

Book Review: Nandini, Hebbar N. *Gender, Caste, and Class in South India's Technical Institutions*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2024. 272 pages, eBook, \$115.

Gender, Caste, and Class in South India's Technical Institutions highlights the lives of young people who aspire to enter the engineering profession, the alternative paths they take to do so, and norms reflecting changes in cultural values that have come to be associated with the strong desire to become successful engineers. The book examines how private engineering colleges in Tamil Nadu maintain social inequalities despite increasing access for diverse students. The ethnographic study emphasizes how accepted cultural roles for men and women, coupled with caste-based, class-driven capital shape educational and career outcomes; thereby propagating existing social stratification structures.

The book is organized with an introduction (The Engineering Mania) and six chapters. An abridged thematic focus of each chapter follows: Chapter 1 ('Kinning' Education: Genealogies of Private Engineering Colleges) illustrates the relationship between philanthropy, patronage, and profit that determines the economic, social, and cultural reasoning for technical institutions. The introductory chapter examines the immense social value placed on technical education as a viable pathway to a good life, respectable middle-class identity, and high status. Chapter 2 ('Edupreneurship': Mapping Management Practices) examines the proliferation of private engineering colleges in Tamil Nadu to spotlight the role played by 'institutional' big men in creating the culture of 'edupreneurhip'. The coinage 'edupreneurship' implies educational enterprise/industry. Chapter 3 (Becoming Professional: Dilemmas in Emerging 'Employable') focuses on the crisis of employability and the consequent pressure on educational institutions to train employable students, particularly in a global knowledge economy. Chapter 4 (Manufacturing Respectability: Gendering the Engineering College Boom) discusses social constructions of gender on campus and how young women negotiate college life in a situation

where their entry into higher education is based on the importance of marriage and increased respectability for their families. Chapter 5 (Negotiating Intimate Risk: Gendered Subjectivities, Performativity, and Self-Making) examines the high drop-out rate of young women from higher education if their families suspected that the presence of young women in college jeopardized their marriage prospects or the family's respectability. And, Chapter 6 (Engineering Aspirations and Lives of Youth: Implications for Gender, Caste, and Class) provides not only some insight into the lives of youth, but also the broader narratives of gender, caste, and class in a system in which they find themselves.

Based on the author's ethnographic study, this book examines how private engineering colleges in the South Indian state of Tamil Nadu maintain social inequalities despite increasing access for diverse students. By drawing on the narratives of youth, the author holds a mirror to the social landscape of India's private educational institutions. The study highlights the role of gender, caste, and class in these institutions. For example, the autonomy and experience of female students are impacted by the strict regulation and "respectability" norms enforced by families and colleges they have to navigate. Furthermore, despite the increase in first-generation learners in private institutions, existing social hierarchies of caste and class are not dismantled, but instead perpetuated. In addition, students lacking specific cultural and social capital struggle securing employment, an indication that even acquisition of technical skills is not a guarantee of upward social mobility. What is more, entry into engineering, for women, is a strategic, family-driven choice to enhance social standing. To cap it, employment and marriage choices continue to be determined by caste. Lastly, the control of technical education by powerful private actors largely influences the environment, including shaping the curriculum and social dynamics within engineering colleges. By studying young women in an engineering college, Hebbar constructed a

story about contemporary India, particularly regarding the issue of caste and higher education, the aspirations of young women, familial anxieties, caste identities, restrictions, and control.

This intensive ethnographic study shows the connection between the interests of rich private actors who control private engineering education and the prospects of social mobility for families that drive the aspirations of young women, and the roles of gender, caste, and class in influencing their educational outcomes. The engaging ethnographic analysis of Hebbar's book offers an insightful study of youth culture and student aspirations in a private engineering college in Tamil Nadu and, thus, contributes to expanding the frontiers of knowledge on the dynamics of gender, caste, and class in South India. Also, the ethnographic narratives also portray young women's hopes, dilemmas, and disappointments in a supposedly post-liberal Indian society. Understandably, gender, caste, and class do not exist in a vacuum; they intersect with patriarchy. Men mostly occupy power positions and enjoy having more power, while women occupy a lower position in almost all identity groups and sub-groups.

To the credit of Nandini Hebbar, *Gender, Caste, and Class in South India's Technical Institutions* broke ground as the first ethnographic study of its kind, focusing on women and engineering colleges in South India. The ethnographic analysis presents the diverse voices and narratives of young female students. Also, this in-depth ethnographic study unveils the connections between student subjectivities and objective factors, such as caste and capital. Key findings regarding the intersection of gender, caste and class in the technical institutions include, among others, that students lacking specific cultural and social capital struggle with employment, an indication that technical education does not offer assurance of upward mobility. In sum, this book offers a critical perspective on how technical education in South India operates in a domain where traditional, gendered, and caste-based structures are reinforced in modern

settings. Hebbbar's writing style is clear and readable. Scholars and students of Gender, Women's Studies and Social Inequality/Stratification, will find Hebbbar's book a good read.

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