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Sabbatical Research: Illusory Meritocracy: Elite Uses of Reservations in Neoliberal India

As part of a larger project exploring the politics of caste in India, here I discuss how elite discourses address caste hierarchy and oppression in India. I argue that in elite discourses, the concept of “reservations” (policies requiring a quota of seats in public institutions to be reserved for marginalized and historically disadvantaged groups) stands as a synonym for caste-ism, which is itself never addressed or acknowledged directly. Ethnographic data reveal how, in elite rhetoric, “reservations” is contrasted with liberal notions of merit in ways that serve to embellish elite dominance.