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Title: Caste and the City: Intersections of Recent Economic Reforms and Dalit Politics in Lucknow

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Abstract:

Abstract: The research attempts to understand the political economy of caste in Lucknow city. It is an ethnographic study of two Dalit-dominated neighbourhoods in the wake of the implementation of demonetisation in November 2016 and GST (Goods and Services Tax) in July 2017, which severely affected the life and labour of people working in the informal economy. Through the narratives of the residents, this thesis attempts to understand how Dalits continue to have limited occupational opportunities in urban areas. These opportunities continue to be guided by a structurally discriminating regime that has historically conditioned the social and political relations in the country. The thesis, at the intersection of caste and gender, explores how structural inequalities manifest in the everyday lives of Dalits and how the caste system reproduces and reconfigures itself in urban areas. The thesis argues that urban space produces specific conditions that often recreate rather than dissolve traditional caste relations and reproduce the dominant hierarchal order. Urban space is a key element in replicating power structures and producing differential experiences based on an individual's or community's social location. The persistence of caste inequalities in urban areas is often not acknowledged and is dismissed or homogenised as a 'class problem'. This thesis intervenes in the scholarly discussions around caste and urban inequality to show the distinct ways caste mediates the impact of economic policies in two neighbourhoods of Lucknow. I argue that my findings in these two neighbourhoods give a sense of structural inequalities and caste contradictions in contemporary urban India.

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