

ABSTRACT

Caste in neoliberal India persists not simply as an overt socio-religious order but as an affective regime that governs emotion and moral self-presentation. This study brings affect theory into conversation with Dalit thought to offer a dual map of how caste mutates under neoliberalism, a configuration it identifies as “neoliberal casteism.” First, it maps the cultural-affective domain, showing how shame, envy, anxiety, and a sense of belonging function as both products of and forms of resistance to “neoliberal casteism.” Second, it draws on Deleuzian assemblage theory to trace how transindividual intensities and affects are shaped, redirected, and sometimes constrained by neoliberal institutions. Together, these perspectives show how neoliberal modernity turns older caste hierarchies of purity and pollution into new emotional expectations of civility, composure, and self-management, while Dalit and anti-caste narratives reclaim these feelings as tools for critique, creativity, and new forms of becoming. Using Sianne Ngai’s “ugly feelings” as a conceptual toolkit, it demonstrates how Aravind Adiga’s *The White Tiger* and Manu Joseph’s *Serious Men* dramatize resentment, envy, anxiety, paranoia, and stupidity as affective registers of neoliberal caste politics, showing how these low-intensity and non-cathartic emotions structure narrative voice, shape caste-marked interiority, and expose the contradictions of mobility in neoliberal India. Through Yashica Dutt’s *Coming Out as Dalit*, the study further examines how the intertwined dynamics of caste concealment, passing, and enforced visibility fracture Dalit selfhood, demonstrating that shame, once reworked as a self-transforming affect, can generate ethical and collective modes of belonging that resist neoliberal multiculturalism’s culturalization of caste. Finally, drawing on Deleuze and Guattari’s notion of affect, the research reads Yogesh Maitreya’s *Water in a Broken Pot* as a site where Dalit transindividual intensities are first captured by neoliberal casteist apparatuses and then rerouted into lines of flight that assemble new capacities for critique, memory, and collective enunciation. Through this process, the memoir transforms writing into a machinic practice in which individual wounds crystallize as shared political force, generating the minoritarian infrastructures of voice and solidarity. By mapping the affective architecture through which caste endures and mutates under neoliberalism, the study reconceptualizes caste as an emotional and atmospheric regime and positions anti-caste narratives as critical terrains where alternative affective futures are imagined.

Keywords: Affects, Anti-caste Narratives, Assemblages, Belonging, Neoliberal Casteism, Ugly Feelings