

Caste Stigma And Discrimination In Educational Institutions: Looking Through Goffman's Interaction Approach

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Abstract:

The present paper attempts to explore Goffman's interaction approach and his constructs like the ritualized interaction and stigma in particular, reflecting on the potential of these in helping to understand and explain the case of exclusion and discrimination of the stigmatized Dalit students in educational spaces. The paper explores specific aspects of his micro sociology that can be useful for the research around the subject.

Introduction

The caste system, has been one of the most rigid forms of stratification characterizing the Indian society. In practice, the caste system is marked by profound inequality between hierarchically arranged caste groups in terms of material resources and power. This inequality is most detrimental in its effects for the Dalits or the notified Scheduled Castes, placed at the very bottom of this hierarchy. They have been victims of caste-discrimination and exploitation in various aspects of social life. One of these has been their access to knowledge. The position of Dalits as 'untouchables' in the caste system has been a major factor which not only led to their historical exclusion from knowledge and education but the stigma of being an 'untouchable' continues to impact their educational access and experience in a detrimental way. This stigma has not only kept the members of the group away from accessing the schools and traditions of modern learning (Rao, 2013), but at the same time it also lies at the root of the discrimination of the former within the institutional settings.

The poor educational status of the group has drawn considerable attention of the researchers of the field. However, a very critical aspect is that despite the fact that the existing research in the field has broadly highlighted the role of caste in education, at the same time there have not been many studies that examine the manner in which stigmatization of the Dalits shapes the social relations within the educational institutions- both at the level of the school and further higher- and the institutional processes which explain the poor performance of the group. As scholars like Nambissan (2010), in the context of the schooling of Dalit children highlight 'though studies have pointed to the discrimination that Dalits in India have historically faced because of their caste location and the continued stigmatization of their identities as 'ex-untouchables', the manner in which the latter shapes the social relation within schools and the pedagogic practices and classroom processes and thereby learning is yet to be the serious focus of research attention' (Nambissan, p 95). So, in order to understand the issue in depth, it is important that more and