

what about the intimacies, real or desired? The author emphasises the importance of *everyday* policing throughout the book, arguing that it is in this domain that the relationship between law, science, and state violence is both most fraught and those tensions actively managed. It remains unclear, however, what the relationship is between the everyday and the exceptional, for example, the role of forensic psychologists in a range of cases (chapter 4) and specifically in terrorism cases (chapter 6). Further, the concept of everyday policing itself remains a bit of a black box: e.g., given the tremendous hierarchy within the police—by rank, caste, gender—it surely matters whose everyday policing we are talking about. Are the tensions in the relationship between law, science, and state violence or invocations of justice and social order similarly constituted for differently positioned police practitioners?

In conclusion, I would like to draw out some of the ways in which the key arguments of this book are generative. The primary goal of locating the contingent state in action allows Lokaneeta to show readers a disaggregated set of state and semi-state actors collaborating to produce police power. This could be considered more broadly as the police power of the contingent state is also institutionally diverse and several discrete state actors beyond the police are in the business of policing today. Further, the notion of scaffolding is useful to think about law and violence even in sites that Lokaneeta brackets as exceptional (conflict, counterinsurgency). This book will inspire much debate and inquiry and must be read widely.

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Ajantha Subramanian. 2019. *The Caste of Merit: Engineering Education in India*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press. x + 374 pp. Notes, references, index. \$49.95 (eBook).

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It was in the 1950s that Indian Institutes of Technology (IITs) began to be established across India, with the aim of enhancing Indians' scientific and technical knowledge. IITs were positioned as being meritocratic, away from the structural inequalities of caste and class. Scholarship,

though, has explained how merit remains culturally embedded, and a popular lens adopted to uncover this is of class (social backgrounds and use of English language). Subramanian's book takes this enquiry further not simply through the lens of class but caste, laying bare the 'interplay of ascription and achievement' (p. 3) that constitutes merit. Furthermore, she does so in the context of India's *sanctum sanctorum* of merit, namely the IITs. This work, then, furthers scholarship on caste identities (how they became fixed and play out in contemporary times) and also positions itself in emerging works on the study of elites that are concerned with explaining how inequalities are reproduced, particularly in elite educational institutions (Khan 2010).

The Caste of Merit provides a historical-anthropological account of how and why the upper-castes (Brahmins) claimed the ideal of merit, specifically in the context of technical skills (engineering), which was traditionally associated with lower-caste identities. This ball was set rolling by the British (chapter 1), Subramanian argues, who wanted to skill Indians (over Englishmen) and turned to the upper-caste middle class Indian population, hoping that they would identify more with the British and become allies of sorts for the colonial project.

Subramanian then moves to post-independence India (chapter 2), explaining how IITs were established with the aim of being distinctive from the existing regional colleges, on the grounds that its students would be selected on the basis of merit, and would shoulder the responsibility of nation-building. In interviews with IIT alumni, Subramanian noted that this distinctiveness (of merit) was, however, tethered to their caste, albeit Brahmin, identity. This was starkly evident in engineer-turned-politician Jairam Ramesh's spin-off of Prime Minister Nehru's Independence Day speech, in which he described IITians as the 'Midnight Brahmins'.

This brahmanical claim on merit was soon challenged with the changing political landscape, with the rise of anti-brahmanical movements. In order to elucidate this, Subramanian focuses on IIT Madras, and in chapter 3, traces the rise of the Justice Party and Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) in the region. As a reaction, Brahmins adopted a discourse of victimhood and turned to merit to reclaim their supposed caste-superiority. They claimed (chapter 4) that their admission to IITs was solely on the basis of their hard work. In her interviews with the IIT Madras (IIT-M) alumni, there was no mention of the role their family's

social network and cultural capital may have played in securing them admission to IIT, which as scholarship (Dickey 2002; Kumar 2011) and theories on class (Bourdieu 1987) explain, are key for class mobility. In this way, caste privilege was ‘consistently misrecognised as middle-class labour and radical talent’ (p. 20).

In the next two chapters, Subramanian explains how the rise of coaching centres and reservation for lower-caste students in IITs lead the Brahmin-caste IIT students to make stronger claims on being the ‘right’ type and deserving IITians, who were innately intellectually superior. Coaching centres (chapter 5), particularly in Hyderabad and Kota successfully trained large number of students from non-urban, non-English speaking backgrounds for IIT entrance exams. Previously, the IIT students swore by the entrance examinations as being meritocratic, allowing no ‘pull’, however as more non-Brahmins and non-English speaking students joined IIT, the students (as well as the Director of IIT-M) claimed that coaching centres were producing ‘crammers’, whereas the ‘right’ IIT student is one with ‘raw intelligence’. A similar discourse was adopted as a reaction to reservation for lower-caste students in IITs, when the Brahmin caste students began to claim that the general category, which is the ‘casteless’ category, is the only meritorious one, since the quota students were not admitted on the basis of merit but their caste identity. This impacted inter-student dynamics too, as the quota students were easily identifiable on the basis of their rank (they were ranked lower), and their spoken English or non-urban styles of living, leading to stark internal differentiation within the IIT student body.

Subramanian ends her discussion with how this narrative of caste and merit has been furthered by IITians who migrated to the United States. She notes that the ‘right’ type of IITians have created a strong network and are successful entrepreneurs and have managed to transform the value of IIT from technical education and ‘intellectualism to entrepreneurialism’ (p. 262). This ‘highly selective character of the diaspora and the illegibility of caste in the United States has made it easier to draw a seamless equation between being upper caste, being Indian, and having “merit”’ (p. 267).

This book’s strength lies in not only explicating the local histories and hierarchies of inequalities (caste, region, language) but mapping them out to global processes of inequalities (class, race, migration). In providing an account of how caste constitutes merit, this book has also

identified subsidiary themes on inequalities including ascriptive gender roles in middle class households (chapter 5), use of humour to maintain caste, class, and regional boundaries (chapter 6), and overlaps between race and caste (chapter 7). At the same time, the readers would have benefitted with further details on the skewed gender ratio in IITs, its implications, and how this impacts their self-fashioning of being middle class; discussions on other ways by which IITians maintain their class and caste boundaries (marriage, education of children, residential preferences); and whether the rise of IT and entrepreneurial hubs in cities like Bangalore and Hyderabad has changed the dynamics of being a 'right' type of IITian. Notwithstanding these omissions, this book is a much needed and welcome addition to scholarship on elites, caste, migration, and inequalities.

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