

Race, Ethnicity and Intersectionality

Chapter 9 provides a detailed overview of social changes through historical (and global) processes such as colonization, through to social analyses of race as a social construct, in terms of perspectives of biological and cultural notions of race, all of which has influenced both theory and practice on race relations. Extending such an analysis through the lens of intersectionality, this chapter will be useful to students who study issues of race and ethnicity, one of the most popular subject areas within the field of sociology.

Often, studies on race and ethnicity fall into the danger of excluding the intersection of both changing and simultaneous interplay of other inequalities in social groups. One way is to analyse how migration has shaped both thinking and practice on race, for example, its impact on how race can be seen as a fluid concept that is not fixed, but changes according to power relations embedded in political, economic and social contexts. Further, Islamophobia (which isn't mentioned in this chapter) has also figured prominently in discourses on race and ethnicity.

In the context of the (global) South Asia, the perspective of intersectionality becomes more significant. The intersection of ethnicity in relation to caste or tribe, a major social division based on social descent and birth, forms a significant basis for social disadvantage and discrimination. With the pursuit of neo-liberal reforms, global changes such as the Information Technology (IT) revolution has posed both opportunities and challenges to such social divisions. For example, research on information technology and social inclusion of poor working women by Arun and Heeks (2010), shows that IT based enterprises have allowed poor women from a range of social backgrounds, including backward castes, to form self-help groups and manage enterprises, leading to improved livelihoods. However, local social norms based on gender and patriarchal ideologies have restricted women's economic mobility to a great extent.

Further research by Arun *et al* (2013) show that social groups such as adivasis - or indigenous communities (referred to as Scheduled Tribes) - face persistent exclusion from social mobility as they face multiple disadvantage as a result of intersections between caste, tribe, class, region and gender. The study finds that building assets of social capital and networks is crucial among such communities, so that resources

of financial and physical capital might enable them to transform their livelihoods into meaningful outcomes. Chronic poverty, measured in terms of both income and non-income poverty, is thus persistent throughout India as a result of structural factors (e.g. intersections between caste, tribe, class, region and gender), which worsens with forces of global social change such as modernisation, neo-liberal reform measures, deagrarianisation and migration.

References

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