

## Urban Middle Class Dilemma: A Social Psychological Review of Ajay Navaria's *Unclaimed Terrain*

Deepak Chaudhary

### Abstract

The rapid pace of Indian urbanization and positive discrimination policies have led to the emergence of an urban well-to-do Dalit population who now have to face evolved modes of social exclusion and discrimination. This paper looks at affectations of these mechanisms through the lens of social psychology scholarship on intergroup interactions and its effects on relative cognitive performance of individuals coming from different social and cultural locations in the short story collection *Unclaimed Terrain* by Ajay Navaria, a Hindi Dalit writer from Delhi. The paper deals with implied cognitive threats in the forms of stereotypes, stigma, ambivalent discrimination, skewed power share, hierarchical structures, status quo justifications, affirmative action policies and the resultant coping mechanisms employed by Navaria's urban middle class characters.

**Keywords:** Dalit literature, urban middle class Dalits, social psychology, reservation policies, ambivalent discrimination

"People know about the [Ku Klux] Klan and the overt racism but the killing of one's soul, little by little, day after day, is a lot worse than someone coming to your house and lynching you."

—Samuel L. Jackson (Mehta, 2019)

Post-liberalization, urban spaces in India have experienced rapid expansion and are home to an emerging well-to-do Dalit population. Unfortunately, these spaces seem to have developed modern modes of social exclusion and discrimination which highly influence movement