group 3</p>	<p><i>I'm very upfront, I'm very, you know, we started, we just we were just planning last, last on 14th of April, we started to do a campaign saying, now we have to be seen in the community. So, we started this campaign of getting Babasaheb Ambedkar's signature that, you know, the, the sign, or you can say sticker, and we're going to put it on the back of cars.</i></p>

<p>Australia Online Focus Group 3</p>	<p><i>The coping mechanism, as he said, I think I or me and [Name redacted for confidentiality] never try to hide our caste or never try to shy away from telling our true identity. And that is one of the mechanisms, I think, works for me and works for us. So, whatever they want to do, they can do. I think every time such incidents happen, I think I get more powerful and stronger to fight back against them because I think that is where my motivation comes from, and that is where it works for me.</i></p>
<p>Australia Online Focus Group 3</p>	<p><i>The kids don't know about them. They come back and ask their parents, and I think that is going on very in-depth and that is worrying me. I think the tackling mechanism I think is best and I think one of the things that we are also doing as an AIM or whatever as a community we are always trying to be open and out.</i></p>

Australia Online Focus Group 3

Similar to what [Name redacted for confidentiality] said, we have been organising an event, a run for equity every year on the occasion of 14th April Ambedkar Jayanti or the closest day to that and in Canberra, all 20-30 people just go out wearing the t-shirt with Baba Saheb's photo and the slogan for equality and equity and people do come and ask us what is this and what is not. But I think that is the way the coping mechanism is. The incidents when I say to this like one family didn't talk to us for 5-6 years doesn't matter to me, and I think that is why because we stood our ground and then there are other friends, same in the same group we had everyone else was Brahmin and a higher caste except me and of my family but the other friends were also other families who are higher caste as well their reactions were something to be noticed for. I think they were not sure what to do in such a situation whether they be friend with them or to be friends with us.

<p>Melbourne Women Session</p>	<p><i>When she asked me, I did not feel sad. I could understand how the other person used to think about it. How his mind was.</i></p> <p><i>So, there was no change in my behaviour. As I was there, I could say that my confidence increased. She asked me and I told her that I am Chamar.</i></p> <p><i>Now, what can I do? Whatever you are, you are different. After that, I did not ask anything.</i></p> <p><i>No one asked me anything. If they wanted to talk to me, it was their wish. Otherwise, I would go to work and come back home.</i></p>
<p>Melbourne Focus Group 4</p>	<p><i>If we are Scheduled Caste, we will tell them that we are SC. Even if a person is working with us, at work if someone brings stuff and asks where you are from and I just say Nawanshahr, if they ask for the caste, we just say that we are chamar.</i></p>
<p>Sydney Focus Group 4</p>	<p><i>I teach children that you should never feel like this, if someone says something, you should speak but never hide your identity. But children have grown up here, so it is not their fault, they just want to. In this matter I agree with R1 hundred percent.</i></p>

Sydney Personal Interview 2

In such situations, it's perfectly acceptable to intervene and educate others about the unfairness of their words ("Next time se at least bande ko sharam aayegi ki maine aaisa kiya tha") tell them so next time they will feel ashamed to do this again, all while maintaining decorum and engaging in constructive dialogue ("Kanoon ke daire me rehkar batana chahiye"). We should advocate for equality and challenge discriminatory attitudes, even in a disciplined and respectful manner.

Canberra Focus Group 2

For instance, during a conversation at someone's house, a remark was made implying someone's actions were due to their caste. I felt compelled to interject and remind them that One should read history, not assumptions based on caste. I highlighted the positive interactions and support I had provided, emphasizing the need to move beyond such prejudices.

I questioned his judgment and urged him to reconsider his mindset, encouraging him to educate himself by studying history. I highlighted the support for indigenous communities in Australia, contrasting it with the lack of attention given to similar issues in India. I recounted how even children in my child's school are taught to acknowledge the indigenous land during functions, emphasizing the importance of recognizing and respecting indigenous cultures.

It means that during these functions, children are taught to acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land and recognize the impact of colonization on indigenous communities. This practice fosters awareness and respect for indigenous cultures and histories. As for my friend, despite our differences, he still

acknowledges me. I believe that changing such mindsets will take time, possibly spanning generations. So, I reminded him not to generalize and avoid speaking in such a manner with me. This incident, though somewhat amusing, underscores the need for ongoing dialogue and understanding.

<p>Canberra Focus Group 2</p>	<p><i>Proudly identifying as a Jai Bhimwale, I stand firm in my commitment to equality, even as societal norms persist.</i></p>
<p>Sydney Focus Group 6</p>	<p><i>I was only there from SC, what's your wrong with you, why is you teasing us straight way like a target it's not about the caste system, how can you say that you know I can take you to the court and he apologized me he literally going to touch my feet as well.</i></p>
<p>Sydney Focus Group 7</p>	<p><i>When someone asserts their Brahmin identity as superior, I question why they consider themselves superior. Who determined this hierarchy? We need to challenge such notions aggressively. Even if they initiate the conversation, we shouldn't back down. By standing firm, even for just 10 or 20 out of 100, we sow seeds of doubt. They'll hesitate because deep down, they know they're wrong. see, discrimination often occurs when individuals hold positions of power.</i></p>

Sydney Personal Interview 3

I never let this get heavy on me. When it comes to 10, 15, 12, 10, 100, then we say that we are a long story of death. What is the matter?

When we have our own discrimination, we keep our own description in front of them, that we are becoming a master of accounting in India, and here too we are becoming a master of accounting in India. I am studying in the CDM, I have been teaching at the university, and I have my own accounting, taxation, tax money, so sometimes they feel discriminated. How did this happen?

Sydney Personal Interview 3

No, always do that that this is what we are, so if you want to meet us, if you want to talk, sit, do business if you are thinking that this is not right, that you are dealing with Chamar, then I would say get lost. That's what I am thinking. If you are thinking like that, even if I am still thinking, I was speaking to Mr. Prabhakar. I was talking to him because Srinath Ji and I have known each other for the last 5, almost 4-5 years.

I was telling him that, in our community, people are being educated, but there is a lack of education on economic roads. So, I want to contribute something from my side based on what type of knowledge I have, what type of experience I have, and how to make them grow more economically. If a person has a 100 Rupee note in his pocket, then he gets glow on his face.

Then he doesn't tell that if he is Chamar or someone else, then he also talks more. So, he gets a little bit of improvement.

<p>Sydney Personal Interview 8</p>	<p><i>I try to project the icons as much as possible, like if I bought a car, the number plate of the car was October 14. So, when people ask me whether this is the birthday of someone in my family, I tell them that it is not the birthday of someone in my family, it is the birthday of my entire community because on this day we were reborn (Dr. B. R. Ambedkar embraced Buddhism on 14th October 1956, rejecting the oppression and suffering in Hinduism).</i></p>
<p>Sydney Personal Interview 8</p>	<p><i>So, my experience in this regard is that here there is a large group of Marathi people called Sahyadri Sydney (Facebook), most of the people there are from upper caste. A friend had made a post some things on how or what the Brahmin Maha Sangha (Federation) works in India. Tagging the same post, I make another post mentioning that ‘now in a country where you can’t say superiority of your caste to speak inferior to other caste and to assert your importance here. You are now in a country where everyone is equal. If everyone starts putting such superiority of their own castes/ groups, then the group will fall short? So, please everyone leaves the caste and post something</i></p>

different avoid talking about this'. Then no one posted after that.

Chapter 6 Conclusion and Recommendation

The issue of India's caste system has drawn significant attention, both at the local and global levels, due to its highly discriminatory and divisive categorisation system. While the caste system is intrinsic to Hinduism, with its strong connection to Brahmanical scriptures, it extends to different religious and cultural groups in South Asia. Even individuals who convert to different religions continue to face stigmatisation and discrimination due to their lower caste status. However, the caste system has evolved over time and is now functioning more covertly within ethnic groups.

As the caste system is found beyond India, it is crucial to recognize the needs of Dalit communities in Australia and the diaspora. The thematic analysis of this consultation highlights that currently, there is insufficient understanding of caste discrimination under the broader lens of equity, diversity, and inclusion in Australia. Dalits are finding that there are limited outlets for complaints of bias, as most equity, diversity, and inclusion policies in Australia do not cover caste as a protected identity. Moreover, most Australians are not knowledgeable about the caste system and how it is a global issue.

The challenges faced by caste-oppressed communities in Australia are multifaceted and require a comprehensive approach for effective resolution. Considering this, the following recommendations aim to address the systemic barriers hindering the full participation and inclusion of these communities in Australian society.

In summary, addressing discrimination stemming from the caste system in countries with growing Indian diasporas requires a multifaceted approach. This study has captured the necessity of addressing this issue as soon as possible before it starts impacting Australia's social fabric and vision. The study recommends the following based on inputs received from this consultation:

- 1. Education and Awareness:** Raise awareness about the caste system's history, impact, and prevalence. Education should encompass not only the Indian diaspora but also the broader community to foster understanding and empathy.

- Develop educational material designed to provide information about caste discrimination to enable a deeper understanding of their unique challenges and demographics.
- Engage academic institutions to facilitate research into the experiences and distinctive challenges faced by caste oppressed communities in Australia.
- Integrate caste oppression education into national school curriculums to instil empathy and understanding from an early age and facilitate inter-community dialogues and collaborative events to foster mutual understanding and unity among diverse community groups.

2. Policy and Legislation: Advocate for anti-discrimination laws that explicitly prohibit caste-based discrimination in employment, education, housing, and public services. Ensure enforcement mechanisms are in place to hold violators accountable.

- Engage community representatives in government initiatives or task forces within existing institutions explicitly to address the concerns and needs of caste oppressed communities.
- Amend anti-discrimination laws to explicitly encompass provisions that combat caste-based discrimination, thereby fortifying legal protection for these communities.

3. Community Engagement: Foster dialogue within Indian diaspora communities to challenge caste-based prejudices and promote inclusivity. Encourage open discussions, cultural exchanges, and collaboration to dismantle discriminatory practices.

- Initiate nationwide awareness campaigns that enlighten the broader public on the history, nuances, and challenges intrinsic to caste oppressed communities, cultivating a more empathetic and inclusive society.
- Develop tailored outreach programs in collaboration with representatives from caste-oppressed communities, simplifying official communications and ensuring culturally sensitive service delivery to foster better awareness and accessibility.

4. Support Networks: Establish support networks for individuals affected by caste-based discrimination, providing resources, counselling, and legal assistance. Empower victims to speak out and seek justice against discriminatory acts.

- Roll out support programs targeted to individual affected by caste-based discrimination.
- Initiate mentorship program for leaders emerging from caste oppressed communities to be mentored by established figures across politics, media, and other sectors.

5. Corporate Responsibility: Encourage corporations and businesses to adopt policies that promote diversity, equity, and inclusion, including measures to address caste-based discrimination within their workforce and supply chains.

- Strengthen strategic partnerships with local and federal government agencies to streamline access to resources and funds, establishing a centralized platform or mechanism that facilitates seamless engagement between governments at all levels and organizations serving caste oppressed communities.

6. Political Advocacy: Engage with policymakers and community leaders to prioritize the eradication of caste-based discrimination through legislative reforms, social programs, and institutional changes.

- Empower organizations through dedicated grants or subsidies to launch comprehensive outreach, advocacy, and support programs tailored for their community members, enhancing service delivery capabilities through training sessions and workshops in collaboration with mainstream service providers.

7. International Collaboration: Foster collaboration between governments, NGOs, and international organizations to address caste-based discrimination as a global human rights issue. Share best practices, resources, and expertise to drive systemic change.

- Include organizations serving caste oppressed communities in policy platforms at national and state levels to voice concerns, contribute insights, and co-create policies, while promoting community awareness and encouraging engagement for a more integrated approach to addressing their unique challenges.

- Designate specialized grant programs specifically tailored for NGOs serving caste oppressed communities, stimulating alliances between established NGOs and those centring on caste oppressed communities to foster a synergetic exchange of resources, insights, and expertise.

8. Media Representation: Promote accurate and nuanced portrayals of caste diversity in media and popular culture to challenge stereotypes and promote positive narratives that celebrate inclusivity and social justice.

- Offer platforms like seminars, workshops, and cultural festivals that amplify the diversity, vibrancy, and resilience of caste oppressed communities, collaborating with media giants like ABC and SBS to develop and disseminate content that foregrounds their narratives, achievements, and tribulations.

By implementing these recommendations, communities can work together to confront and dismantle caste-based discrimination, fostering a more equitable and inclusive society.

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