RESEARCH NOTE

Quality, Employability and Capabilities: The Enduring Elusive Triangle in Indian Education

Lakshmi Narayanan Venkataraman

Summary

India is historically known for its caste system and ascriptive social stratification. Inheritance-based ascription permits a small percentage of the population to be at the top of the social hierarchy and enjoy economic privileges. For this reason, the intersection between caste and economic factors often reproduces the "underclass" (MacDonald 1997). This is largely due to the country's socio-historic underpinnings. Although caste-specific sociological representation has been well established in the mainstream literature, this paper analyses the intersectional aspects of caste and class dimensions. Its analysis of the social underclass is based on interviews with educated unemployed youths in southern India. As the paper has been conceptually influenced by capability approach (Sen 1999), its main aim is to highlight the dualistic interaction between human agency and social structure. To this end, reflexive insights were collected from an ethnographic restudy of Sripuram in South India. Sripuram, a classic sociological field site, was first studied by renowned Indian sociologist André Béteille in the 1960s. He conducted fieldwork on caste, class and power dimensions in this village. By revisiting the same village five decades later, the author of this paper has attempted to analyse the caste, class and education of the poor.

Keywords: intersectionality, capability approach, ethnography, underclass, youth, India, education, caste system

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Introduction

Educational reality in India lies between two extremes today. On the one hand, there are official documents that often celebrate the increasing "achievements" of school education, while on the other, enrolment rates have been decreasing at state schools over the years. With this background in mind, the present paper analyses the quality of education that deprived children and unemployed youths have obtained in southern India and how it has affected their employability and capability. These two groups of people have been identified as poor since their daily lives are spent on the...