

Sanitation: Key Explorations through Multidisciplinary Approach

Sumit Saurabh Srivastava

Abstract

Though central to the human lives and relegated to 'invisibility' during most of the parts of human lives, sanitation in contemporary times has become a core area of social sciences across disciplines. The present has attempted to outline three distinct yet inter-connected mappings of sanitation; i.e. in the fields of History, Sociology and social anthropology. The first one relates to how and why sanitation came into fore as a result of pandemics and advances in science and technology over a period of time. The sociological discourse on sanitation in the south Asian context gets interlinked with caste and occupation thesis deriving its strength from 'purity and pollution' praxis. Last but not the least, the socio-anthropological understandings of 'dirt' have much to offer to the sanitation discourse. The paper is a partial and situated attempt to provide an overview of the same.

Keywords: Sanitation, India, Caste, Manual Scavenging, Purity and Pollution

Introduction

The objective of the paper is to underline the multidisciplinary/trans-disciplinary perspective/s of understanding sanitation primarily through the lens of its historicity and its socio-anthropological correlates. In particular, the paper has employed the historical and socio-anthropological lenses to underline strands of sanitation. It is important to note that there are other frames of reference to the same; for instance, the political economy of sanitation which focuses on the politics and the inherent dynamics between the institutional state mechanism, governance structure and public policies. One can also go for the 'law and legal' mode of inquiry wherein a vibrant discussion awaits outlining legal discourse on the same. However, the present article has limited itself to the history of sanitation and its socio-anthropological ramifications. In this process, the paper explores how sanitation has evolved over a period of time and its catalytic variables within. Subsequently, it looks into how sanitation is looked through the prism of caste and caste system in the Indian context.

SUMIT SAURABH SRIVASTAVA, Assistant Professor, Centre for Development Studies, Institute of Inter Disciplinary Studies (IIDS), University of Allahabad, Uttar Pradesh 211002. Email: sumit.manjula@gmail.com