

**An Exploratory study of caste-based DEI policy in  
Indian Corporates**

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# **SELF-DECLARATION**

This is to certify that the thesis submitted by me titled **An Exploratory study of caste-based DEI policy in Indian Corporates** is my original work and has not previously formed the basis for the award of any Degree, Diploma, Associateship or Fellowship to this or any other University.

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# CERTIFICATE OF THE SUPERVISOR

This is to certify that the thesis titled An Exploratory study of caste-based DEI policy in Indian Corporates is original work undertaken by Shankar Mepparambath under my supervision and guidance as part of his Master degree in this Institute. The thesis may be sent for evaluation.

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## Abstract

The study explores and examines Diversity, Equality and Inclusiveness (DEI) in private organisations, from gender and caste perspectives in terms of policy and practices. It examines the role of DEI as a mediator between psychological safety and workplace dignity. The study uses a mixed research method to explore DEI. Qualitative research methodology is adopted, and quantitative research methodology is applied to examine the relationship among the study constructs. Qualitative techniques included an in-depth interview method; nine informants were selected, belonging various sectors such as banking, academics, manufacturing etc. Employees working in the private sector are the unit of analysis. The study applied a non-probability convenience sample method to collect the quantitative data, which was generated using a structured questionnaire method. 75 respondents filled the questionnaire. The qualitative findings showed that gender-based DEI is the most common; caste is still invisible in the corporate workspace, but it is living in a disguised form. Informants agreed the paradox between meritocracy and inclusiveness. However, they opted for meritocracy for core areas and Inclusiveness for the non-core business. Other DEI, such as People with Disability and Neuro, is slowly getting attention. On quantitative findings, DEI is a mediator between psychological safety and workplace dignity. On textual analysis broadly, four topics are formed. The study has limitations in terms of sample adequacy for statistical generalisation. A qualitative study would not get the information from face to face; all the informants are approached through Zoom. Respondents were recruited from the researcher's known circle.

**Keywords:** DEI, Gender, Caste, and Indian Corporate

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Caste is a ‘material reality’ with a ‘material base’; it is not only a form but a concrete material content, and it has historically shaped the very basis of Indian society and continues to have crucial economic implications even today

--- Gail Omvedt

## 1 Introduction

Diversity, Equity and Inclusiveness (DEI) or Equality, Diversity and Inclusiveness (EDI) have recently become buzzwords among top-notch Indian corporates. Much research from the Global North showed that firms with high DEI led to high creativity and productivity [Ely & Thomas \(2001\)](#). DEI and organisation performance positively relate to numerous organisations, including federal agencies [Choi & Rainey \(2010\)](#). People from different ethnicities, cultures, religions, languages, gender and caste truly bring different perspectives than a homogeneous group of employees. Back at the end of the 1970s the American Supreme Court judgement supported the need for affirmative action towards diversity in education campuses to provide access to educational opportunities for African American citizens. Similar work was attempted in India with the support of political pressure, which has got legal authenticity initiated by Dr B.R. Ambedkar. However, In India, the reservation system is used as mere tokenism rather than serving a root cause. Close to 75% of subaltern caste and religious minorities Indians occupy less than 20% of high-level profiles in government and private organisations. Statistically, nearly 15% of the upper caste occupy almost 90% of critical jobs in judiciary, media, and education sectors. Interestingly, these skewed caste analytics have prevailed since the yesteryears of India. In the 1930s, Ambedkar mentioned this fact in his book, *The Annihilation of Caste* [Ambedkar \(2015\)](#) In Arundhati Roy’s *Doctor and Saint*, critical edition, the same facts are brought to the notice of the policymakers. Yengde, from Harvard, stated the same statistics in recent times in his book *Caste that Matters*. From the 1930s till today, skewed caste representation in both the Government and private sector has not changed numerically; this raised questions such as how effective the reservation policy in India is implemented and why social disadvantages would still come out of their precarious position. Post 1990-91, India’s union government embraced liberalisation, privatisation and globalisation, changing the employment landscape. The government has moved away from the role of an



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employment provider, and the market has become a key driver in providing employment opportunities. Though this move benefited large urban, upper caste and English-medium educators, it also set back marginalised castes where there is no quota system in the private sector.

Jodhka (2017), in his study, concluded that affirmation policy was a complete ‘no-go’ for corporates. Out of 25 HR recruiters interviewed, all unanimously supported that ‘merit’ is the main criterion for choosing the workforce in the corporate and narrated that by entertaining caste element at the cost of merit or vice versa. The binary category of the introduction of caste is no merit, and the general category is known for merit, which made social disadvantage groups as exclusion. The author also emphasised that ‘caste-blinding’ in ‘corporate hiring’ does not mean there is no role of caste or religion in recruitment. However, it is camouflaged in the name of the candidate’s family background, education, parents’ education and profession, etc.

In this research article, the key focus is on the missing element of caste-based DEI in Indian corporate. Section 2 deals with literature on various aspects of DEI, which includes the need for DEI, the role of DEI in the workplace, different dimensions of DEI such as gender, caste, region, physical ability, and religion etc. The current study tried to understand, why caste is missing in the DEI landscape. Section 3 deals with the research methodology, and Sections 4 through 6 cover the data analysis, findings, and recommendations to various stakeholders.

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## 2 Review of Literature

DEI is discussed in diverse literature. This section deals with literature from different disciplines, such as management, sociology, gender and caste studies. DEI based on gender, caste and intersectionality dimensions is discussed mainly in the market-driven economy scenario. This section dealt with the importance of DEI; its antecedents and consequences of DEI, and the role of different components of DEI, namely, gender, caste and others, are discussed. Lastly, the literature covered the tension or paradox the corporates face between meritocracy and inclusiveness and the corporate initiatives to adopt successful DEI policies in the workplace.

### 2.1 Why DEI is vital for corporates

The concept of DEI is no longer an obligation to the corporate. Broadly, for two reasons, one from a social perspective and one from an economist's perspective, DEI is vital in organisational settings. Supporting arguments towards economic perspectives, the corporate's strategic priority is to have a diverse workforce to outperform the competitors in innovation, attracting talent globally [Kundu & Mor \(2017\)](#). To obtain productivity and creativity at the team level, a diverse workforce is a pre-requisite. Also, supported DEI utilising untapped human resources such as women's potential and alternative abilities of physical and neuro disabilities. DEI brings good employer branding, which enhances the company image in the eyes of the commoner [Wells et al. \(2021\)](#). From social perspectives, Equality should be appreciated at all levels of the organisation to overcome the discrimination problem, and inclusiveness is needed to hear the voices of all the members in the decision-making process. The workplace is known for various social identities such as gender, race, caste, sexuality and age cohort and providing a platform for every employee to participate who possesses single or multiple identities is essential for a decent workplace culture. [Ashforth & Mael \(1989\)](#) explained the social psychological process that brought sociological aspects to the domain of organisational behaviour; Social Identity theory (SIT) is applied in role conflict, inter-group relations and organisational socialisation. DEI accommodates all identities without any discrimination for the betterment of the organisation. A blend of SIT and DEI bring to enrich the organisational cultures.

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## 2.2 Antecedents and consequences of DEI

Pre-requisites of DEI, like climate for inclusion, can address the downside of diversity issues in the organisation. Climate for inclusion can mediate the relationship between gender diversity and conflicts in tasks and relationships. Dimensions such as equitable employment practices, integration of differences and inclusion in decision-making will filter the social stigma in the workplace [Nishii \(2013\)](#). Many studies show a positive relationship between a diversity climate and employee performance; however, the relationship is only feasible if psychological safety exists [Singh et al. \(2013\)](#). The same study also showed race as a moderator between diversity climate and psychological safety and between psychological safety and employee performance. Psychological safety is employees expressing their opinion without fear or repercussions in the work environment. [Chrobot-Mason & Aramovich \(2013\)](#) showed psychological safety enacted as a mediator between diverse climates and turnover intentions of the employees. [A. Edmondson \(1999\)](#) introduced psychological safety construct; his study concluded that psychological construct enhances learning and performance in organisational work teams. [Yackulic \(2019\)](#) showed the role of psychological safety in establishing the relationship between diverse climates and various subgroups among the financial sectors. [Winters \(2020\)](#), in her book, stressed eight conditions for inclusive conversation, One condition is bravery; psychologically safe spaces are essential to start an inclusive conversation which bring positive workplace culture.

[A. C. Edmondson & Lei \(2014\)](#) showed that psychological safety could mediate between antecedents and outcome variables such as organisational learning and creativity. In addition, the author tested the model in both individual and group-level units of analysis. All this literature clearly showed the role of DEI and psychological safety. [Kaplan & Donovan \(2016\)](#) D&I are initiated to bring change in workplace safety. It can happen only through a change in organisation design. DEI changes organisational culture; DEI should be connected to the company's business and reward system to encourage new behaviours through DEI. Keeping workplaces safe is an ongoing activity, which implies that DEI practices are long-lasting and resilient and keep going beyond the flavour of one month or quarter.

In the strategic management literature, resource-based theory, explained how organization outperform the competitor in utilizing the resources, these resources are non-imitable, rare, unique and non-substitute resources [Barney \(2001\)](#). [Richard \(2000\)](#) echoes the same view

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through his research that diversity can act as a resource to attain sustainability over competitors. Various studies showed that diversity brings employee involvement, enhanced customer satisfaction, talent retention and less turnover intention. In contrast, DEI enhanced the conflict between teams in the organisation. Both positive and negative outcomes are cited in the working paper [Nair & Vohra \(2015\)](#). Literature showed how DEI enhanced financial outcomes like revenue, sales and profit when the company adopted an effective DEI policy [Herring \(2009\)](#). Management has seen the business from an “economist” paradigm for many years, and a practical “humanistic” framework is needed to understand the problem apart from the bottom line [Pirson \(2017\)](#). [Sayer \(2007\)](#) advocated broadening the concerns of bullying and harassment at the workplace; he echoed Kant’s view on dignity, “dignity is above all,” especially in the workplace arena. Workplace dignity is pivotal to emancipatory ‘Critical Management Studies’ and ‘humanistic framework’ goals. Linking DEI climate and workplace dignity is essential; in other words, employees’ dignity can be assured through a safe climate in the workplace and the presence of significantly different social identities such as gender, caste, and different ableness.

### 2.3 DEI from Intersectionality perspectives

Prof. Kimberle Crenshaw introduced the term intersectionality to address the exclusion of black women’s specific concerns in legal discourse. Intersectionality is rooted in social identity theory, arguing that many identities, such as gender, race, caste, class, sexuality and age, overlap in determining the person’s experience. Understanding phenomena like DEI needs multiple lenses than a single one. The kind of oppression and discrimination women face can be understood using intersectionality. In the workplace, a transgender person with low economic status with a Dalit background, has faced many discrimination problems, and sometimes they are forced to quit their job [TNM \(2023\)](#). (Uma Chakravarti and V. Geetha, as cited in [Ambedkar & Rege \(2013\)](#),pp.21-22) that” Post Mandal, it is essential to engender histories of caste and encaste gender”. Intersection invokes a better method to understand the phenomena. [Tewary \(2023\)](#) Recently, a caste-based survey sparked controversy; when allocating a caste code 22 for the third gender, every caste gets their code, like 126 for Brahmins and 142 for Bhumihars. Has caste code 22 becomes catch-22 logic?;<sup>1</sup> Time has to answer it.

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<sup>1</sup>catch-22 term was coined by Joseph Heller, who used it in his 1961 novel Catch-22, A catch-22 is a paradoxical situation an individual cannot escape because of contradictory rules or limitations

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### 2.3.1 Gender-based DEI representation

Much research proved that Organization's top management, more represented by women, did a better job than those less diverse, especially in the banking and financial sector. The financial sector is known for scams and fraud, and more women composed in top management drastically reduced fraud acts [Berinato & Casu \(2021\)](#). However, in the sub-continent, the data showed that the level of diversity in top management scams or frauds is not reduced in the financial sector. [Outlook \(2023\)](#) Recent financial news includes Chitra Ramakrishna, ex-CEO of Nifty, in a co-location scam. Other news from the financial sector included Chanda Kochar of ICICI loan fraud case [Today \(2022\)](#). [ET \(2018\)](#) RBI declined to extend the tenure of Shikha Sharma of Axis Bank due to climbs in NPA. It showed it is optional for women in top positions to change the organisation's performance towards North. At the same time, the study showed how HSBC progressed in its financial position by adopting gender-based DEI in its leadership role. Boarding more women at the top management level changed the bank's brand value "[HSBC Women at the Top](#)" (2014).

### 2.3.2 Race and Caste based DEI representation

[Richard \(2000\)](#) showed in his study that there is a positive relationship between racial diversity and firm performance, but the relationship can be moderated upon what business strategy the firm adopts; growth strategy enhances the relationship but downsizes strategy may dampen the relationship. [Prasad et al. \(2020\)](#) study showed the difference between race-based affirmative action programs(AAP) and caste-based APP in USA and India, respectively what was the difference?. Also, the article emphasised organisation sensitisation towards unconscious bias toward the caste system what did it say about this sensitisation?.

[The Swaddle \(2022\)](#) In India, currently, a large portion of people believe caste is not a current issue, though caste statistics show how underrepresented socially disadvantaged castes and over-represented by the upper caste in every walk of life in academics, media, business and religious affairs. Though caste is limited to India and South Asian nations, rightly pointed out by Indian constitutional founding fathers, wherever Hindus go, they will take caste to it, and caste becomes a world problem (Ambedkar, 2014). This is echoed in many recent incidents in the United States. [Soundararajan \(2022\)](#) Equality lab created a landmark report on caste in the United States, which opened much controversy and helped

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bring caste-based discrimination regulation to the university campus. [Ilavarasan \(2007\)](#) showed that the Indian software catered for the employment needs of males from the upper level of socio-economic status most of the time, and inclusiveness needs to address socially disadvantaged communities in a growing sector like software. Ambedkar pointed out that liberty, equality and fraternity cannot be obtained just by legal sanction, it is a social mindset. Even though India showed development in economy and technology, average Indians' thoughts of caste have not changed much. Despite constitutional sanctions on political and social equality, still, most Indians following religious texts which endorse the inequalities of caste, which gives uninterrupted advantages to the upper caste [Chakravarti \(2018\)](#). Most Indian's minds perceived divisive and stagnant texts like Manusmritis as better than living constitutional documents. Back to caste and corporates, Jodkha insisted through his study that most corporate HR recruiters are not even interested in discussing the role of caste and religion in their conversion, many deliberately avoiding the word "caste" in their discussions. This shows a need to change among DEI's corporate leaders and managers. Avtar Diversity, a Chennai-based company, has worked in the DEI field for 20 years "[Avtar](#)" (2023). Avtar is known for a second career for women, but not even a word about caste on their website. Their DEI is much more skewed towards mid-career or second-career women than caste-based DEI. The latter is almost nil. Even in the corporate sector, many top-notch leaders think pushing women up the ladder is a sort of tokenism; this is well covered in *diversity beyond tokenism* [Jena & Hari \(2021\)](#). However, the same author should have discussed the advantage of caste-based DEI. The author hardly gives an example of caste-based DEI except for the US CISCO issue, which is irrelevant to the Indian context. However, the author suggested diversity sensitisation workshops to mitigate the risk of skewed employee distribution. A narrow DEI advocates for gender sensitisation but not caste sensitisation. Most corporates do not encourage caste-based DEI to safeguard merit and efficiency in the work. However, there is no data to support this belief that caste-based DEI impacts quality of work adversely. Most DEI consultancy and coaches have taken the DEI framework from Western countries. However, the importance of caste is unarticulated or muted. Most failed to realise that caste is the similar to race in India, creating the same impact on marginalised society for the more significant periods. Candidate acquisition, hiring and talent management are the critical areas which act as a bottleneck for DEI. MIT and University of Chicago research showed a strong bias in the recruitment process concerning applicant names [Bertrand & Mullainathan \(2004\)](#). In the

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US, bias towards African American names, In Canada bias towards Asian names, In Europe bias towards Middle Eastern countries' names and India bias towards SC/STs. In their experimental study, [Banerjee et al. \(2009\)](#) revealed that the potential employee's call-back rate is higher for the upper caste than for another caste. ([Jodhka,2017,p.142](#)) the study showed that most corporate managers are under the impression that the Government failed to run their business enterprises due to the choice of the workforce based on reservation rather than merit. The company's workforce strategy needed to be revised to merit, which led to the exclusion of large, socially disadvantaged groups. This kind of attitude may bring set back to the DEI. [Shashidhar \(2021\)](#) discussed Indian corporation's unconscious bias on gender promotion to a top-notch positions like CEO and CXO Etc., surprisingly without touching the caste-based discrimination in the selection of talents. [Majumdar \(2020\)](#) is batting for a caste-based DEI policy in the private sector and agrees that caste is a rare component of DEI HR Policy.

a Dalit hip-hop artist, blamed the upper caste people as “Your ancestors were sick people. . . All you know is five words, Dalit, Merit, Caste, Ambedkar and Reservation (Samos, as cited in [Yengde \(2019\)](#)).” Large extent, this idea is very much prevailing in many Indians' minds. Otherwise, “selected silence” is the status quo when caste is discussed among educated Indians. [Express \(2023\)](#), Jain university students of Bangalore made a skit which demeaned the Dalit and reservation system in the name of humour; this is evident to show how educational institutions failed to do their job regarding caste concerns in society. Unfortunately, bias is very high in the university and institutes; for the last 10 years, 14 students have committed suicide at the IITs; in Madras, 52 students committed suicide across 8 IITs in India . The reasons are attributed to discrimination based on caste, religion and regional background [TNIE \(2019\)](#). Unfortunately, the institution still mutes in its stand and does not know how to address it except to appoint a psychiatrist and psychologist. The same view his echoed to save the younger lives on campuses with support of Institutional Eco-system and culture of cohesion [Bakthavatsalam & Qamar \(2023\)](#). Similarly, recent Kalashetra students protested against to removal of four faculty members on sexual harassment charges, and our independent institutions reacted slowly, which is raising the question of what is the safest environment in institution premises [Misra \(2023\)](#). All these realities demand the need for DEI policy irrespective of enterprises, commercial or academics. Bias impacts behaviour which creates a non-inclusive environment. Priming,



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Affinity bias and stereotyping and confirmation bias played a significant role in the critical decisions of the leaders of organisations. Systemic bias started from individuals is further institutionalised, and it turned out to be the organisation's culture, which challenged the DEI acceptance. Individuals and organisations suffer from catch-22 logic; it paved the way to inequitable treatment of employees, and clients, role conflict, and, in the long run, it leads to organisational maladaptiveness [Ashforth \(1991\)](#).

### 2.3.3 Intersectionality: Gender & Caste lens

Gender and caste shape each other, determining the subordination role of women across various castes (Chakravarti,2018,pp.25). The intersectionality of these two gives different perspectives on corporate recruitment strategies. For instance: some jobs are only meant for males or females. In Airlines Industry, most steward crew members are more female than male; among the females, most come from the upper caste, urban and are fluent in English from a particular region of India. (Jodhka,2017,pp.132-133) In his study, one of the interviewees admitted that “A majority of air hostesses come from Punjabi families, as they are open. They can speak well. Their faces glow. However, that is not the same with Haryana, UP or Bihari culture.” Based on job level, recruiters decide what background of employees is needed; for instance, in the hotel industry, if it is a cleaning job company prefers females from low caste jobs, but if it is the front office, most of the time upper caste female and male. One of the interviewees of the (Jodhka,2017,p.128) study cited, “But in the front office, we go for trained and professional people, and they all belong to higher castes.”

## 2.4 Other components of DEI

Periodically, inadvertently only one component of DEI is supported. In corporate, gender-based DEI is emphasised, compared to caste, physical and neuro disability. In the inclusion list, often gender and race are considered, but neuro-inclusion is never considered [Thompson \(2022\)](#). Organisations like HSBC are known for conducting “Pride Month,” which celebrates LGBTQIA+ employees and conducts many gender sensitisation training programmes for their employees. HSBC has given a rainbow colour for the paired lion in the Hong Kong head office, which stirs debate among the anti-LGBTQ people [Cheung \(2016\)](#). However, there are umpteen stories from the LGBTQ community, and many lost



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their job when they revealed their sexual identity. It showed still a long way for corporates to go on LGBTQ DEI policy. Many large Indian and MNCs companies are still obsessed with IIMs and IITs. Students passed out from small town and hinterland cannot access the key positions in the corporates; this shows that DEI is needs to take geographical location into account. [Bhargava & Brown \(2021\)](#) SHRM surveyed HR managers; the results revealed that 97% of managers felt no performance difference between physically disabled people and other people. The WHO report revealed that 15% of the world's population has one form of disability. However, there was still less motivation for the organisation to accept physically challenged people.

## 2.5 Paradox: Meritocracy and Inclusiveness

[Smith & Berg \(1987\)](#) cited the definition of a paradox, given by Hughes and Brecht, “a statement or set of statements that are self-referential and contradictory and that trigger a vicious circle.” The author also explains the paradox of identity and investigates the relationship between individual and group identity. (Donovan and Kaplan, 2019, pp 1-25) Three terms Meritocracy, inclusion and diversity, all go hand in glove. Paradox is common among leaders and cultures. For instance, Thomas Jefferson, known for simultaneously fighting for individual liberty and freedom, owned hundreds of enslaved people in the US. Similarly, in India, the Hindu society boasts the phrase “Vasudeva Kutumbakam,” which means “the world is one family.” Still, it perpetuates gender and caste subordination for many centuries. Paradox is extended to organisation culture, embedding meritocracy on the one hand and, on the other hand, perpetuating discrimination and unequal treatment. Ask any board of Fortune 1000 companies or Nifty 50 companies if the organisation is built on a meritocratic system, and the answer is a resounding Yes! If pure meritocracy prevails, why do Indian corporate not top the tables of 2022's Fortune 100 companies list? [Zuyware \(2023\)](#). Why is a single institution or university not even among the top 150 QS World University Rankings of 2023? [Education Desk \(2022\)](#). Most Indian companies run the family business; the same family member fills 90% of MD and top-notch posts as qualified professionals. Walton family still holds the largest share in Walmart; at home, Adani and Ambani's enterprises do the same. The family business encourages homogeneous cultures like the same caste, language, region and network.; Irony is all batting for meritocracy. Because of international pressure, many of these are embracing new kids in the block,

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which is DEI. Still, large organisations fill the top position through referrals. Research showed any department, more than 30% of filling vacancies through referrals have less heterogeneous. There is an inverse relationship between referrals and DEI practices. All these examples make the argument that, It was not merit alone that contributed to the company; more things need to understand, such as culture, policy and process and social value system. A company is diverse but still needs to be more inclusive; many women and marginalised workforce are entry-level, but only some are in top positions. People who bat for meritocracy and against inclusiveness are intimidated to lose their top position in the organisation.

## 2.6 Initiatives for facilitating DEI

A strategy or policy on DEI is adequate if it is implemented in the right direction; DEI may also bring reverse effects if it is not executed correctly. [Kalev et al. \(2006\)](#), from his study, recommended three broad approaches to promote diversity: Organisational responsibility, Structure embedded diversity and accountability. Organisational responsibility supports diversity training, education and evaluation. Diversity training and education reduce many unconscious biases among the managerial cadre, especially in hiring and promoting particular races or caste people. Accountability ensures everyone's compliance towards the DEI policy in the Organization. [Herdman & McMillan-Capehart \(2010\)](#) DEI policy is alone not sufficient; constant organisational attention is needed on many contextual factors, such as managerial values and representation of minorities and other socially disadvantaged groups, that ensure the efficacy of the DEI programmes.

## 2.7 Gap in the literature

From the above-discussed literature, it is evident that DEI in management and HR literature has dealt with the economic paradigm rather than the humanistic framework. In contrast, in humanities, caste and gender are discussed as social issues rather than corporate goals or policy. This study is attempted to stitch together literature from both. In the West, much research on DEI is spoken from a race point of view, but when it comes to India, caste does not get the same attention as race in the US. However, some research has dealt with caste in business research with neither DEI nor a humanistic approach. The current study plugs the gap by looking at DEI and caste from a humanistic framework

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rather than mere financial performance.

### 3 Research Methodology and Design

[Pringle & Booysen \(2018\)](#) The relationship among ontology, epistemology, axiology, and methodology determines research paradigms or worldviews. Positivism dominated the research landscape till the mid-80s. Non-positivist paradigms often embrace research on EDI, which is based on the difference in a basic understanding of workforce representation. On EDI, the most appropriate paradigms are critical, post-structural and post-positivist. [Booyesen et al. \(2018\)](#) emphasised that EDI research cannot be limited to a single paradigm. [Atewologun & Mahalingam \(2018\)](#) need Intersectionality research in the EDI arena and how it is applied in EDI research. [C. Baron \(2018\)](#) argued that combining constructivism with post-positivism is a good fit for mixed research methodology. The current research understands the paradigms followed by EDI research and uses a mixed research methodology, including qualitative and quantitative research. Qualitative, in-depth interviews with diversity managers are chosen, and leaders from corporate and academics who worked in Government and private sectors are the study's subjects. The study is interested in more than just collecting non-numerical data. It is more about seeing the DEI from a social construct beyond the dominant positivism paradigm, emphasised in the qualitative research methodology [Guba & Lincoln \(2005\)](#). First, the qualitative research methodology is used to address two questions, while the quantitative research methodology is used to address the remaining questions.

#### 3.1 Research Questions

Researchers would attempt to frame the research questions based on the limited literature reviews and preliminary discussions with social science experts. First, two questions are sorted out through the qualitative research methodology, and the following questions are directed through the quantitative research methodology.

- RQ1. what tension exists between DEI and meritocracy in the context of caste, in Indian corporates?
- RQ2. What types (gender, caste, ableness, and region) of DEI are adopted predominantly in the Indian corporate sector?

- RQ3.What is the relationship between psychological safety and DEI ?
- RQ4.What is the relationship between DEI and workplace dignity?
- RQ5.Can DEI mediate between psychological safety and workplace dignity?
- RQ6.What is the role of caste as a moderator among the study constructs (psychological safety, DEI and workplace dignity)?

The study objective is to explore the reason for not including caste as a component of DEI among private-sector enterprises and the reasons for tension or paradox in following meritocracy and DEI policy simultaneously. Also, to examine the current practices and perceptions about DEI in the Indian context. The study used all the required analyses based on survey research guidelines (DeVellis & Thorpe, 2021; Saris & Gallhofer, 2014). The study covered cronbach alpha to check the consistency of the measures. Correlation to explore the relationship between the constructs and regression is used to assess the role of control variables on outcome variables. PLS-SEM is used to test all the given hypotheses of the study from H1 through H7.

### 3.2 Research Hypotheses

The hypothesis is given below:

- H1:There is a relationship between psychological safety and DEI climate
- H2:There is a relationship between psychological safety and Workplace dignity
- H3:There is a relationship between DEI climate and Workplace dignity
- H4:DEI climate enacts mediator between Psychological safety and Workplace dignity
- H5:Caste moderates the relationship between Psychological Safety and DEI climate
- H6:Caste moderates the relationship between Psychological Safety and Workplace dignity
- H7:Caste moderates the relationship between DEI climate and Workplace dignity

### 3.3 Conceptual defintion

The whole study dealt with key three constructs such as DEI climate, Psychological safety and Workplace dignity. The conceptual definitions are:

Taylor et al. (2012) authors defined DEI Climate is “the extent to which employees share the perception that a diverse organization’s policies, practices, and procedures

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communicate a strong priority given to fostering and maintaining diversity and inclusion.” The definition emphasized policies, practices and procedure of DEI in the organization. Psychological safety is “the sense of being able to show and employ oneself without fear of negative consequences to self-image, status, or career” [Kahn \(1990\)](#). Workplace dignity (WPD) is defined as “individual’s perception about respect and trust, equal treatment, valuation of one’s worth, fair-treatment, autonomy and freedom of expression and decision making enjoyed by an employee at the workplace” [Tiwari & Sharma \(2019\)](#).

### 3.4 Measures used in the study

The study used three key constructs: DEI climate, psychological safety and workplace dignity. All three constructs are captured in the Likert scale rating format. Psychological safety and workplace dignity have been taken from previous academic literature. DEI climate is adopted from the SHRM employees survey on DEI [SHRM \(2022\)](#). However, the SHRM instrument contains many dimensions to measure DEI climate or practice in the organisation. The current study considered only three dimensions: overall DEI, policy and procedures and inclusiveness. All the items are measured on 5-point rating scale. Psychological safety is measured by borrowing the scale developed by [A. Edmondson \(1999\)](#), which contains seven items measured in 5 point rating scale. Work Dignity is measured through a scale developed by [Thomas & Lucas \(2019\)](#), the study used only four dimensions, and all are measured on 5 point rating scale.

### 3.5 Data collection

The study collected data from senior leaders in the role of decision making from corporate and business schools or Institutions through interviews. Nine in-depth interviews were conducted to collect the qualitative data. Informants were chosen using purposive sample method. The average work experience of Informants is close to 20 years. Out of 9, three of them represent the female category. On caste, one informant was from SC, two from BC and the rest from the General category.

Further, a questionnaire was used to collect the data to understand the DEI climate in various private organisation studies. The unit of analysis is an employee who worked/working in a private organisation. The sample is collected using a non-probability convenient sample method. Though the researcher reached out close to 200 respondents

Table 1: Sample composition

	count	percentage
Gender.Female	31	41.33
Gender.Male	44	58.67
Age.21 - 35 Years	21	28.00
Age.36 to 45 yrs	35	46.67
Age.46 - 55 Years	12	16.00
Age.Above 55 Years	7	9.33
Education.PG	37	49.33
Education.PhD	33	44.00
Education.Professional	5	6.67
Caste.Backward	12	16.00
Caste.Don't want to mention	2	2.67
Caste.General	56	74.67
Caste.SC/STs	5	6.67
Belief_system.Hinduism	52	69.33
Belief_system.Islam/Christianity	11	14.67
Belief_system.Secular/Atheism	12	16.00
Sector.Banking/Finance	11	14.67
Sector.Education Sector	56	74.67
Sector.Others	8	10.67

through online and offline modes, only 75 samples were filled. Sample composition is given below:

### 3.6 Data Analysis approach

There are two studies. Study 1 used qualitative methods and textual analytics to explore the phenomena of DEI among managers and leaders from both corporate and academics. Using the PLS-SEM analysis framework, study 2 used quantitative methods to explain the relationship among psychological safety, WPD and DEI climate. Quantitative analysis used the mediator and moderator framework to test the hypothesis from H1 to H7.

The sample composition of the study showed the respondent's demographic profile. On gender, 58 per cent is male, and the rest is female; on age, 36 to 45 years, occupied 46 per cent; on religion, 69 per cent follow Hinduism, and 74 per cent of the sample is from the General caste category. Close to 50 per cent of respondents hold post-graduate degrees. Since data is collected through the online survey, there is a high level of bias in data collection. Most of the respondents belong to the researcher's known circle.

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## 4 Qualitative Research

[Creswell & Poth \(2016\)](#) Unlike quantitative data, qualitative data is textual data and sample size of subjects or informants are not large. Inductive logic in the qualitative research approach is the data-driven than hypothetical testing. The study used semi-structured interviews to collect the data. The study identified leaders and managers from both academics and corporate; through the informants, the study attempted to explore the DEI philosophy and practices in the workplace, primarily focusing on the role of caste in the recruitment and hiring. Choosing the informants in qualitative research methodology is not for a statistical representation but for the sake of theoretical sampling and purposive sampling; even terms like representation of representation, the unit of analysis and universe are the different context in qualitative research, sometimes it leads to sample slippery [Nakkeeran \(2016\)](#).

### 4.1 Interview

Whether Interviews or Focus group discussion, the first question is how many informants or subjects should be considered. What is the saturation point to complete the number of interviews? [Kumar et al. \(2021\)](#) study discussed interview purpose, numbers and saturation point (as cited in ([Creswell & Poth, 2016](#); [Galvin, 2015](#); [Guest et al., 2006](#))). The current study covered nine interviews. The profile of the respondents is given below table. Refer to Annexure-A for the interview questions. Five to Six questions are common, and another five questions are based on the informant's reply to the questions. The collected textual data are analyzed in two ways. Firstly, following typical qualitative research methodology, converting video into transcripts, and further identifying the broad themes and sub-themes through manual coding. Secondly, textual analytic paradigms include word cloud, sentimental score and topic modeling. Textual analysis is done through R software. The following section contains selected verbatim of informants and the construction of broad themes and sub-themes. And finally, textual analytics.

#### 4.1.1 Voice of Informants

The interview opened many ideas; some have already prevailed in the literature, and some still need to be covered in the prior literature. With the support of textual data, broad themes are derived, sub-themes are identified, and actionable prompts show what factors

Table 2: Informants Profile

SN	Informants.ID	DOI	WorkEx.in.yrs.	Expertise	Caste	Gender
1	RS	23-Mar-23	38	Coaching	GC	M
2	EK	25-Mar-23	22	L&D	GC	M
3	MS	27-Mar-23	30	CHRO	GC	M
4	DH	31-Mar-23	17	Global Head L&D	GC	F
5	VN	01-Apr-23	42	Banker	GC	M
6	SH	01-Apr-23	35	Strategic Consultant	BC	M
7	PD	01-Apr-23	38	Principal	BC	F
8	DN	02-Apr-23	22	Asst VP	SC	M
9	RN	02-Apr-23	35	Director	GC	F

determine the effective DEI policy and practices. In a paradox, informants supported meritocracy, and some advocated inclusiveness.

**4.1.1.1 Paradox: Merit vs Inclusiveness** The dominant theme emerging out of the interview process is a paradox: merit versus inclusiveness. When corporate embrace merit for better performance, inclusiveness is placed in the back seat and vice versa. Some informants outrightly rejected the idea of paradox, and some voted for paradox—people who supported merit for competition and profitability. Informants who support inclusiveness also support utilising all possible resources for the organisation’s benefit; inclusiveness is a must. The argument opened another idea of core vs non-core areas that fit the organisation’s meritocracy and inclusiveness policy.

RS, Sr. HR Consultant and Coach, has 35 years of experience in both manufacturing and consulting. His view is,

*It is debatable. My apprehension is that merit should be protected in the name of diversity. A company more diverse is not necessarily inclusive. Diversity is hiring more people, but inclusion involves people in the decision. Making our corporate follows more diverse but less inclusive. In private organisations, capital comes from investors, who are more concerned about profit than ideology. Pressure on perceived returns on Quarter to Quarter surges. Investors prefer better returns than other more excellent Utopian philosophies and social concerns. Many corporations talk about diversity, but investors will only switch to companies with good returns if returns are assured. We live in*



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*an uncertain period where investors get incentives to promote diversity. In government companies, none bothered about profit every year, and they have a social motive, but in private, we cannot do the same. There is a challenge for private companies to initiate more jobs for socially disadvantaged groups.*

DN, Asst. VP, in one of the reputed MNC banks and has more than 20 years of experience, he said,

*Nothing called a paradox. Getting into a role is merit. Everyone has some skill, on skill set what kind of role they can do. There are many departments and different roles; every person has a role based on their skill set.*

VN has thirty-plus years of experience as a banker and academician in the public and private sectors. His contrary view is,

*Absolutely, It is a paradox. First of all, I would not believe merit only belongs to the upper caste. It is a flawed and fallacy argument. I have seen many dull heads from the upper caste, and narration is floated across the century about merit and caste belonging. Social media fuel this narrative strengthening. In this country, we do not know why every person is not getting opportunities; in the name of merit, system always keep a away large section of society, especially 21% of social disadvantages. Even corporate not utilize such extensive resources.*

**4.1.1.2 Role of Caste in the private sector** Caste plays a vital role in Indian society. It cuts across all walks of life, including social, political and economic, and the private sector is not exceptional. However, only it is invisible and blinding in the corporate sector, as emphasised by Jodkha in his research. Caste plays a vital role in recruitment, hiring and other day-to-day practices. The study revealed mixed opinions, which are discussed below:

EK, who has more than 20 years of experience in the Learning and Development department across seven private entities, replied to the question about the role of caste in recruitment.

*I do not think so. We do not know what the caste or community of potential employees is. Our company policies, we should not ask about the candidate's caste. For example, Satya Nadela and Sundar Pichai are in the highest position*

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*based on their merit rather than caste.*

However, when the question is changed, “What is the role of caste surname in the hiring process?” he replied as

*I agree with this, I am from South India, and most of us may not use a surname. However, we can determine the background of the candidate by seeing the names, for instance: the difference between “Karuppusamy” (literal meaning is black god) and “Subramaniam” (brahminised version of Tamil god Muruga). I have seen people from North India use caste surnames, which shows the caste identity, and I believe that influences the selection of the candidates. One hundred per cent, I agreed. Dropping the surname can reduce the selection bias in the private sector.*

DN, Global Head of Learning and Development from the private company, echoed that caste is corporate blinding through referrals.

*Each country has a different unconscious bias. In one of the large MNCs I worked for, I belonged to the Upper caste; I was privileged when working at a Chennai-based company where “referrals” work through the same community, language, and background. This group formed a clique and barrier to an inclusiveness culture in the organisation. It took me many years to figure out the relationship between referrals and caste discrimination in the hiring process.*

From the literature Kaplan emphasised, it is understood that more than 30 per cent of referrals showed bias in the hiring process. People from the Workplace openly say we do not discriminate the people, but if you ask them how many are socially disadvantaged in their friends or colleague circle, the reply is almost nil.

However, there is a contrary view; informants believed that caste has no role in the hiring process. MS, CHRO is one of the leading large organisations.

*We never filtered people from the Dalit community. We respect talent, whether it is Adani or TATA groups. We are looking only for talent. Our board members appreciate the people from the backward community, and they look to take them to the next level. In my experience, organisations are never limited to the particular background of people, especially colour, caste, or creed. It may*

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*be in Western countries, but the organisation looks for talent in India.*

*Whomsoever has talents, and we will pick them up.*

SH who has more than 30 years of experience in both the public and private sectors and he is a consultant in organisation development, described the the role of caste and importance of meritocracy:

*In India and even Europe, the person in charge of recruitment has developed unconscious bias since childhood; they prefer a particular caste or race. The private sector has no bind on whom it should hire or not. On a personal level, they may play their bias. In South India, most employees are vegetarians and prefer vegetarians as potential candidates. Overcoming unconscious bias is difficult. TATA is an excellent example of DEI in India. Top management very meticulously hires people from different backgrounds. Affinity bias is on a personal level; sometimes, it spreads across the organisation. “Look alike, Feel alike, Talk alike” they want to include only. Caste is a personal bias, but promoters or investors never bothered about caste or creed. They want someone who can overturn it. Unfortunately, both are not connected. Companies prefers performers, but bias does play a role because attitudes formed in the formative ages; however, the organisation put mechanisms in place to reduce bias. For example: When Gita Gopinath became chief economist, many Indians searched her caste on Google. This showed that caste is ingrained in our minds.*

This conversation brought up the affinity and unconscious biases existing in most Organisations, especially in the hiring process. Both biases brought up the stereotypical behaviours of hiring managers, which brought setbacks to DEI in the workplace.

RS echoed the same view but denied the role of caste in hiring. His opinion is

*I did not find any caste discrimination, but they prefer one caste over another. In the financial sector, people prefer Agarwal over others, possibly because of their childhood social condition. There is no caste discrimination based on the Institutional level, but we come across it from the individual level.*

*India is diverse, and affinity towards a particular community is expected. Even preference is reduced over the period may be because of the adoption of DEI in the corporate sector*

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The affinity bias and stereotypes become systemic bias where the whole institution runs based on caste-oriented institutes. Systemic bias prevails across most institutions in India. In the opinion of PD, it is revealed that,

*Yes, it is because of stereotypes. In the Christian institution's leadership posts filled by Fathers and Sisters, the same thing happens; institutions run by Brahmins keep Brahmins as leaders. Other communities like Lingayat and Vokkalikas follow this. They want to see only their people and culture in the organisation.*

It is understood that HR leaders accepted one thing, caste comes from individual preference than the organisational level. The role of stereotype is very much because it is formed in the very formative age of the human being. One of the informant's replies contradicts the caste is personal, not organisational level. RN currently enacts as the Director, B-School in Noida. She has over 30 years of experience in academic and administrative positions and is a board member of a private organisation.

*In one of the medical college interviews for employee hiring, I was part of the interview board. Before we started the interview process, the college representatives informed the board members, "Do not select the candidate from X or Y caste. So we cannot say caste discrimination is happening, but it all depends upon organisation types. It may be a small organisation, but I do not see it in MNCS or large organisations.*

Though informants believe caste discrimination happens only in small organisations but not in MNCs or large institutions. However, this needs to be probed. The caste culture may become visible through other organisational practices such as inter-dining. Dr PD, the Principal of a private education institute, said,

*Any food (veg or non-vegetarian) should be allowed because institutions are secular, and there is no discrimination. However, in our institute, we do not recommend non-vegetarians. Even in our School's mid-day meals, we avoid eggs. Our management practices vegetarianism. We wanted to start a hotel management course a decade ago, but the idea was dropped because the committee felt non-veg cuisine should be prepared on the premises, so we dropped it.*

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The reality is different from one place to another place of India; These data points showed that caste practices vary from place to place. Nothing is uniformly practised across India, and Uma Chakravarthi echoes the same view in her work. Though the union government runs some of the institutions, their practices differ. The answer is the diversity of the workforce and who decides what people eat and on behalf of whom.

4.1.1.3 Gender-based DEI Many interesting opinions pop up when the question is turned on gender-based DEI. For the question of how gender DEI prevails in the workplace of private firms?

RS said,

*In the manufacturing domain, there is much diversity on the shop floor, and women are more diverse in the current corporate world. Other diversity like neuro, region, language and LGBTQ do not get much attention. In the name of gender too much extreme, in a country like the US, corporate has a unisex restroom, which is outrageous, and on LinkedIn, I can see calling “his” or “her” not meaningful and looks like show business. Based on the need for diversity than fashion claims diversity. DEI is an effective team, not a question of gender alone. We should include introverted, ambivalent and extrovert parts of the team rather than gender.*

RN replied as

*We fantasied by many jargons, at least ten years of organisation advocacy and policy on DEI. In 2013, to have mandatory one independent women director in the board. So the inclusion of women is increased. A good number of women become board members. It is wonderful. There is tokenism of DEI. Can women contribute to the board or just present for the norm? In family-owned businesses, the role of women is attached to family decisions and tokenisms. Many women accepted that, they can understand profit and loss statements, but deeply they cannot. When it comes to big data and complex analysis, they are not par matched with men since they cannot represent their voices in the technical domain.*

Though the two informants directly support more women representation, they are suitable

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for the organisation, but informants perceived tokenism is prevailing in the gender-DEI implementation.

In the view of EK,

*DEI in Gargi International is the pivot. We have a separate team working on DEI around the year. In every meeting, the first few minutes are spent on DEI. Every year we have an evaluation of DEI aspects; the questionnaire runs for 150 statements which assess the workplace culture and DEI. Last 6 to 8 years, women's representation has increased from 20% to 40%; even in the department of finance and leadership roles, many women are positioned.*

DN echoes a similar view,

*From HSBC's view, we have an excellent process to include the LGBT community; we have "Pride Month" in a year to celebrate LGBTQ employees in the work streams. We have marches and marathons on the events of HSBCs and their families. LGBTQ has a good number of employees. At all levels, their presence, at least at the global level. Our company covers almost all types of DEI. We have a policy or drive called "Return to work" for women rejoining after maternity and the child is delivered.*

The above two informants work in large multinational corporations whose policies and practices are dictated from a global level and Western culture. A uniform policy and practice are mandatory, where DEI is followed religiously. All gender is getting representation in all levels of the organisation. However, this may not be true in the MSME and SMEs or family-based businesses where they inherited many stereotypes of gender and caste. The idea is evident in the opinion of RN.

*In a company, a boy worked for five years and revealed his sexual identity as female within a week; now the person is a girl, and he is forced to resign, and despite star performer, the person is asked to leave the company. In another organisation I came across, HR said if the woman is about to get married or adopt to motherhood. They have dropped from the selection despite talent. On the one hand, every job is meant for women, but at the same time, recruiters closed opportunities in their minds. If you take MSMEs during covid time, most women lose their jobs.*

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when DN replied,

*More aware of Bro culture (male domination) does not know how to deal with women; what should I do if the woman goes on maternity leave? If a woman emotionally breaks down, what should I do? Many managers need a clue.*

The view of RN and DN clearly showed that the organisation's culture plays a vital role in accepting the different social identities in the private sector. The role of women in business is very much linked with the organisation's performance; significantly, HSBC completely changed their organisation practices which encourage close to 40% workforce is women, which took the performance to higher levels "[HSBC Women at the Top](#)" (2014). Economic motivation is the primary reason to add more women workforce among the Indian companies; this is what we can see from MS's reply.

*On the intellectual level, thinking perspectives and productivity, gender DEI is essential. We are a B2C organisation; our employees should be sensitive when dealing with diverse customers and women on meter readings. Diversity alone will not work; it should be acceptable in the organisation; an inclusion point of view is essential, and how a diverse workforce participates in the daily meetings through another level of decision-making.*

It indicated that the role of women is inevitable for the organisation's progress abroad or at home.

4.1.1.4 Other types of DEI From the interview participants, it was told, that, time to focus on other types of DEI in the organisation. RN narrate his student's experience.

*Companies like TATA for their Hotel Business; went to tribal areas, picked up talented students from the schools, trained them in all aspects, and blended them into the system. Aradhana, VP of Lemon Tree Hotels, in charge of sustainability and ESG, made 18% of their workforce differently abled, below the poverty line and marginalised group. Similarly, Vindhya of e-Infomedia Pvt Ltd particularly employs People with Disabilities and people from socially-disadvantaged communities as the central workforce.*

Whether TATA, Lemon Tree or e-Infomedia, all these leaders are influenced by the founder's vision and direction. It shows that the commitment of top management is of

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utmost importance to bring any change in the organisation, and DEI policy is the top-driven approach. Other level management, like middle level, ensured it was percolated to the last layers of the organisation (Kovaimani, 2023; The Brand Called You, 2022). On ability, the private organisation should focus more, for instance, neurodiversity (autism, hyperactivity, ADHD etc.).

From the words of EK,

*On various types of DEI, gender, especially female participants, is addressed better, but other things such as cognitive, physical and neuro disability and hyper-active do not adequately address it. However, I have seen in Gargi, many people with physical and neuro disabilities employees given a particular task to focus on so they can do what they can.*

Again, it is clear that MNC-based companies with visionary leaders can encourage other types of DEI, but only some of the concerns can do.

4.1.1.5 Pre-requisite of DEI in the workplace There is no second thought on the need for DEI in the corporate sector. However, what are the antecedents or pre-requisite to having a DEI climate in the workplace? In the literature section, the study cited much previous research which emphasised organisational settings, top management commitment, the mind of the leaders, psychological safety, and organisational culture etc. Do the informants validate that every construct is a critical question? For the question of what is the pre-requisite to apply DEI, RN replied,

*I would say mindset, what Lemon Tree's Aradhana did, they made a sensitisation programme for ordinary people to accept the disability. A similar example is Vindhya e-Infomedia Pvt Ltd, which mainly employs People with Disabilities and people from socially-disadvantaged communities as the primary workforce. Again it showed the organisation's mindset, which is top-driven and committed; when they start voicing and noising, it picks up. Secondly, with policy, it will be executed. Post-pandemic, many organisations accept neurodiversity. However, there are challenges in the organisation.*

DN also echoed the same view on the role of top management in applying DEI.

*DEI is most important. It is not only HSBC—most organisations. DEI is a*



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*strategic initiative. It has been followed on for quite a few years.*

DN added that, “We can change the managers’ unconscious bias through various training programmes on DEI, and we attempted in the past too.

## 4.2 Outcomes of Interview: Broad themes

Broad themes are derived based on the interviews textual data from the informants.

Themes are positive and negative from the DEI’s perspectives. They are given below:

- Paradox:
  - Meritocracy
    - \* Core area of the business
    - \* Competition and Survival
    - \* Quality
    - \* efficiency
    - \* place for talent
  - Inclusiveness
    - \* More on the non-core area of Business
    - \* More representation of various identities
    - \* Accepting all ability
    - \* Workplace dignity

On types of DEI, Gender DEI is much practised in MNCs and Large organisations. Caste DEI is invisible or blinding, and people have not considered it. However, the interviews bring out the key reasons for not supporting caste DEI in the organisation. Also, other types of DEI have come out of the interviews.

- Types of DEI:
  - Gender DEI
    - \* (+) More representation is welcome
    - \* (+) Contributing to Business
    - \* (+) change in culture
    - \* (-) Tokenism
    - \* (-) Overdrive
    - \* (+) Sensitization

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- Caste DEI
    - \* (-) Invisibility
    - \* (-) surname barrier
    - \* (-) Referrals Hurdles
    - \* (-) Bias: Affinity, Unconsciousness, Confirmation
    - \* (-) Unwillingness to accept caste concern
  - Other DEI
    - \* (-) LGBTQA is still a concern
    - \* (+) Org. aware of neurodiversity
    - \* (-) PwD does not get enough attention
    - \* (+) Organisation recognition of various levels of ability

On factors determining the effective DEI implementation, the interview brought up many points, they are:

- Effective DEI
  - Type of Organisation
    - \* MSME and Family-based business - Affinity bias
    - \* MNCs, Large companies follow DEI
  - Management Policy
    - \* Role of Founders
    - \* Role of Board Members (Professional vs Family)
    - \* Mindset of key decision-makers
    - \* Commitment at every level
  - Management Practices
    - \* Department for DEI
    - \* Meetings
    - \* Discussion
    - \* Training

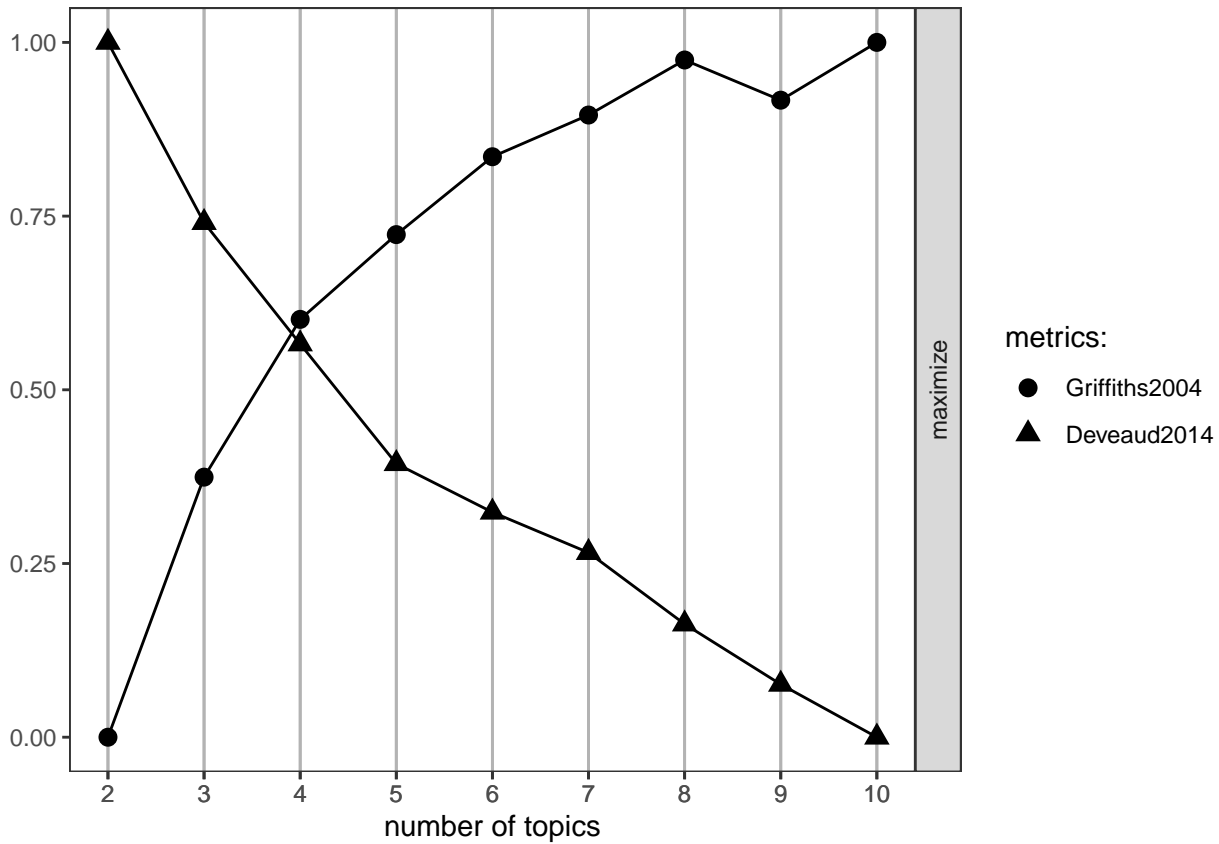
#### 4.2.1 Textual Analytics

This section dealt with informants' interview statements, which are analysed using textual analytics. The input for textual analytics is non-numerical or textual data collected from the informants. Word cloud is used to show what key terms are frequently appearing. The

below table and chart showed the result. In the word cloud, the frequently appeared terms are DEI, women, gender, caste, organisation, corporate bias, merit, and people etc. Sentimental analysis showed the various positive and negative sentiments derived from the corpus collection. At last, Topic modelling is used to evaluate the broad topics or factors out of collected data.

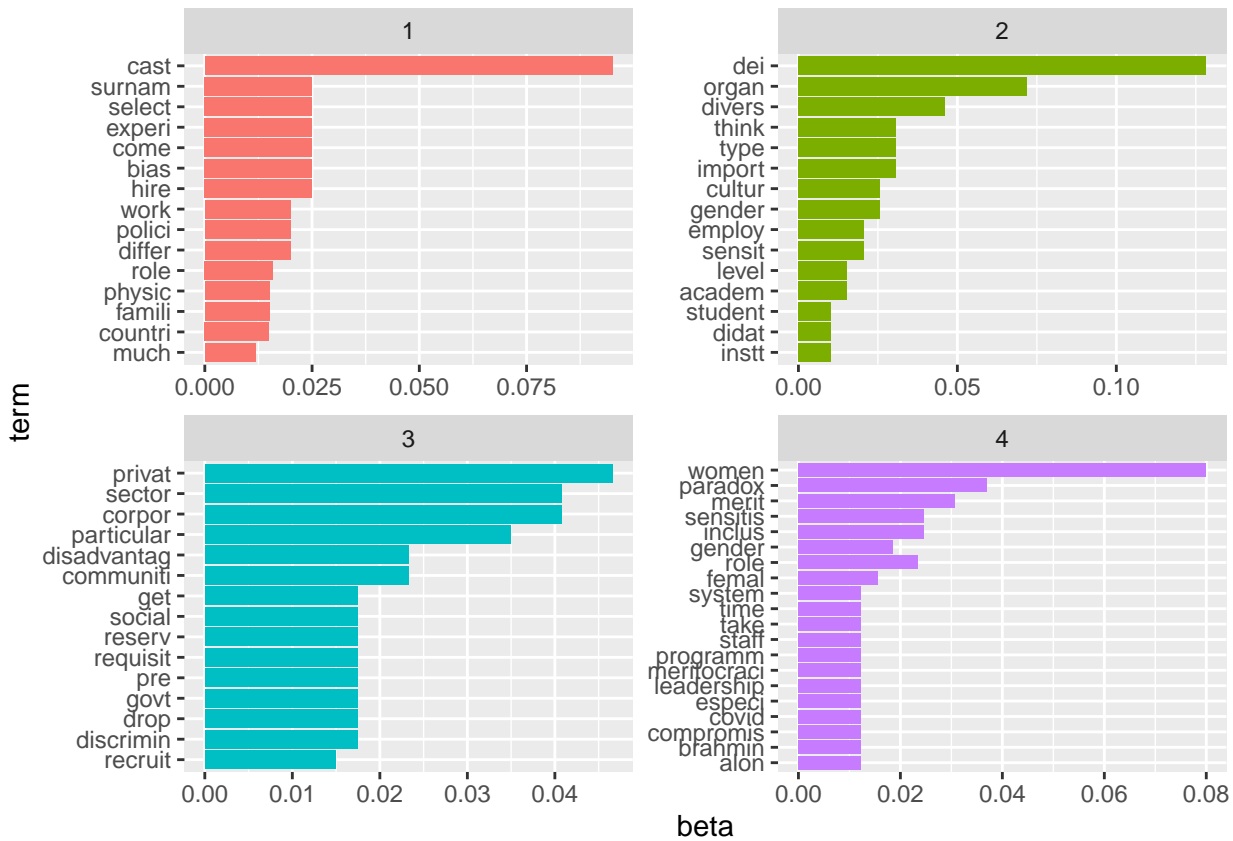


4.2.1.1 Topic Modeling Topic modelling is to develop a theory. It is based on inductive reasoning to classify or cluster the concepts. Classification of the topics or clusters is unbiased based on the collected corpus or text. [Storopoli \(2019\)](#). ([Grün et al., 2021](#); [Nikita & Nikita, 2016](#)) packages helped the study to get the number of topics.

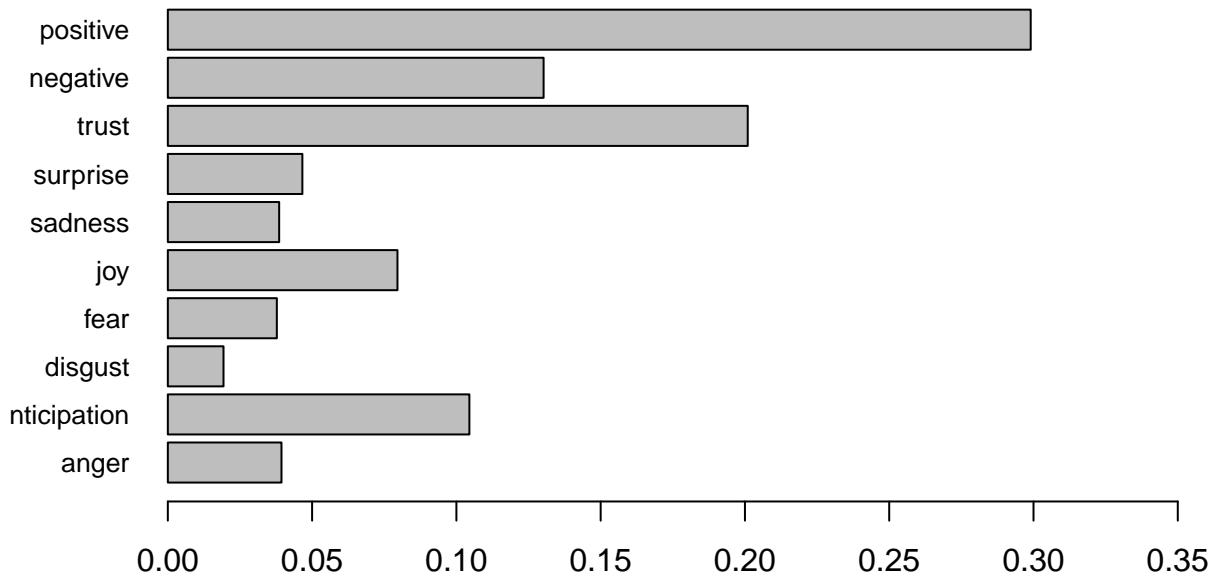


On topic modelling, the analysis showed four topics are derived. Metrics such as Griffiths and Deveaud is used to determine number of topic in the model. The interaction of two metrics determines the number of topics clustered. Two metrics showed four topic model is derived.

4.2.1.2 Sentiment Score Sentiment analysis showed positive and negative scores, and other attributes like joy, anger, fear, and disgust were given.



**Dominant sentiment score in %**



On Sentiments, the score revealed the highest score for positive, which is around .30. But on the negative side, it showed fear, disgust, anger and sadness. While the low scores for the negative attributes suggest that the text content is not strongly associated with these negative emotions. The result showed trust, which indicated that the source of information was credible.

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On topic modelling, four topics are generated. Among the four, the first topic revolves more around caste orientation, which includes surname, selection, bias, and family business. Topic 2 looks like the organisation as a whole, which includes DEI, culture, type of DEI, sensitisation and importance of DEI. Topic 3 is about as sector, which includes corporate, social disadvantage, reservation and Government, etc., and it shows how marginalised communities faced problems accessing corporate resources. Last, Topic 4 is the mixed element of women: paradox, merit, inclusiveness, compromise and leadership. Nevertheless, in a nutshell, topic 4 is, balancing competing priorities and aspects of gender-based DEI.

## 5 Quantitative Research

Based on the study’s objective, hypotheses are formulated, and empirical observation tests all the hypotheses.

### 5.1 Reliability analysis and Descriptive statistics

The analysis showed the cronbach alpha dimensions, which is more than .7 suggested by Nunnally (1994). Workplace dignity has four dimensions, DEI climate has three, and psychological safety is unidimensional. All the variables are measured on 5 point rating scale. The output is shown in the order of (alpha, mean and std. deviation). Workplace dignity dimensions: RES = ( $\alpha = 0.949, M=4.338, SD=0.808$ ), CC = ( $\alpha = 0.835, M=3.96, SD=0.877$ ), EQ = ( $\alpha = 0.871, M=3.907, SD=0.961$ ), IV = ( $\alpha = 0.914, M=4.138, SD=0.932$ ).

Similarly, DEI climate has three dimensions; results showed, OV = ( $\alpha = 0.937, M=3.784, SD=0.999$ ), PP = ( $\alpha = 0.863, M=3.858, SD=0.847$ ), INC = ( $\alpha = 0.864, M=3.797, SD=0.842$ ). Psychological safety is single dimensions, ( $\alpha = 0.697, M=3.37, SD=0.665$ ). All three constructs’ alpha scores are more than .7, and the mean scores range between 3 to 4.5. Descriptive statistics fulfill the criteria to do further analysis like correlation and regression.

### 5.2 Correlation Analysis

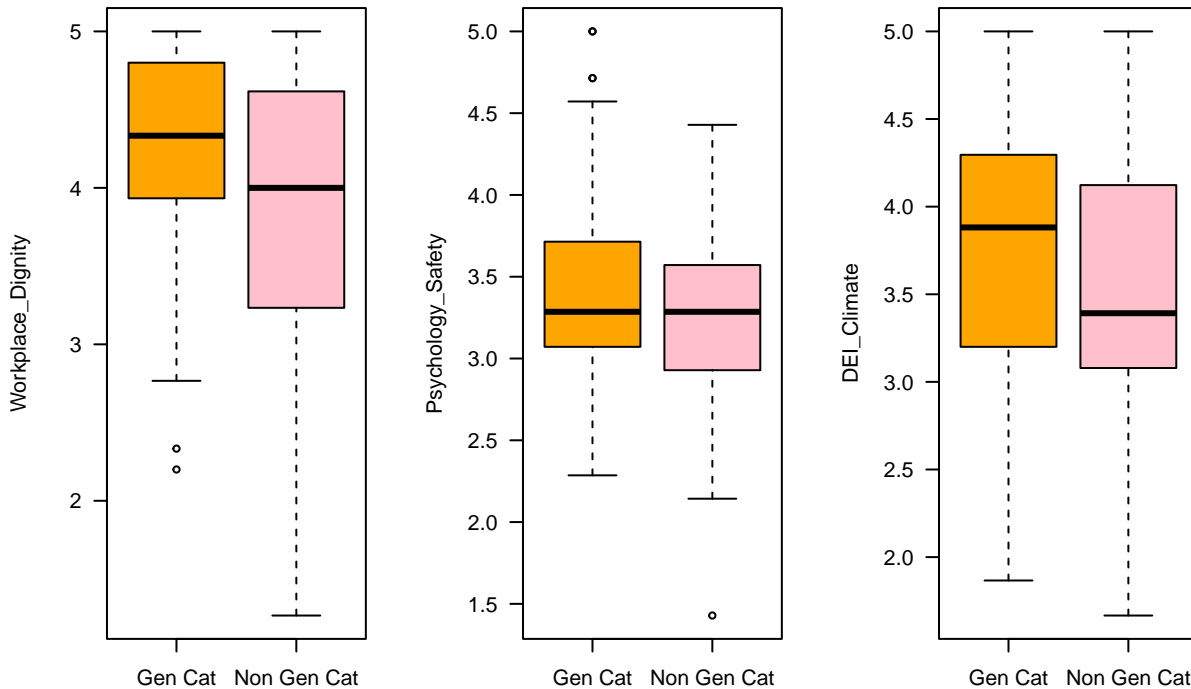
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1 Caste	1	-0.140	-0.120	-0.180	-0.130	-0.240	-0.140
2 OverallDEI	-0.140	1	0.800	0.780	0.900	0.830	0.620
3 Policy and Procedure	-0.120	0.800	1	0.810	0.890	0.700	0.640
4 Inclusiveness	-0.180	0.780	0.810	1	0.920	0.730	0.660
5 DEI climate	-0.130	0.900	0.890	0.920	1	0.800	0.660
6 WorkPlace Dignity	-0.240	0.830	0.700	0.730	0.800	1	0.630
7 Psychology safety	-0.140	0.620	0.640	0.660	0.660	0.630	1

The relationship among the constructs is explored with the support of Pearson correlations.

Among the constructs, caste is a dummy variable; the rest of the constructs have taken an overall mean score. The relationship is ranged between .12 to .920. DEI Climate comprises Overall DEI, policies and procedures and inclusiveness.

### 5.3 Graphs - Key constructs by Caste

The below graph shows the result of four key constructs, Workplace dignity, Overall DEI, Inclusiveness and Psychology safety by caste; caste is regrouped into two categories, namely, the General category and other is Non-General category which combines OBCs, SC/STs, because of less representation of a sample. Except for the rest of the variables, the general category perceived higher mean score than non-general category respondents. Further, to establish a relationship between gender and caste on study constructs, regression analysis is used.





## 5.4 Regression Analysis - constructs by Caste and Gender

The regression outcome showed that, except for workplace dignity, caste would not establish any significant relationship. On workplace dignity, the general category is perceived higher than the non-general category ( $\beta = -.44, p < .05$ ) and is statistically significant at a 5% level.

=====			
Dependent variable:			
	DEI_Climate	Workplace_Dignity	Psychology_Safety
	(1)	(2)	(3)
-----			
Constant	3.800*** (0.150)	4.300*** (0.150)	3.400*** (0.130)
GenderMale	-0.100 (0.190)	-0.210 (0.190)	0.090 (0.160)
Caste_IndNon Gen Cat	-0.240 (0.210)	-0.440** (0.210)	-0.220 (0.180)
-----			
Observations	75	75	75
R2	0.022	0.074	0.024
Adjusted R2	-0.005	0.048	-0.003
Residual Std. Error (df = 72)	0.800	0.800	0.670
F Statistic (df = 2; 72)	0.810	2.900*	0.890
=====			

Note:

\* $p < 0.1$ ; \*\* $p < 0.05$ ; \*\*\* $p < 0.01$

## 5.5 Partial least square - Structural equation model (PLS-SEM)

PLS-SEM is a statistical technique widely used in management and humanities domains. It is used to explore and examine the relationship among the constructs. The study followed the guidelines given by [Hair Jr et al. \(2021\)](#). PLS-SEM is suitable for small samples, even below 100 [Chin & Newsted \(1999\)](#). SEM technique is a multivariate model, which is most suitable when the theoretical model contains more than one predictor or outcome variable and examines the relationship [Hair et al. \(2006\)](#). The study used smart pls version 4.0 to do the analysis [Ringle et al. \(2022\)](#).

### 5.5.1 Theoretical model

The study wants to explore the relationship among the selected constructs. The below diagram shows the relationship, DEI climate enacts as a mediator, caste enacts as moderator, psychological safety as a predictor and workplace dignity as the outcome variable.

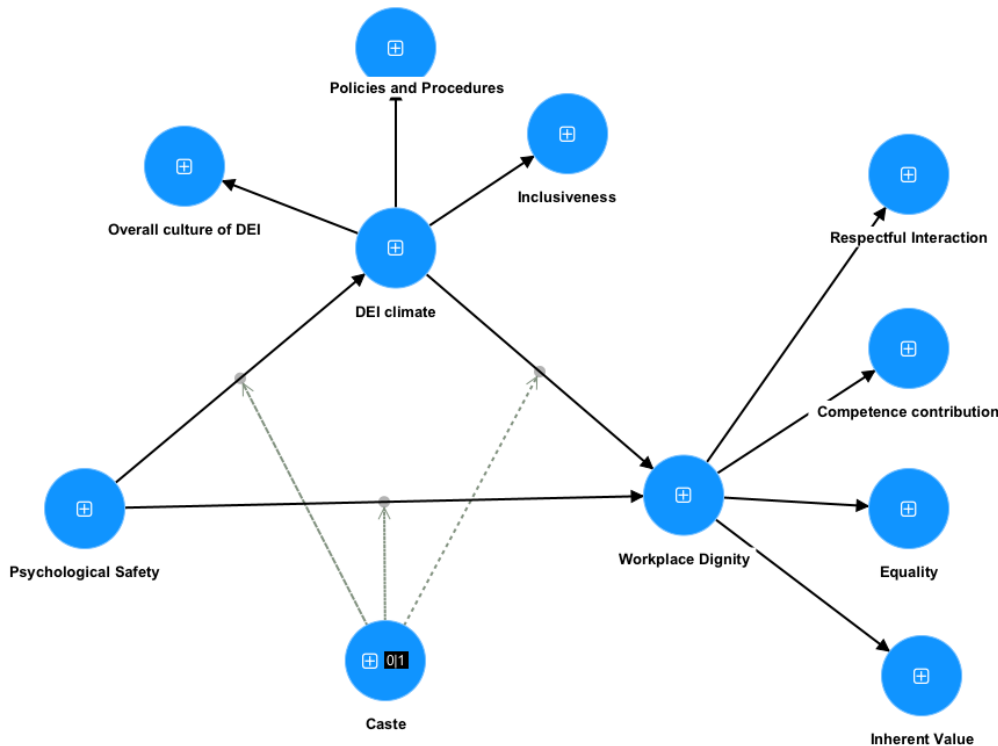


Figure 1: Theoretical Model

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### 5.5.2 Measurement Model or Outer model

The outer or measurement model in PLS-SEM dealt with each construct or block. The relationship between each construct and its manifested items or variables is assessed through factor loading. It assesses the reliability and validity, including alpha, composite reliability (CR), average variance extraction (AVE) and discriminant validity through the Fornell-Larcker test. It also measures the model quality through various R square and F square statistics. [Hair Jr et al. \(20 C.E.\)](#).

**5.5.2.1 Outer model loadings:** The outer loading table showed the relationship between the construct and its items in the outer model. SEM literature suggested having at least a .70 cut-off as an item qualifier. In this study, factor loading between construct and items is more than .70, but for the items such as PF02 and PF06, they are .65 and .63, respectively, which are close to .70.

### 5.5.3 Reliability and Validity

To assess the consistency of the construct, cronbach alpha and composite reliability are mandatory. Both should have more than .7, which ensures the construct's reliability. ([Fornell & Larcker, 1981](#); [Nunnally, 1994](#)). Similarly, AVE should be more than .5, which assures the convergent validity of the measurement model.

### 5.5.4 Discriminant Validity

[Fornell & Larcker \(1981\)](#) suggested discriminant validity, where respondents can discriminate between positive and negative items or constructs in the given study. The square root of AVE should be greater than the correlation value of given constructs. For instance: AVE of CC is .75, the square root is .87, and the correlation value of other constructs with CC should be less than .87. It assured discriminant validity. Similarly, for the rest of the constructs.

### 5.5.5 Model quality - R square

R square is the ratio which is ranged between 0 to 1. It is a measure of goodness fit in regression analysis. Higher the value higher the explained variance between independent and dependent variables. This given model showed Psychology safety can explain the

Table 3: Outer loadings

Items	CC	EQ	INC	INV	Overall_DEI	PP	Psyc_Safety	RES
CC01	0.8							
CC02	0.87							
CC03	0.92							
EQ01		0.94						
EQ02		0.95						
INC01			0.83					
INC02			0.82					
INC03			0.89					
INC04			0.75					
INC05			0.75					
IV01				0.93				
IV02				0.89				
IV03				0.95				
OV01					0.89			
OV02					0.83			
OV03					0.93			
OV04					0.91			
OV05					0.90			
PF02							0.65	
PF04							0.84	
PF06							0.63	
PF07							0.86	
PP01						0.89		
PP02						0.85		
PP03						0.92		
RES02								0.97
RES03								0.97

Table 4: Reliability and AVE

Constructs Name	Alpha	CR	AVE
CC	0.83	0.9	0.75
EQ	0.87	0.94	0.89
INC	0.87	0.9	0.65
INV	0.91	0.95	0.85
Overall_DEI	0.94	0.95	0.8
PP	0.87	0.92	0.79
Psyc_Safety	0.75	0.84	0.57
RES	0.94	0.97	0.94

Table 5: Fornell-Larcker test

Items	CC	EQ	INC	INV	Overall_DEI	PP	Psyc_Safety	RES
CC	0.87	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
EQ	0.82	0.94	-	-	-	-	-	-
INC	0.69	0.67	0.81	-	-	-	-	-
INV	0.76	0.85	0.67	0.92	-	-	-	-
Overall_DEI	0.76	0.78	0.78	0.75	0.90	-	-	-
PP	0.59	0.69	0.82	0.65	0.80	0.89	-	-
Psyc_Safety	0.63	0.68	0.69	0.64	0.68	0.68	0.75	-
RES	0.71	0.73	0.61	0.72	0.71	0.61	0.52	0.97

Table 6: R square

Constructs	R-square	R-square adjusted
DEI climate	0.58	0.56
WPD	0.72	0.7

changes in DEI climate has .581 or 58.1%; similarly, both psychological safety and DEI climate combined can influence Workplace dignity is .719 or 71.9%.

### 5.5.6 Model quality - F square

F square assesses the effect size; it is the strength or weight or path coefficient that exists in the population. It is one model quality measure like R square. F square values of 0.02, 0.15, and 0.35 for the significant independent or predictor variables represent low, medium and high effects, respectively, on outcome variables. [Cohen \(1992\)](#). In the current study, the H1 effect size is small, but H2 and H3 have a high effect size, more than .35.

### 5.5.7 Total Effect between Psychological safety and WPD

Inner, structural, or path models test the hypothesis or path relationship between variables. Using bootstrapping or resampling method of 5000 times suggested by [Ringle et al. \(2022\)](#). The below table shows H1: the relationship between psychology safety and

Table 7: F square

Hypothesis	F square
H1: Pscy_safety & WPD	0.04
H2:Pscy_safety & DEI	0.71
H3:DEI & WPD	0.36

Table 8: Total Effect

Path Relationship	Original sample	Sample mean	STDEV	T stats	P values
Psyc_Safety -> WPD	0.69	0.7	0.05	13.34	0.00

WPD beta is ( $\beta .69, p < .001$ ). It showed relationship is statistically significant. However, literature based on mediator and moderator suggested obtained beta between independent and dependent variables is not true; other variables can be an attribute or accountable to the relationship. It is better to use a mediator and moderator suggested by the prior literature (R. M. Baron & Kenny, 1986; Hayes, 2009).

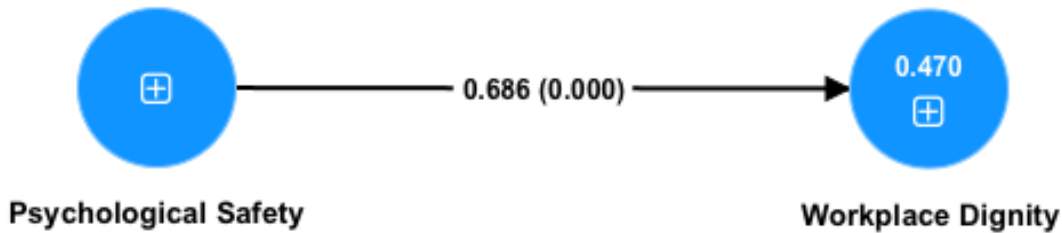


Figure 2: Total effect

### 5.5.8 Boot strapping coefficient Estimation - Mediator analysis

The below table shows the result of the inner model using bootstrapping estimation. out of main three hypotheses, H1 ( $\beta = .17, p = .15$ ), not significant, H2 ( $\beta = .63, p < .001$ ), and H3 ( $\beta = .57, p < .001$ ). Both H2 and H3 have established significant relationships. Earlier, the relationship between psychological safety and WPD is ( $\beta .69$ ), and after the introduction of mediator variables, DEI Climate, the relationship becomes ( $\beta = .17$ ); this showed the relationship weakens due to mediator variables, and it is proved there is the role of DEI climate as a mediator between psychology safety and WPD.

Below table showed, H4 dealt with mediator, ( $\beta = .36, p < .001$ ). It showed that the beta is reduced to .36 from .69 and is statistically significant. Hypotheses H2 and H3 are significant and measure the indirect effect. H1 showed no direct relationship ( $\beta = .17, p = .15$ ). Results indicated a full mediation effect. The model supported the H2, H3 and H4 on mediator analysis.

Table 9: Boot strapping Estimation

Path Relationship	Original sample	Sample mean	STDEV	T stats	P values
H1-Psync_Safety -> WPD	0.17	0.17	0.12	1.44	0.15
H2-Psync_Safety -> DEI climate	0.63	0.64	0.07	9.18	0.00
H3-DEI climate -> WPD	0.57	0.57	0.13	4.29	0.00
DEI climate -> INC	0.93	0.93	0.02	45.81	0.00
DEI climate -> Overall_DEI	0.94	0.94	0.02	58.28	0.00
DEI climate -> PP	0.92	0.92	0.02	50.83	0.00
WPD -> CC	0.9	0.9	0.03	32.65	0.00
WPD -> Equality	0.92	0.92	0.02	61.3	0.00
WPD -> Inherent Value	0.91	0.91	0.03	30.44	0.00
WPD -> RES	0.87	0.86	0.04	20.15	0.00

Table 10: Mediator Estimation

Path Relationship	Original sample	Sample mean	STDEV	T stats	P values
H4-Psync_Safety -> DEI climate -> WPD	0.36	0.37	0.1	3.49	0.00

### 5.5.9 Boot strapping coefficient Estimation - Moderator analysis

**Blair (2019)** explained that the role of the moderator is not to check the causal mechanism between X and Y using Z as the third variable. However, the role of the moderator can strengthen, weaken or reverse the relationship between two variables, and under what condition can the relationship be altered? Western studies used race as a moderator between psychological safety and DEI. The current study used caste as a moderator between variables, testing three more hypotheses. H5, H6 and H7. In other words, when caste and psychological safety can alter the relationship with WPD.

H5 ( $\beta=.46, p<.05$ ), H5 ( $\beta=-.06, p=.81$ ), and H7 ( $\beta=.34, p=.17$ ). Among the three moderator hypotheses, only H5 is statistically significant. In other words, caste can change the relationship between psychological safety and DEI climate. H6 and H7 did not prove the role of caste as a moderator between variables. The diagram below shows the mediator and moderator relationship on each path; it shows the beta value, and inside the parenthesis

Table 11: Moderator Estimation

Path Relationship	Original sample	Sample mean	STDEV	T stats	P values
H5-Caste x Psync_Safety -> DEI climate	0.46	0.45	0.21	2.17	0.03
H6-Caste x Psync_Safety -> WPD	-0.06	-0.07	0.25	0.24	0.81
H7-Caste x DEI climate -> WPD	0.34	0.34	0.24	1.38	0.17

shows the p-value. In the diagram representation, the mediator forms a triangle and the moderator's perpendicular bisector between two variables.

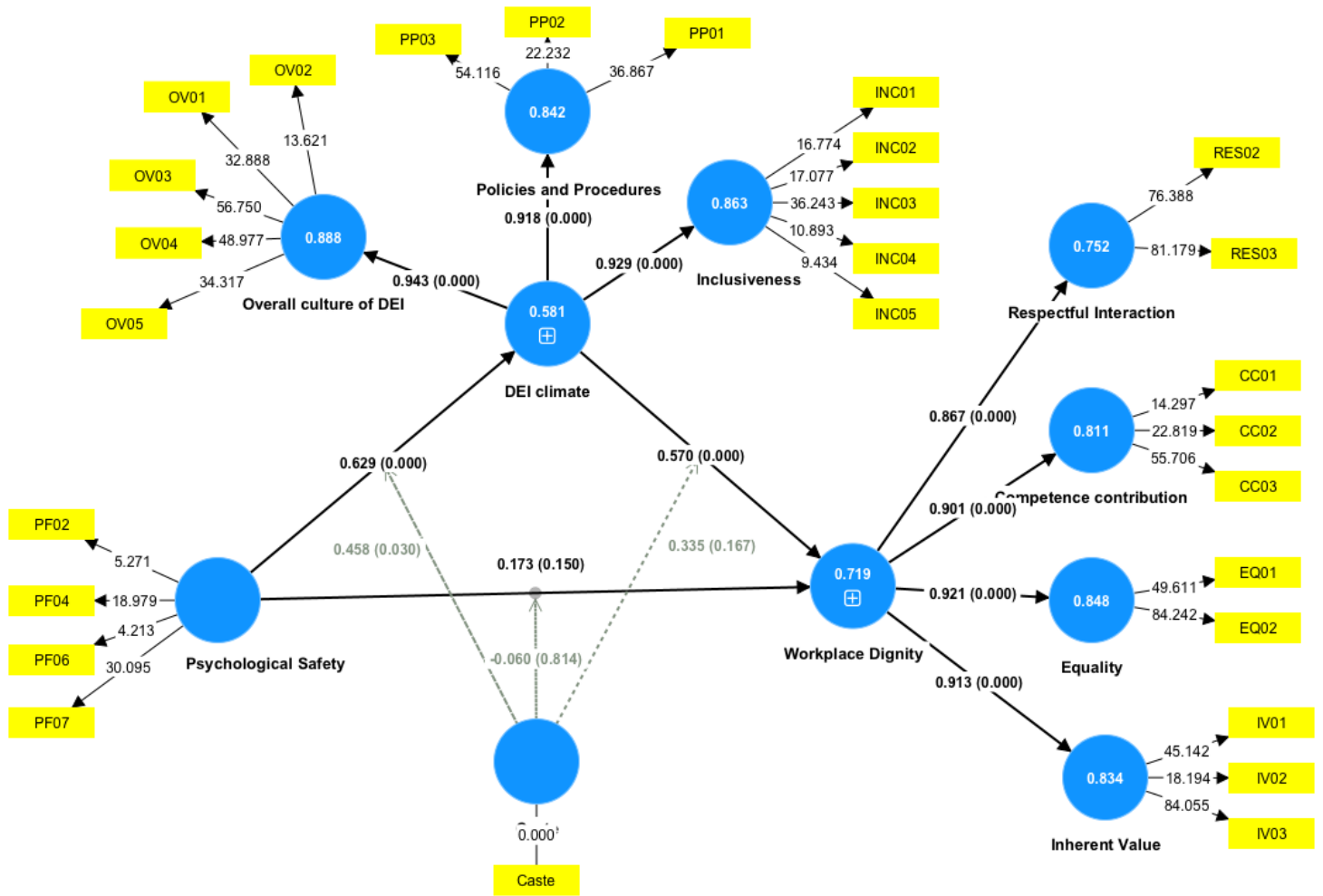


Figure 3: Boot strapping estimates



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## 6 Findings, Discussions and Recommendations

The current study broadly followed three approaches to data analysis: first, qualitative approach; second, textual analysis (using qualitative data but quantitative approach) and third, quantitative approach. The study attempts to converge or triangulate findings in this section. The qualitative outcome showed that corporate is a trade-off between meritocracy and inclusiveness to remove the tensions or paradoxes created in the system. Meritocracy is given importance in the core business area. At the same time, inclusiveness is adopted in the non-core area where business processes or efficiency are of little concern. Corporations like Lemon Tree and e-Infomedia utilise resources based on their capabilities and build a brand for their organisation in the eyes of society. Many companies, including small organisations, embrace gender DEI, but leaders feel it is also used as tokenism in the corporate to fill the vacancy. Caste still becomes invisible or inattention to most managers especially family-based and MSME businesses. At face value, there is not much bias in hiring based on caste. However, caste is disguised in the form of family background, surname, and region etc. In the interest of affinity bias and other unconscious biases, caste still plays a vital role in recruitment and hiring. It also learned that corporate showed concern about including neuro diversity in MNCs.

Results of the quantitative analysis showed caste moderated psychology safety and DEI climate. DEI played as the mediator between psychology safety and workplace dignity. It showed that psychological safety is not directly related to workplace dignity but can be related when it passes through a DEI climate. Both psychology safety and DEI can influence workplace dignity by almost 72%. It indicated that the role of DEI and psychological safety is essential to attain the workplace. Surprisingly, gender does not show any statistical relationship with any of the three constructs in the regression model.

All three approaches accepted the role of caste and discrimination in hiring is not explicit but in the minds of recruiters it is prevailing. Gender-based DEI has driven well, especially female get their traction in the corporates. Corporate acknowledged the PwD and Neurodiversity, and some organisations started incorporating them in their policy. Caste sensitisation is nil, and corporate is still uncomfortable opening the discussion on caste-related DEI. MSME and family-based businesses still hold the caste value in their hiring process. Affinity and unconscious bias still exist, hindering overall private sector DEI

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policy. The study showed the role of psychological safety of utmost importance to keep workplace culture and environment more dignified. A continuous watch over DEI compliance and top management's participation in DEI initiatives make DEI policy active.

## 6.1 Recommendations, Limitations and Conclusions

Stone (2001) The policy is known for its paradox. Policy implementation never followed a linear approach; it is more cyclical and non-linear. In the words of Harold Lasswell, the political model says, "Who gets what, when and how." Distributions of things: materialistic or social construct between various stakeholders of the society and distribution through merit or ranking or voting participation brought policy controversies. Merit is a thorny issue. How to compare people born with inherited privileges on the one hand and, on the other hand, a massive population would not access basic things over many hundred years? Despite many policies rolled out. Based on the study results and findings, I recommend motivating corporate stakeholders to enhance caste-based DEI.

- Caste invisibility prevails in the corporate sector; top management should take initiatives to overcome such biases and discrimination as they have done with gender-based DEI.
- In the form of CSR, corporates already provide education and health. Unfortunately, the focus on livelihood and employment could be better; The CSR focus should shift to providing quality livelihood through employment opportunities to the marginalised communities.
- Many managers are not open to discussing the caste problem in the workspace; the organisation should start the conversation about caste and their implications in the society and organisation level, opening people's minds to caste blinding Though the policy is there, the practice is ineffective; bringing awareness or a caste sensitisation programme, especially to recruiters and hiring managers, may change the situation.
- The Government should incentivise family-based businesses and MSMEs to include caste and disability-based DEI.
- DEI practices are as equal as policy. Many organisation practices have an open team on DEI, which needs more expertise than general HR to ensure DEI practices are followed per the policy.

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The study also admitted various limitations in terms of sample size, limited constructs used to explain the DEI phenomena and also study would not cover various sectors of the private organisation. All these limitations can be taken care of in future research by potential researchers in this field. The key contribution of this study is emphasising caste-based DEI in private organisations. It is a missing piece in terms of DEI literature and application in various sectors.

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## Annexure-A

### 7 Interview schedule - DEI from Corporate managers and Leaders

#### Question for Interview Schedule – DEI Managers/Leaders

- 1. Why DEI is important to the corporate or any other Institution to implement it?
- 2. What is the main objectives of companies to encourage DEI based work environment?
- 3. What is the pre requisite to implement DEI in the corporate sector?
- 4. What are all the process (recruitment, selection, appraisal, and success planning) DEI is applied?
- 5. What are the key components of DEI (for example gender, caste, physical disability, Rural back ground, and Others)?
- 6. What are the steps taken into various sensitization like (gender / caste) in the organization?
- 7. What is the representation of marginalized or minority community in your organization and what level of job they are placed?
- 8. Does organization has scope to address any sort of discrimination against employees?
- 9. Do you think recruiting marginalized caste people in various layers of organization affect the productivity or meritorious elements of the work?