



THE ISSUE OF CASTE IN THE CONTEXT OF GLOBALIZATION

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ABSTRACT

In the 21st century, the world is increasingly resembling a global village, while modern institutions such as nation-states continue to emerge. Globalization has significantly influenced the social frameworks of various states and societies. However, it is paradoxical that, despite these changes, Indian society continues to grapple with a pronounced hierarchy among different castes, particularly concerning economic, social, political, and cultural standings. This paper aims to explore the nuanced aspects of globalization that are often overlooked in academic discussions, which tend to present globalization in a binary manner. My central argument posits that, despite the profound impact of globalization in India, the caste system remains a formidable force. Although the government has implemented measures to address this entrenched hierarchical division through affirmative action, some argue that the challenges posed by historical issues like the caste system are rendered irrelevant in the context of globalization. Furthermore, it is suggested that globalization alone is adequate to diminish the caste-based inequalities that persist in the country. This paper seeks to examine the question of why caste continues to be a dominant factor in Indian society, even as globalization reshapes the framework of what is considered a modern society.

KEY WORDS: Globalization, Developmentalism, Capitalism, Modernization, Caste

INTRODUCTION

Globalization has emerged as a prominent term since the early 1990s, becoming a focal point of discussion and debate worldwide. It is a phenomenon rooted in modernity, which originated in Europe and subsequently spread across the globe. The concept of globalization cannot be confined to a singular definition; some view it as a collection of financial, political, and cultural elements, while others perceive it as a new industrial revolution propelled by advanced information and communication technologies. Posits that globalization can be interpreted as a new phase of capitalism, modernization, or developmentalism. The globalization as a rapidly evolving process characterized by intricate interconnections among societies, cultures, institutions, and individuals on a global scale.

This social process significantly reduces the time required to traverse physical or representational distances, thereby creating a perception of a smaller world and fostering a sense of closeness among people. At first glance, the terms Globalization and Caste System may appear to represent phenomena from vastly different historical contexts, with globalization reflecting contemporary realities and the caste system evoking a sense of the past. However, these two concepts coexist and interact, influencing the caste system in India. Numerous studies have established that the caste system remains prevalent in modern India, despite various efforts to eliminate it. This persistence underscores the necessity of examining the caste system in light of the ongoing societal and economic transformations. It is widely acknowledged that globalization has impacted numerous aspects of individuals' lives. Given the scope of this study, it is impractical to explore all dimensions of these effects or to determine whether they have led to improvements in welfare; therefore, I will limit my focus.

Caste and Market: Exclusion or Inclusion?

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global village, while modern institutions such as nation-states continue to emerge. Globalization has significantly influenced the social frameworks of various states and societies. However, it is paradoxical that, despite these changes, Indian society continues to grapple with a pronounced hierarchy among different castes, particularly concerning economic, social, political, and cultural standings. This paper aims to explore the nuanced aspects of globalization that are often overlooked in academic discussions, which tend to present globalization in a binary manner. My central argument posits that, despite the profound impact of globalization in India, the caste system remains a formidable force. Although the government has implemented measures to address this entrenched hierarchical division through affirmative action, some argue that the challenges posed by historical issues like the caste system are rendered irrelevant in the context of globalization. Furthermore, it is suggested that globalization alone is adequate to diminish the caste-based inequalities that persist in the country. This paper seeks to examine the question of why caste continues to be a dominant factor in Indian society, even as globalization reshapes the framework of what is considered a modern society.

Caste and question of opportunity: from reservation to rejection

A range of factors has altered the traditional connection between caste and occupation. Land reforms have resulted in the transfer of land ownership to numerous former sharecroppers, predominantly from the middle caste. The decreasing incomes of artisans, coupled with the influx of mass-produced goods, have contributed to a decline in caste-specific occupations among potters, weavers, and other artisans, who are now compelled to depend on manual labor for their livelihoods. Furthermore, the growing educational requirements in contemporary professions have facilitated the entry of individuals from various castes into modern job markets. Collectively, these developments indicate that the relationship between caste and economic status in present-day India is, at best, tenuous. In his examination of the numerically



dominant castes in southern India, the distinguished anthropologist MN Srinivas observed that certain peasant castes possess both numerical dominance and significant political and economic influence, even as they continue to be classified as "middle castes" within the Varna framework. The politics surrounding affirmative action has significantly empowered lower castes through the provision of reservations in government employment and higher education. However, the reality of affirmative action presents a different narrative. While the execution of quotas has seen gradual improvement, it remains imperfect and exhibits disparities across various job categories. For example, in the highest-ranking officer positions, specifically Group A jobs, the representation of Scheduled Castes (SCs) stands at a mere 1.6 percent, while Scheduled Tribes (STs) account for only 0.3 percent. As one descends the employment hierarchy, the representation of SCs and STs increases, with approximately 80 percent of cleaning staff identified as SCs in 2007. Overall, the Group D category consistently shows a higher proportion of SCs compared to their demographic representation. This indicates that within government roles, lower castes predominantly occupy low-paid and low-skilled positions. Furthermore, modern institutions such as universities continue to reflect caste hierarchies. According to the 2001 National Commission for SCs and STs report, among the 256 universities and around 11,000 colleges supported by the University Grants Commission (UGC), SCs and STs constituted only 2 percent of the 3.42 lakh teaching positions, with approximately 75,000 reserved teaching roles remaining unfilled. Data regarding the representation of SCs and STs in non-reserved public institutions is equally telling. For instance, at the prestigious Indian Institute of Technology, reservations are only applicable at the lecturer or assistant professor level. Recent research further illustrates a diminishing influence of caste on economic prosperity, indicating that factors such as migration, the diversification of Dalit employment into non-traditional sectors, and agricultural advancements have collectively contributed to an improved relative status for Dalits in recent years. Statistical analysis reveals significant caste disparities across various indicators of opportunity structure, with Dalits and Adivasis positioned at the lowest tier, while Other Backward Classes (OBCs) occupy a middle ground. In comparison to forward castes, Dalits and Adivasis exhibit lower land ownership rates, reduced years of education, diminished household consumption expenditure adjusted for household size, and fewer vital social connections. Data encompassing material living standards, poverty levels, health conditions, educational achievements, and occupational outcomes consistently demonstrate that the disparities between Scheduled Castes (SCs), Scheduled Tribes (STs), and non-OBC groups are both persistent and systematic, despite regional variations. According to data from 2009-10, the monthly per capita consumption and expenditure (MPCE) shares stand at 54.9 for SCs, 49.9 for STs, and 39.8 for OBCs, with Others at 21.2 percent. An examination of average daily wages reveals that the wage ratio for SCs was 0.71 in 1983, declining to 0.61 by 2009-10, indicating an increasing wage gap between SCs and 'Others' over the past 25 years. This trend suggests a divergence in average wages rather than convergence.

Most of these employment opportunities remain unaffected by affirmative action, yet a clear and systematic wage disparity persists based on caste, which is attributed to labor market discrimination. It is crucial to recognize that the so-called 'explained' or non-discriminatory component already encompasses a discriminatory aspect. The substantial differences in educational attainment between the two groups upon entering the labor market highlight the existence of 'pre-market discrimination,' indicating that discriminatory factors during formative years hinder lower castes from obtaining the same level and quality of education as their upper caste counterparts. Thorat conducted an experiment in which identical resumes were sent to both domestic and multinational corporations in response to a newspaper advertisement in New Delhi during 2005-06, revealing significant differences in outcomes. An examination of statistics concerning caste-related atrocities in the decade preceding and following India's adoption of neoliberal economic policies indicates a notable rise in nearly all categories of such incidents. The average occurrence of crimes against lower castes has escalated. This trend is strongly endorsed by what is termed modern society. Incidents of mob lynching, exploitation, and hatred are on the rise within contemporary Indian society. Globalization has fostered an environment where caste divisions are subtly perpetuated among various castes. The pressing question is how modern society, equipped with a robust network of information and institutions that espouse contemporary ethics and morality, remains tethered to caste identities. While modernity has transformed the external aspects of society, the internal dynamics still reflect feudal characteristics. It is essential to recognize that economic and social disparities pose a significant threat to equal opportunity. Individuals born into poverty face considerable challenges in competing for desirable positions compared to their wealthier counterparts, as their families are unable to provide equivalent access to education, networking opportunities, healthcare, and cultural capital. Consequently, even in the absence of discrimination, the poor do not enjoy the same opportunities as the affluent.

CONCLUSION

The findings outlined above indicate that while status hierarchies may appear to be diminishing due to significant civic and political engagement from marginalized groups, economic and educational inequalities among major caste divisions persist. It may be prudent to explore new frameworks of social stratification in India. One potential argument is that class relations are beginning to overshadow caste relations, akin to the perspective in Western sociological literature that posits industrialization facilitated a shift from hereditary privileges associated with the "estate" system of the nobility to a more open society where the bourgeoisie could attain status through market achievements. Access to essential resources, particularly education and skills, remains intricately linked to caste. Children from lower castes continue to face educational disadvantages when compared to their upper-caste counterparts. When the religious and ideological aspects are removed, caste in contemporary India reveals this consolidation. Emerging research from Central and Eastern Europe provides intriguing parallels.



Various studies indicate that the transition from socialism to capitalism presents a compelling example of the concentration of material resources within specific groups, even as market dynamics take root. The ongoing prominence of Brahmins in Indian society and the economy exemplifies this phenomenon, similar to how Eastern and Central Europe has experienced the accumulation of economic resources by select groups. Despite the explicit efforts of socialist regimes over five decades to eliminate the hereditary transfer of wealth and power, the endurance of privilege remains unexpected. In reconciling studies on post-socialist transitions with broader research on stratification, a case is made for a middle ground between societies structured around the estate logic, where an individual's status is determined by ascriptive factors linked to group membership at birth, and the logic of status itself. An analysis of globalization and its associated processes reveals that it has not significantly altered the economic, political, social, or educational status of caste groups. It has failed to endow these groups with new attributes that could facilitate a transformation in the social framework of institutions. Moreover, globalization has been detrimental to the representation of lower castes within the contemporary market system. The adoption of a Western model of globalization within Indian society is likely to exacerbate existing social issues. This model has fostered an elite environment where only the privileged class possesses the means to benefit from it. Ultimately, globalization has not facilitated social mobility; rather, the caste system continues to exert a stronger influence than class structure.

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