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Question of caste in the era of globalization

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Abstract

In the 21st century where the entire globe is converting into the local village as well as a modern institution like nation-states are emerged. Globalization has immensely affected the social structure of different states and societies. But this is very paradoxical thing is that globalization has changed the status of society but on the other hand Indian society is still facing the strong hierarchy between different castes in terms of economic status, social status, political status and cultural status. In this paper I am trying to draw the grey area of globalization which is rarely discussed in the academic discourse, we generally discussed the globalization in black and white. My main supposition is that after the strong influence of globalization in India, we have a strong element of caste. Though the government has taken some step to eradicate this unequal hierarchical division of society through affirmative action. One of the reasoning given for that is, in the times of globalization the need for actions related to problems of the past like Caste System does not arise and also that even if there is a need, globalization is sufficient enough to fade away the caste inequality present in the country. In this paper, I am trying to address the question 'why Caste is still the most dominating element in Indian society; however, globalization has changed the entire structure of so-called modern society'.

Keywords: affirmative action, caste, globalization, inequality

Introduction

Globalization is the most popular word that has come into the world since the early nineties of the last century. Globalization is the most debated and discussed issue in all over the world. Globalization is the consequence of modernity which emerged in Europe and then it expanded across the globe. The process of globalization cannot be seen in a strictly definitional way. Some argue it as a set of financial capital, political, culture etc. others look it as a new industrial revolution driven by powerful information and communication technologies. Appadurai (2001:14) argues, "We can do our best to see globalization as just new phase of capitalism, or modernization or developmentalism". According to Tomlinson (1996:22-23), "Globalization refers to a rapidly developing process of complex interconnection between societies, culture, institutions and individual worldwide. It is a social process which dramatic reduction in the time taken either physically or representational, to cross them, so marking the world seen smaller and in a certain sense bringing human being 'closer' to one another."

Perhaps, the words Globalization and Caste System make one feel that we are talking about phenomenon associated with two different time horizons. Globalization seems to be a reality of the latest times and Caste System of a bygone era. But not only are the two coexisting together but the interaction between them has affected the Caste System in India. As it has already been established from various other studies that Caste System is still very much prevalent in contemporary India despite all the measures been taken to eradicate it, justifies the need to look at it in the light of various other changes happening in the society and the economy. It is widely believed that Globalization has made an impact on most facets of many individuals' lives. It is not feasible for me in this small study to look into all the aspects of their effects and whether the effects were welfare increasing or not, and so, I would like to restrict my attention to only its effect on the Caste System which is also in itself a very integral part of the contemporary Indian society.

Caste and Market: Exclusion or Inclusion?

The tradition of caste in India is historically 3000 years old. It is hierarchical systems which

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divide the society initially into four mutually exclusive, exhaustive, hereditary, and occupational- specific Varnas (Deshpandey, 2000), define all aspects of a person's existence. These are the mainly Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaisyas, and Shudras. Throughout the Indian caste history, those social groups who controlled economic resources and wielded political power became the privileged upper caste while others were treated as social outcasts. Without access to the ritual and economic resources and bargaining power, the lower castes especially the Dalit became the most exploited peripheral groups in the Indian society.

The most important point here needs to be remembered is that Indian society for the last 3500 years is controlled by (about) 18 per cent population of the country, which includes various caste groups and upper-caste elites. Among these groups, the most dominating, who enjoy all the privileges are only 5.52 per cent Brahmins, Kshatriyas, and Vaisyas because others had privileges according to their caste. The fourth caste Shudra (servicing class) did not have any privilege, but they are still recognized as human beings. Therefore it is 18 per cent minority (among those 5 per cent Brahmins), who enjoy the various privilege according to their grade.

By the now the educated and politically active castes have understood that globalization is a generic process, which includes liberalization, privatization, and scientific revolution. After independence, India has adopted the mixed model of the economy but it was not very successful in terms of eradicating poverty and empowering people. In the nineties when liberalization touched every corner of society it opened the door of development for everyone. But globalization has created a new kind of social structure; new middle class rapidly changed the dynamics of caste structure in India. But the question was still that which caste became middle class? At its most basic level, globalization is a phase of capitalism seeking to extend capitalist relations entered the country during British colonial rule, many people expected it would decimate the caste system, as it did feudalism in Europe. But not only did caste survive the spread of capitalism, but it also infested capitalism itself. On the contrary, it catalysed a socio-economic structure of rural India that has aggravated casteism.

Even in modern India, scheduled castes (SCs) continue to dominate the ranks of the sweepers (*safai karmacharis*). SCs form nearly 60% of the sweepers in central government compared to only 18% of other Class D workers. An interesting analysis of the Indian Administrative Services (IAS), shows that as late as 1985, about 37% of the IAS officers self-identified as being Brahmins, a disproportionately large number since Brahmins form only about 5% of the population. Moreover, since a substantial proportion of the applicants do not provide caste information, this number is undoubtedly an underestimate. Consequently, it is not surprising that many studies have found a strong link between caste and economic status postulated to be a function of exclusion from access to productive resources such as land and education as well as discrimination in the labor market.

Two aspects of caste inequalities deserve attention: inequality of opportunity and inequality of outcome. Centuries of caste-based social organization have left a legacy of inequality in access to land, education, business ownership and occupation. These processes lead to unequal access to productive resources and thereby lead to material

disadvantages. However, caste-based inequalities are not simply limited to inequality in opportunity. It has also been argued that even highly qualified members of lower caste face social and economic discrimination resulting in inequality of outcomes. The distinction between inequality of opportunity and that of outcome is not straightforward; inequality of outcome in one generation may lead to inequality of opportunity in the next but this distinction remains important from a public policy perspective.

Caste and question of opportunity: from reservation to rejection

Additionally, a variety of forces have disrupted the link between caste and occupation. Land reforms transferred landownership to many former share-croppers, most of whom belong to the middle caste, declining incomes of artisans and influx of mass-produced goods have led to declining caste-based occupations among potters, weavers and other artisans who must now rely on manual labor for subsistence, and increased requirements for education among modern professions have led to influx of people from a variety of castes into modern occupations. All of these trends would suggest that the link between caste and economic status in modern India is marginal at best. In an analysis of the numerically preponderant dominant castes in south India, noted anthropologist MN Srinivas found that certain peasant castes enjoy numerical superiority as well as a political and economic power, although they remain "middle castes" by the Varna schema.

Politics of affirmative action has further strengthened the power of lower castes with reservations in government jobs and higher education. But the myth of the affirmative action is different. The implementation of quotas has improved over time, though it is far from perfect and the displays variations of jobs. For instance, in topmost categories of officers, group-A jobs, the share of SCs is only 1.6 per cent, STs 0.3 per cent. As one goes down the hierarchy, the representation of SCs – STs increases, with as many as 80 per cents of the cleaners being SCs in 2007. Overall, the Group D category has always had more SCs than their share in the population. This suggests that within the government, all the low paid and low skill jobs are dominated by lower castes. In modern institutions like universities are also exercising the caste hierarchy. The 2001 National Commission for SCs&STs report reveals that in the 256 universities and about 11,000 colleges funded by UGC, with 3.42 lakh teaching positions, SCs and STs comprised 2 per cent and about 75,000 reserved teaching positions were vacant. Data on the representation of SCs - STs in non-reserved public institutions is also revealing. For instance, in the elite Indian Institute of Technology, reservation is provided only at lecturer or assistant professor level. Recent studies further document the dilution of the role of caste in shaping economic well-being and suggest that migration, expansion of Dalits in non-traditional occupations and changes in agriculture combine to improve the relative position of Dalits in recent years.

It shows statistically significant caste disparities in each marker of opportunity structure with Dalits and Adivasis at the bottom and Other Backward Classes (OBCs) in the middle. When compared to forwarding castes, Dalits and Adivasis are less likely to own land, have fewer years of education, have the lower household size-adjusted household consumption expenditure and have fewer

important social connections. Data from a variety of sources on material standards of living, poverty rates, health status, educational attainment, and occupational outcomes indicate that the disparities between SCs – STs and non- OBC are persistent and systematic, regional variation notwithstanding. From the 2009 – 10 data, we see that monthly per capita consumption and expenditure (MPCE) shares are 54.9, 49.9, and 39.8 for SCs, STs and OBCs, respectively, and 21.2 per cent for Others'. If we look at the average daily wages of social groups that the ratio of SCs wages was 0.71 in 1983, which then fell to 0.61 in 2009-10, so the gap between SCs and 'Others' wages increased over the last 25 years or so. It is indicating that average wages are diverging rather than converging. The bulk of these jobs are untouched by affirmative action, and yet there is a clear and systematic difference in the distribution of wages by caste. This is linked to labour market discrimination. It is important to note that the so-called 'explained' or non-discriminatory part already contains a discriminatory component. The fact that the two groups enter the labour market which substantial difference in educational levels indicates 'pre-market discrimination', which means that there are discriminatory factors at work in the formative years which prevent lower castes from acquiring the same quantity and quality of education as the upper castes. Thorat argues that, sent out identical resumes to private companies, both domestic and multinational corporation (MNCs), in response to a newspaper advertisement in New Delhi during 2005-6. The only differences in the resumes were the easily identifiable names of applicants and three categories were used: Hindu Upper caste, Hindu Dalit, and Muslim.

A simple analysis of statistics on caste atrocities over the decade before and after India embraced neoliberal economic policies reveals a significant increase in almost all categories of atrocities. The average incidence of crime against lower castes increased. So-called modern society is strongly advocating this. The cases of mob lynching, exploitation and hate are continuously increasing in modern Indian society. Globalization has created a very exclusive space where caste division is implicitly exercised within different castes. Now measure question is that modern society which has a strong network of information and institutions, which have modern ethics and morality but still, they are bounded with caste identity. Modernity has changed the outer domain of society however the inner domain of society is still in feudal nature. It should be clear that economic and social inequality is a threat to equality of opportunity. Those who are born poor cannot compete as effectively as the well-off for desirable positions because their families cannot provide the same level of education, network support, and healthcare, and the same level of cultural capital, and so forth. Thus, even if there was no discrimination, the poor do not have equal opportunities as the rich.

Conclusion

The results presented above show that if status hierarchies seem to be on the decline with considerable civic and political participation by marginalized groups, economic and educational disparities between large caste groupings continue to flourish. It may be time to look for new models of social stratification in India. One possibility would be to argue that caste relations are superseded by class relations, just as the western sociological literature has argued that

industrialization was associated with a movement from hereditary privilege associated with the concept of "estate" held by nobility to an open society in which the bourgeoisie could gain status through their achievement in the marketplace. Access to productive resources, particularly education and skills remain closely associated with caste. Children from lower castes continue to be educationally disadvantaged compared to children from the upper caste. Once stripped of its religious and ideological trope, caste in modern India of this consolidation. Newly emerging research on central and Eastern Europe offers interesting comparisons. Several studies suggest that the transition from socialism to capitalism in offers one of the most interesting examples of consolidation of material resources in hands of certain groups even as market mechanisms continue to take hold. The continued dominance of Brahmins in Indian society and economy is perhaps the clearest example eastern and central Europe has led to the capture of economic resources by certain groups. Given the explicit attempts by socialist states over five decades to eradicate the hereditary transmission of wealth and power, the persistence of privilege remains surprising. In reconciling scholarship on post-socialist transition with broader stratification research, argues for a middle space between the societies organized around the logic of estate where the individual's position is determined by ascription based on membership in a group, conferred mainly by birth and logic of status in which the basis of the individual's position is exclusively achievement portrayed as returns on human capital endowments. Instead of hard distinctions between caste and class based on varying degrees of closure within each form of stratification, we will gain more analytical power by focusing on ways in which a socially closed system like caste adapts and manipulates emerging class inequalities in a society undergoing an economic transformation.

If we analyse the function of globalization along with its other processes and its impact on caste then we find that it has not made any difference in the development of their economic, political, social, educational status. It has not provided them with any new qualities by which they can change the social construction of institutions. Further, it has been against the quota of the lower caste of society in the modern market system. The western model of globalization in Indian society will create lots of social problems. It has created the elite space where only privilege class has the authority to use it. Globalization did not provide social mobility; caste structure is more dominating over the class structure.

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