

## Untouchability and the Caste System: Questioning Its Banality Socio-phenomenologically

**RAHUL SINGH**

Department of Sociology, Presidency University, Kolkata, West Bengal, India

### **Abstract**

The article seeks to enquire into the quality of being banal that untouchability acquires through caste-based practices. I take a socio-phenomenological approach to focus on the body to show how notions of bodies create a certain life-world within the caste system that makes the practice appear banal both to the Hindu upper caste and Dalit group. My focus is to see how the experience of untouchability is layered in the way it has been conceptualised and practiced over generations through concepts of *lived body*, and *body in pain*. Not only has this made the phenomena of untouchability ontologically evil and humiliating for the Dalit being, but has made them experience social *dys-appearance*. Using narratives from short stories written by Dalit writers in Malayalam and other Indian languages, I intend to chart out the pain and evil that have been wrought on the Dalit being since time immemorial. In the resultant Dalit lifeworld, such an understanding of bodies within the caste system makes the practice of untouchability banal and thoughtless. These narratives that resonate the lived experiences of a Dalit being will allow me further to critique the banality associated with untouchability and put forth the argument that the real evil lies in the consciously pursued act of engendering violence and humiliating a body that is not as purely lived as the Hindu upper castes.

*Keywords:* Socio-phenomenology, Untouchability, Lived Body, Social Dys-appearance, Lifeworld, Banality, Dalit Being