



Book Review

Caste Politics: Sociological Analysis of Language, Literature, and Cultural Industry

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C. G. Lakshmipathi, *Caste Politics: Sociological Analysis of Language, Literature and Cultural Industry*, Bangalore, India, *Sahitya Sambhrama Prakshana*, 2026, Pages 218, Rs. 250/- ISBN: 978-93-49064-86-7.

Caste Politics by Dr C.G. Lakshmipathi (popularly known as CGL in Karnataka) is a collection in the Kannada language, comprising articles written over the last decade for various Kannada magazines. As the name suggests, essays in the collection foreground the multiple facets of the functioning of caste in the everyday life of Karnataka. CGL treats prominent figures who have shaped post-independent Karnataka's history and cultural ethos to undertake sociological analysis on themes of contemporary relevance. At first glance, it appears to be a collection of biographical sketches or character portraits, especially given the prominent figures featured on its cover. However, these individuals serve merely as entry points rather than final destinations for the inquiries undertaken by the author. For instance, Karnataka's Ex-Chief Minister Siddaramaiah is invoked not to present a biographical sketch of the politician himself, but to highlight the uncritical acceptance and flocking of Karnataka's intellectuals towards the power centre as Siddaramaiah laid claim to power. Similarly, D. Devaraj Urs is invoked to dissect the broader structural and socio-political phenomena of the dominant castes claiming reservations since the times of the First Backward Classes Commission, popularly known as the Havanuru Commission, which was constituted in 1972 and eventually recommended the provisioning of reservations for the Backward Classes in 1975 through its four-volume report. This way, the book inherently problematises the contemporary political discourse of Karnataka led by a media landscape that is often exhaustingly personality-driven.

The remarkable strength of this volume lies in how it bridges academic theory with the lived realities of people in Karnataka. Despite aspirational talks and discussions to engage with the 'ground' and the 'field', researchers are accustomed to working within the confines of an anglophone academic

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world wherein major sociological texts are not just primarily written and read in English, but thinking is also dictated by the English life-world that controls not merely the choice of subjects but also the methods and language in which sociological studies are framed. Therefore, sociologists continue to grapple with the challenge of adapting both the ideas and the texts to 'local' contexts without losing their essence.

Here, CGL not just imports sociological concepts from the Anglophone world into Kannada, but he subverts and re-shapes them to be able to capture Kannada's popular culture and lived realities to the fullest. For instance, in his essay analysing the popular television show *Weekend with Ramesh*, the author examines the profiles of each of the guests to explain how the representation of guests is skewed in favour of the upper castes, leading to an eventual exclusion of people from other castes unless they are very popular personalities with a large following, to explain the workings of caste in media. He also highlights how no achiever from untouchable caste backgrounds was ever invited as a guest for the show. The author thereby presents a structural critique in Kannada that is immediately accessible and highly convincing to his readers irrespective of their training in sociology.

The book moves beyond mere adaptations of sociological concepts to make significant contributions to sociological vocabulary, especially in its regional variant by coining and elaborating on terms like *Caste Colony* and *Caste Colonialism* amongst others. It is important to note that CGL had named his earlier book *Caste Chemistry*, catching the imagination of sociologists knowledgeable of Kannada.

While the idea of segregated or ghettoised spaces (like *hattis* or *keris* in Karnataka) has long been documented, CGL flips the lens to examine how the upper castes consciously insulate themselves into exclusive spatial or social circles by coining the term *Caste Colony*. Students of sociology and other allied disciplines can adapt this term to understand the words of Bourdieu, 'to reveal that which is hidden' (Bourdieu, 1998, p. 17). By adding the prefix caste to the word colony, which has long existed not just in sociological vocabulary but also in the everyday lives of people, CGL highlights the workings of caste, pinning the issue more precisely than ever before. Such precise naming of social realities enables researchers to further explain the workings of caste in relation to spaces. Concepts such as these can also illuminate other disciplines beyond sociology. For instance, educational institutions in Karnataka often function as modern colonies, wherein colleges are not just owned, but are also overwhelmingly populated and hegemonised by specific castes like Brahmins, Vokkaligas, or Lingayats, whose working can be better explained by the term.

The book also provides a sociological evaluation of the ideas of towering literary and political figures like P. Lankesh and K. P. Poornachandra Tejaswi. For a large section of the public that consumes their creative literature but ignores their sharper ideological and socio-political essays, CGL provides an essential invitation to understand how deep the social divisions escape the consciousness of even the most conscious people to impact an individual at the subconscious level.

In addition to these rigorous structural analyses, the book also has dedicated chapters that are deeply moving and intimate reflections on friendships. Essays dedicated to late activists and scholars like Fr Chasara and Prof. Vasu Malali stand out as profoundly affectionate tributes. While these two essays do not fit in a collection of sociological essays, even when read together as stand-alone essays, they fall short of upholding the critical reading that CGL has provided in the rest of the volume. For instance, the discussions on the works of Fr Chasara could have been expanded to explore and illuminate the fragile relationship of the triangular workings of caste, language, and religion in contemporary Karnataka. The same holds for a few of the other essays as well.

In his chapter examining the ideas of cleanliness, CGL argues that notions about hygiene and cleanliness are weaponised to reinforce caste hierarchies, pointing out that true cleanliness requires access to resources (like clean bathrooms and running water) that the society denies to many. However, the essay falls short of examining the role of hygiene and cleanliness in the cultural life-world of the working class, thereby failing to illuminate readers on how, despite the lack of resources, a vast majority of the working-class communities — be it the agricultural labourers, construction workers, welders, mechanics, and others — accord highest priority to their bodily hygiene. A detailed exploration of various other dimensions could have, possibly, highlighted the tensions between functional cleanliness and the ritualistic, discriminatory ideas of *purity* and *pollution*.

Yet, the two major glaring omissions of the book lie in not being able to foreground the voices of women to provide readers with an intersectional perspective in its essay and its silence on the issue of internal reservations and sub-caste politics, wherein both issues continue to haunt Karnataka in contemporary times. Ultimately, the greatest triumph of *Caste Politics* lies in its readability that invites readers to pick and finish the book seamlessly while grappling with profound societal critiques. It stands as a vital, highly recommended text for students and anyone eager to be introduced to social realities of caste in Karnataka over the last five decades.

Reference

Bourdieu, P. (1998). *On Television* (P. P. Ferguson, Trans.). The New Press.