

ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the societal implications of reincarnation assertions on familial relationships, caste dynamics, and social mobility, with an emphasis on case studies from Haryana and West Bengal, India. Through the examination of individual narratives and collective behaviours, it becomes evident that beliefs in reincarnation significantly influence personal identities and social connections, frequently leading to the emergence of dual kinship structures and the questioning of established caste divisions. In Haryana, assertions of reincarnation serve to strengthen caste and kinship connections by associating individuals with their current and previous familial units, occasionally leading to a reconfiguration of familial roles. In West Bengal, the concept of reincarnation serves as a mechanism for transcending social and caste divisions, facilitating a degree of fluidity in social hierarchy. The study utilises sociological frameworks, including Berger's concept of the "sacred canopy" and Goffman's frame analysis, to situate reincarnation as a cultural and religious mechanism that aids individuals in managing trauma, loss, and identity amid evolving social environments. The research emphasises the ways in which spiritual leaders validate claims of reincarnation, situating these assertions within the framework of local customs and influencing the reactions of the community. This work emphasises "claims of reincarnation" instead of attempting to validate the phenomenon, highlighting how such beliefs maintain or evolve social structures. It provides a distinctive perspective on the influence of religion in shaping social realities, identity, and resilience.