



Original Article

A Sociological Analysis of Caste- Based Atrocity Incidents in Maharashtra: A Case Study Approach

Dr. Ramesh Ghedmal

(M.A., M.Phil., Ph.D., LL.B., B.Ed.), Assistant Professor Dept. English, (Business communication)

Dr. Ambedkar College of Commerce& Economics, Wadala, Mumbai

Manuscript ID: **Abstract**

JRD -2025-171166

ISSN: 2230-9578

Volume 17

Issue 11 (I)

Pp. 310-314

Nov. 2025

Submitted: 18 Oct. 2025

Revised: 3 Nov. 2025

Accepted: 8 Nov. 2025

Published: 30 Nov. 2025

Several caste-based incidents of atrocities have shown an increase in the state of Maharashtra over the years due to the deep-rooted social inequalities and persistent discrimination against the Dalit community, deprived of their fundamental rights. This particular research paper aims to discover the selected atrocity incidents in both rural and urban Maharashtra that have frequently taken place. To consider the same view, the socio-economic background of the victims and culprits, which is a pattern and form of violence, outrages, and discrimination the original cause of the social consequences of these incidents. The researcher's findings suggest that there are traditional power, hierarchies, economic need, and political downgrading, and a lack of protective lawmaking execution by the upper caste Hindu organizations. There is continuous segregation and humiliation, physical violence, and murder that reflect the stressful surroundings within contemporary caste relations. The state of Maharashtra reveals its social reform movements with the inconsistencies and endures to witness numerous caste- based atrocities, especially against the scheduled caste and the scheduled tribes, and other marginalized communities. This case study approach investigates some selected incidents and understands the multifaceted affiliation of social, economic, political, and institutional factors that are responsible for creating violence against Dalits.

Keywords: Atrocities, consequences, discrimination, lawmaking, segregation, multifaceted.

Introduction:

In brief, Article 17 of the Constitution of India has abolished untouchability, and the practice of untouchability in any form, whatsoever, is made a punishable offense. To enforce this Article, the Parliament, therefore, enacted the law viz Protection of Civil Rights Act, 1955. Even after the lapse of three decades, the socio-economic condition of the Scheduled Caste and Tribes remained vulnerable. Our parliament, therefore, enacted another law, viz. The Prevention of Atrocities Act, 1989. The statement of object and reasons for this unique and salutary piece of legislation is to improve the conditions of the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes. Despite various measures to improve the socio-economic conditions of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, they remain vulnerable. They are denied several civil rights. They are subjected to various offenses, indignities, humiliations, and harassment. They have had several brutal incidents. They are deprived of the rights to their life and property. Serious crimes are committed against them for various reasons, historical, social, and economic.

The Indian society is precisely categorized in unequal terms with caste, creed, religion, and gender, and most of the time, economic status plays a dominant role for the higher caste Hindus, almost shaping social relations. These incidents occurred particularly in rural Maharashtra as well rest of Maharashtra, whereas the atrocities are not merely making it legal violations. But appearances create social injustice and political unequal power and deep-rooted discriminatory practices. Despite the present scenario, enacted SC/ST (Prevention of Atrocities Act, 1989 exists, but there are several incidents not been registered in the police station due to fear, social pressure, and weak institutional machinery that obstructs the creation of the legal process.



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Address for correspondence:

Dr. Ramesh Ghedmal, (M.A., M.Phil., Ph.D., LL.B., B.Ed.), Assistant Professor, Dept. English, (Business communication), Dr. Ambedkar College of Commerce& Economics, Wadala, Mumbai

How to cite this article:

Ramesh Ghedmal (2025). A Sociological Analysis of Caste- Based Atrocity Incidents in Maharashtra: A Case Study Approach *Journal of Research & Development*, 17(11(I)), 310-314.



Hence, a sociological investigation of these atrocities' patterns becomes indispensable. Through this research paper, the researcher explores his aims to study the patterns and background of several social dynamics and their impact on victims' atrocities in rural Maharashtra through a sociological lens.

Objectives of the study:

- To examine the nature and sequential patterns, incidents of atrocities in rural Maharashtra.
- To analyse the affiliation between caste, class, gender, religion, as well as social and political inequalities that have led to atrocities.
- To study the experiences and their social and psychological impacts on the victims of atrocities.
- To understand the legal challenges to the Prevention of Atrocities Act under the SC/ST and administrative responses.
- To study and provide some essential recommendations and remedies to raise awareness for the reducing atrocity incidents in rural areas.

1. Butegaon Case:

Butegaon is a remote village in Jalana District of the Marathwada region, with a population of about 1800; 75% of this population belongs to the Bhutekar family, a Maratha community, and the remaining 25% population is composed of Buddhist converts and Mustangs, the Dalit community. In fact, there are 14 houses for Buddhists and 18 homes for the Matang community. Drinking water is the main problem in this village. Out of 12 water pumps, only 2 are in working condition. One pump is located in the Maratha (Hindu) dominated locality, and one is in the Dalit locality. Quarrels are very common while taking water from these water pumps. One day, Lata, the daughter of Shendge, a Dalit, was in line to fetch water.

One of the Bhutekar community members broke the queue and tried to take water forcibly. Lata objected to this. Bhutekar got furious and started abusing her. Unaware of the goon element of the Bhutekar community, Lata boldly stopped Bhutekar from taking water. She was bold enough to do so as she had lived in Mumbai. Bhutekar manhandled her physically. An open challenge from the Dalit girl was not tolerable to him. The quarrel ensued. Dattatreya Bhutekar beats Lata's brother, Deelip, who intervened and beat some of the members of the Bhutekar Community because he could not tolerate his sister being assaulted. Lata was infuriated and fell unconscious. Elders from the Bhoi community intervened, and things subsided. Lata was hospitalized.

2. Murti Village Case:

Janabai Thorat, a Matang woman and mother of seven children, was brutally killed by one Surashe, a Maratha, on 10th May 2003, in Maruti, a Village in Ghasangaon taluka. This village is also known as Kumbhar Pimpalgaon. On the fateful day of May 10, 2003, Ankush Thorat and his wife Janabai went to the weekly bazaar, as usual. Kalpana, daughter of Ankush Thorat, went to fetch water from the water pump. A quarrel took place between Kalpana and Adyodhya Surashe, a Maratha. Surashe challenged Thorat. Surashe and his male servants attacked Thorat and Janabai with sticks and axes. Santosh 14 years, a young son of Thorat, rushed to Pimplegaon and narrated the incident to the district secretary. He took Janabai secretly to Dr. Deshmukh's clinic. Dr. Deshmukh examined her and declared Janabai dead, and advised that Thorat, being seriously needed to be admitted to Ghati Hospital at Aurangabad immediately. The heinous and barbaric act of the Surashe family is beyond imagination; they could not see that beating a pregnant lady is a sin. They had mercilessly beaten Janabai to death and seriously injured her husband.

3. Khairlanji Massacre Case:

This is one of the horrible and inhuman Dalit massacres, which shocked the entire Maharashtra. Khairlanji is a village in the Bandara District, with 180 houses, of which 3 belonged to Buddhists. Bhotmange, a Buddhist convert family, was living happily. They owned a piece of land of 5 acres. Siddhartha Gajbhiye, also a Buddhist convert, an influential landlord from a neighboring village, and a close friend of Bhotmange, was assaulted by some villagers on September 3, 2006. Surekha, the wife of Bhotmange, had identified and named the assailants in her police complaint. The people accused of assault were arrested and presented before the court, but released on bail since the people had not made a case under the Atrocities Act. After their release on September 29, 2006, they were looking for Siddhartha and his brother Rajan, but failed to trace them. They turned to the Bhotmange family and killed Surekha and her three children.

Before the fateful day and the earlier incident, which led to enmity and hatred that some other backward class members of the village wanted to construct a new road passing through the agricultural land of Bhotmange. Surekha opposed it more successfully. Due to this opposition, the OBCs got enraged. They thought it would be taken for granted, but failed. They decided to teach the lesson to Bhotmange. They came with their weapons and attacked the Bhotmange family around 7.00 P.M. with the intention to kill them. Bhaiyalal Bhotmange, the head of the family, ran away to the nearest village. In his absence, his wife and his entire family were gheraoed and attacked physically. They insisted Rohan and Sudhir, Bhotmange's sons, rape their sister and mother. But they refused to do so. This made them furious and killed the Bhotmange family brutally.



The OBC ladies of the village, insisting on their males and helped them to arouse their sexual appetite. Surekha and Priyanka, wife and daughter, were then necked/paraded around and raped while the crowd was dancing and clapping. Some people, apparently, symbolically married Surekha in her nudity. They organized a procession and took a round of the village, singing a victory song. Along with hysterical, violent dance, symbolized as the bride of the village was mass raped in front of her in-laws and elders. Nobody comes to their rescue. The villagers took all the dead bodies in the bullock cart around the entire village, with zeal and enthusiasm. They celebrated the victory by dancing and drinking, and throwing the bodies in the water canal. The inhuman and savagely cruel act has no place in a civilized society.³

4. Political Outrages of Palsa Village:

Tukaram Kandalkar an old and literate farmer, belonged to a backward Mali community, fighting a legal battle in the court of law against powerful political heavyweights who produced an old agreement by which he had become the owner of 13 acres of land, out of which, there is an orange orchard on four acres in Pusla village, 10 km away from Varud, in Shenurjana Ghat. Tukaram Kandalkar, a Dalit who never saw a court in his life, is now fighting a legal battle to save his land and is optimistic, running from pillar to post. He says, although I am an old man, I cannot give up this fight, as land is the only source of livelihood for my family⁴. His family consists of a son, mentally challenged, and three grandchildren, Devananda, Mohan, and Vaishali, suffering from Down syndrome.

About 15 years ago, Tukaram Kandalkar had borrowed a sum of Rs 12,000/- from a money lender named Sadashiv Sinkar. The money lender had prepared a fake document, and Tukaram Kandalkar had already paid him Rs 18,000/- in 1996. But Sadashiv Sinkar demanded still more sum. When an old Tukaram Kandalkar was unable to pay more, Sinkar filed a suit against him for specific performance of the contract, which was entered into long before. A civil court passed an order asking Tukaram Kandalkar to pay the sum of Rs 35,000/- along with an additional amount of Rs 45,000/- towards damages, costs, and interest to Sinkar. Accordingly, the amount was to be recovered from Sadashiv Sinkar. Sadashiv Sinkar passed away a few years later.

After six years, Tukaram Kandalkar again had to fight back. On October 18, 2002, his land was auctioned for Rs 2.9 Lakhs to satisfy the lender's claim, with the further amount accumulated to Rs 93,971/-. Purushottam Ingle, leader of the Nationalist Congress Party and sitting member of the Agriculture Produce Marketing Committee of Varud Village, immediately purchased the land by depositing the money in the treasury. Tukaram Kandalkar, an old man of 70, went from one lawyer to another, seeking legal help, but failed to pay within the deadline. An appeal against this has been filed in the Supreme Court, and the poor Tukaram Kandalkar is awaiting justice.

5. Tamil Nādu Massacre:

42 untouchables, along with 20 children, were burnt alive on 25th Dec., 1968. The case came up before the Madras High Court, in an appeal, as the accused persons were convicted by the session court. The High Court acquitted them because the learned Judge believed that the accused were innocent. An extract from the judgment is given below: Something is astonishing about the fear that all the 23 accused implicated in the case should be Mirasdars, who are landlords. They might have been anxious to wreak vengeance upon the Left Communist kisans. It is difficult to believe that they walked boldly to the scene and set on fire the houses unattended by any of the servants. Richman, who has vast interests, is more likely to play for safety than desperate and hungry laborers. We regret that the evidence does not enable us to identify and punish the guilty. Intrinsic inferiorities in the prosecution's evidence prevent us from convincing persons who are probably innocent.⁵

6. Ramabai Ambedkar Nagar Case

Ramabai Ambedkar Nagar, a very popular locality of Ghatkopar (East), Mumbai, was known as a calm and peaceful locality. It is inhabited by the majority of the Scheduled Caste working class. On 11th July 1997, somebody played mischief and offered a garland of chappals to the statue of Bharat Ratna Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar. This news spread like wildfire in the early hours, all over the locality and in Mumbai city. But the police did not take cognizance of it. Ambedkar followers flocked around the spot and requested that mischief mongers be booked. But, instead of respecting people's feelings, Police Sub-Inspector Manohar Kadam opened fire to dispel the mob. This firing killed 10 innocent people. The Maharashtra Government, then run by the Bhartiya Janta Party (BJP) on public demand, appointed the Gundewar Commission to inquire into the incident. The commission submitted the report stating that there was no firing. Some oil tankers were standing roadside on the Eastern Express Highway, and by smashing vehicles, the fire was extinguished. The case was not progressing for 10 years in court because the prosecution had made a weak case.

Gundewar Commission visited the Ramabai Colony, the spot to collect the material facts, and interviewed the local people, where the police actually opened fire to disperse the mob, as alleged later by the commission findings. The people of Ramabai Colony welcomed Justice Gundewar. After meeting and collecting and recording the people's statements, Justice Gundewar went to the house of Manohar Shinde in Garodia Nagar, from where the picturization photograph of gas/ oil tankers was made. On 26th Oct. 1997, *Loksatta* reported news that Justice Gundewar was against the BJP and Shiv Sena coalition Government. Virendra Bakshi, Secretary, Mumbai Pradesh Committee of BJP, alleged



in his statement that a plan was prepared to spread the communal feeling in the city, and what happened in Ghatkopar was a conspiracy against the Dalits.

It appeared in the findings of the commission that a story was told to him that a violent mob was approaching the gas/oil tankers full of inflammatory material that were parked on the Eastern Express Highway, tearing violent frenzy mob would attack the gas tanker and set them on fire, and the whole locality would be inflamed and would be reduced to ashes. To avoid this from happening, the police had no option but to open fire to disperse the mob. Nevertheless, a full-fledged inquiry into this matter was held under the Justice Gundewar Commission, but the truth was not revealed, and the whole story was cooked. Some heavyweight politicians are suspected of being behind this incident. The judgment is yet to come.⁶

7. Mathura Rape Case.

Mathura, a tribal girl of Thane, was raped in the police station by a drunken policeman. The Supreme Court believed that perhaps the woman had consented to sexual intercourse and that she was used to this kind of thing. The fact that she was raped in police custody by a drunken policeman was completely ignored by the Supreme Court. The commissioner for Scheduled Castes had rightly observed, referring to the judgment in the Kellivamani case, that the above case is only one instance. Most of the cases between the poor Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes people and the influential meet similar fates. Law is present, but justice continues to sidetrack it. Such is the attitude of the judiciary; the only hope left for justice. Therefore, whatever may be the law, toothless or harsh, untouchability and discrimination against Dalits do not show any sign of decline.⁷

Due to awareness created among the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes through education, they are trying to assert their rights. This is not being taken very kindly by the caste Hindus. When they assert their rights and resist practices of untouchability against them, the caste Hindus, the vested interests try to cow them down and terrorize them. When they try to preserve their self-respect and honor of their women, they get enraged. The occupation and cultivation of even the government-allotted land to them are resented. More often, Dalits become victims of attacks by vested interests. Of late, there has been an increase in the disturbing trend of commission of certain atrocities like making the Scheduled Castes eat inedible substances like human excreta and attacks, including mass killings and rape of women. Under these circumstances, the laws become ineffective in protecting the Dalits. The culture, religion, and social structure of the country are mainly responsible for these atrocities and the oppressive acts. The successive governments, including the present government, are equally responsible for this grim state of affairs.⁸

8. Recent Judgement in Maharashtra: (Prof.Kadam v/s Principal Ravindra Karthadi)

Under the Atrocities Act, Shri. Naryan Guru College is located in Chembur, the first time in the state of Maharashtra, has jailed the Principal Ravindra Karthadi and the institution president named M.I. Damodaran, and Prof.Jayashree Venkatachalam were found guilty of collecting highly profligate excess fees from the backward class, OBC, Minority, and Marathi-speaking students far beyond the government-approved fee structure. At the same time, they also misused the scholarship funds of the Scheduled Caste and the Scheduled Tribes students and have collected unnecessary fees from the first-year students in the name of add-on courses.

In this regard, Prof. Kadam, who has served in this college since 2000, opposed the college management and the administration for illegal practices, and continuously raised the issue by conducting meetings, but a part of the college authority was ignored and took this matter to the University of Mumbai Tribunal in 2012, and the university authorities ordered to stop charging illegal fees from the students and parents. The result of the college authority's accusation and harassment of him was deliberate and subject-based discrimination.

Subsequently, Prof. Kadam registered a complaint and personally argued the case and refusing to submit to threats. After a long battle, the Mumbai Session Court convicted the accused in the SC/ST Special Case No. 05/2013, delivering the judgment on 4th November 2025. As he had won a related case in the Mumbai University Tribunal (Case No.03/2016), exposing the corruption. His spirited stand and giving justice to the deprived SC/ST/OBC/Minority/Marathi-speaking students has been widely praised, and he has set a strong example of Ambedkarite principles put into force.

Conclusion:

The sociological analysis approach of caste-based atrocities in Maharashtra exposes daily practices, and such incidents are deep-rooted in long-standing inequalities, injustice, outrages, and discrimination. That is why, to study and make it an effective prevention of caste-based atrocities enacted the law viz Protection of Civil Rights Act, 1955 was enacted. Even after the lapse of three decades, the socio-economic condition of the Scheduled Caste and Tribes remained vulnerable. Our parliament, therefore, enacted another law, viz. The Prevention of Atrocities Act, 1989. And at the same time, there is a combination of strong legal prosecution that is required, community-level awareness, socio-economic, cultural, and political empowerment of the marginalized so-called Dalit community. And for their protection, sustained political will secured their fundamental rights. To consider all these issues inclusively and contribute to reducing caste-based violence and promoting a more just and impartial society.

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Journal of Research and Development

A Multidisciplinary International Level Referred and Double Blind Peer Reviewed, Open Access

ISSN : 2230-9578 | Website: <https://jrdrv.org> Volume-17, Issue-11(I)| November 2025

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