Caste and Class dynamics in Post-Globalization India

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In India, the wave of globalization was first felt when the then Finance Minister, Dr. Manmohan Singh proposed the economic liberalization policy known as Liberalization, Privatization and Globalization Policy (LPG Policy), 1991,[1] also known as New Economic Policy, 1991.[2] Since then, the Indian society has changed enormously due to urbanization and globalization. In the present world, with a considerable amount of help from the advancement in technology, the exchange of ideas, skills, goods, services, and manpower, the trade relations between different nations have increased manifolds and it has created a gigantic trade bubble constituting multiple nations of the world.

A society is a group of people who share common goals, ideas, and interests. People who share similar thoughts and perceptions come together to form a society. Since the beginning, Indian society has been the most diverse in the world because of its rich ethnic and cultural diversity, and this diversity is also one of the main reasons for the current way of functioning of the Indian government.[3] In the twenty-first century world, a country can't be self-reliant in terms of the goods and resources it needs. We have to share our resources, ideas, and technology in exchange for the ones that we need. Without globalization, India would have been in serious trouble during the pandemic. It is because we have a strong connection with other countries of the world that we can sustain such heavy losses due to the large pandemic. This article assesses the Indian scenario before the introduction of globalization and the impact of globalization on Indian society.

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[1] Liberalization, Privatization and Globalization Policy (LPG Policy) 1991

[2] New Economic Policy 1991

[3] *Ibid*

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INTRODUCTION

Let us firstly look at some important terminologies to start with:

Caste: Your caste is decided the moment you take birth in this world. Caste finds its roots in the Portuguese word "casta" which means a group. It is something that a person acquires by birth and cannot change, that is, it is unalterable.

Class: A class is a social group of people living in a society holding equivalent or comparable social and economic positions. A person's class depends upon multiple traits such as wealth, occupation, education, earnings, skills, etc.

Social differentiation: A human society has a complex structure. When we divide these societies based on race, color, sex, ethnicity, age, height, bodily orientation, etc., then we call this differentiation of the society into different groups based on the characteristic features of the members as social differentiation.

Social stratification: Social differentiation differentiates people horizontally, that is, it does not rank or discriminate any group mentioned under it in any sort of order above or below it. Social stratification, on the other hand, arranges people in a society based on their position in society, that is, their social status. These include income, occupation, education, etc.[4]

In a complex society, both social stratification and social differentiation are interconnected with each other. For example, in villages, we see that people are generally differentiated based on their caste. For example, in the same caste, we see people of different colors, heights, ages, sex, etc., living together. But people having different social statuses (or caste) do not live together as equals; which is still true in most Indian villages. On the other hand, in towns and cities, people are generally differentiated based on their class and not caste. This shows that

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[4] T Oommen & C Venugopal, *Sociology* (Eastern Book Company 2019)

the traditional societies use caste as a system of social grouping whereas the modern societies view class as a system to differentiate between various sections of people.[5]

HISTORY OF INDIA'S CASTE SYSTEM

Ancient History

In ancient India, people were categorized based on their Varna or castes. Varna is defined in Rigveda as the color, form, order, or shape. The Purusha Sukta defines Varna as having four categories created from Lord Brahma's body. The term GOD is an abbreviation for Generator, Operator, and Destroyer. Lord Brahma is the Generator and creator of all life forms according to Indian mythology.[6] The image mentioned above depicts the creation of Brahmins (priests, gurus, etc.) from Brahma's mouth, of Kshatriyas (Kings and warriors) from his arms, of Vaishyas (traders or merchants) from his thighs, and Shudras (laborers or menials) from his feet. According to most astrologers, the purity of the body decreases as we go from the top of the head to the bottom of the feet which is the reason why in the Varna system, the Brahmins are labeled as the purest souls and are positioned as the topmost caste, then come Kshatriyas, Vaishyas, and Shudras respectively. With time, the term Varna started to be used interchangeably with caste. In reality, varna is the larger structure under which there exist different castes. The main idea behind the introduction of the Varna system was to establish and maintain peace, just order, wilful adherence to the law, and above all, being true to one's responsibilities and duly performing them to attain moksha.

The traditional Varna system gradually started diminishing as other religions such as Islam, Christianity, Buddhism, and Sikhism started to gain prominence. Due to the significant changes being brought about in the west, the ideas of liberty, freedom, and equality slowly started having an impact on the Indian Varna system.[7]

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[5] *Ibid*

[6] *Ibid*

[7] A Burnell & E Hopkins, *The Ordinances Of Manu* (Routledge 2002)

Post Colonial Rule

As time passed by, India became a colony of the British. And soon, even though on a minor scale, the caste system was practiced in the colony, on a major scale, the Britishers were the elite class and the Indians were ruled by them. The Britishers brought new ideas and western traditions to the table and that started to bring a series of changes to the traditional system of categorization. But together working as one against the British oppression, after many years of struggle, India gained independence from the Britishers and established itself as a democratic republic adopting secularism as one of its ideals; and since the country had accommodated people from so many different cultures and ethnicity, it became necessary to regulate all of them under one command (the law that came to be known as the Constitution of India).[8] But the caste system's roots were still intact and we saw many laws and rules coming into the picture trying to abolish the oppression of the lower caste and lower-class people like the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes by the upper caste people who held the higher posts. The concept of reservation came to the picture to save the still-oppressed sections of the society and to uplift them to better living standards. Though it was initially brought in to uplift the lower caste people to a better position and keep them on equal footing with the upper caste people to establish and maintain a balance in the society, yet in its current form, the reservation that we are witnessing has become a symbol of corrupt politics which is, in some way, also responsible for the creamy layer concept, and therefore, wrongful usage of the policy by the higher class "beneficiaries" has made it pretty clear that the oppressed masses are still, in one way or the other, being exploited and that the once "all-important" concept has a big loophole which is now being exploited mercilessly.[9]

GLOBALIZATION: THE SOURCE OF CHANGE

Globalization in India: A Brief History

When we look at the word globalization, the very first thought that comes to mind is connectivity beyond the local markets. In other words, connecting the local with the global is

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[8] *Ibid*

[9] *Ibid*

what we can consider as the underlying principle of globalization. The history of the rise of globalization is as recent as the 1990s. After the Liberalisation, Privatization and Globalization Policy of 1991 was implemented in India under the leadership of Dr. Manmohan Singh (the then Finance Minister), the trade barriers that were restricting the international traders from trading in India were slowly removed and that changed a lot of things, both from economic and sociological perspectives. In short, globalization has led to the global market effectively using renewable and non-renewable resources by making use of the human resource and technology available to convert them into finished goods and services which are then being made available to consumers all around the world for use.

Impact on the Indian Society

From the sociological perspective, there have been both positive and negative impacts of globalization on the different categories of people. Globalization has become very important for each country in this world because no country is self-sufficient and each government needs some form of support from the other nations (or states) for efficient and effective functioning. In India, it has broken the rigid caste system and solidified the class system (which was introduced by the British) more significantly. Some of the factors that have been affected by globalization are listed below.

Advancement in Technology

The growth of technology in India has been immense. The usage of the world wide web has helped to set up a web of information around the world which has rendered the distance between any two persons (legal or natural) insignificant. The area of communication, as well as access to it, has increased manifolds whereas the time required for communication has reduced considerably. But we can see that access to technology has not been uniform among the masses, as people from the rural and remote areas do not get proper facilities.[10]

Many villages still do not get proper electricity due to many factors. In the villages, the traditional caste system is still followed and the wealthier upper-class people get access to the

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[10] Galanter M, 'Law And Caste In Modern India' (1963) 3 Asian Survey

available facilities first. In terms of technological advancement, most of the farmers in India still do not have access to proper internet connections and electricity. And in this era of online studies, the children living in villages and poor families in urban areas, due to poverty and lack of proper guidance, do not have access to proper education, mentorship, and internet facilities.[11]

Better Employment Opportunities

Nowadays, more foreign multinational companies get contracts from the government to build new facilities all around India. This has led to an improvement in the quality of infrastructure. Since the government is dishing out more and more tenders for the companies to construct many new facilities in the country, the employment opportunities for the middle-class and lower-class people have increased. The main concern here is that of underemployment or disguised employment. Although there are people who; through sheer hard work and determination despite being from a lower-class family, achieve stable employment to stabilize and sustain their families properly, such cases are rare.[12]

Again, the people from the wealthier class who hold higher positions in any company or firm exploit the lower-class workers by making them work extensively for a lot of hours, and in return, the laborers do not get sufficient payment to sustain their families. The middle-class workers, on the other hand, find themselves sandwiched in between these two classes. They get exploited by the higher class members and then in return, they take out their frustration on the laborers who work under them. This constant cycle of exploitation, corruption, inefficiency, and unjust order, coupled with a rapid increase in population, is one of the primary reasons for underemployment.[13]

Improvement in the variety of goods and services

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[11] *Ibid*

[12] Deshpande M, 'History Of The Indian Caste System And Its Impact On India Today'
(*Digitalcommons.calpoly.edu*, 2010)
<https://digitalcommons.calpoly.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1043&context=socssp> accessed 03 October 2021
[13] *Ibid*

Since the trade barrier was lifted due to the LPG Policy, 1991,[14] a better variety and quality of goods and services are being made available to the local consumers. A common man could now get world-class services and goods from home in just one click, thanks to technological advancement. Nowadays, there are a huge variety of goods and services of all kinds in the market suited to the needs of almost all the customers. This creates healthier competition among the producers which is beneficial for both themselves, their products, and the buyers.

Because more and more companies are investing and competing in the Indian markets, the local industries have been getting huge opportunities and they get better exposure, more manpower, better competition, better human resources, access to better technology, infrastructure, and experience. But on the other hand, due to the involvement of established and famous foreign companies and traders in an area, the local people and their small-scale industries, firms, and shops suffer because the consumer gets more driven towards the more famous products.

ACCESS TO BETTER EDUCATION AND HEALTHCARE FACILITIES

Education

Perhaps alongside agriculture, this sector has been affected the most. For the past thirty years, we have witnessed a lot of change in this sector. Nowadays, students get better infrastructure, teaching methods, and availability of resources. Especially in the time of the pandemic, the technology has again reiterated its importance to us as Distance Learning Programs are now helping the students to keep learning even in tough times. Recently, various government schemes like the *AICTE Swanath Scholarship Scheme* (to provide 50,00 per year to children who are orphans, or those children whose either or both parents have died, or wards of Armed Forces or Central Paramilitary Forces martyred in action)[15] and *Rashtriya Ucchatar Siksha Abhiyan*, have strengthened the cause and ensured that students of all classes get better exposure in terms of online study materials and better quality teachers.

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[14] LPG Policy (n 1)

[15] 'AICTE – Swanath Scholarship Scheme for Students' (*Student Development Cell (StDC) of All India Council for Technical Education*, 2021) <https://www.aicte-india.org/sites/default/files/stdc/AICTE-SWANATH-%20SCHEME%20final.pdf> accessed 08 October 2021

Yet in many villages across India, due to lack of proper infrastructure, corrupt practices of some employees, and poor connectivity, many students are left with no option but to either give up studies or just work by themselves to study, to somehow keep moving forward. The burden of buying something as expensive as a phone or a laptop increases mental pressure in poor families.[16] Recently, cases in which farmers committed suicide because they could not buy their children a phone to study, are getting very common. In wealthier families, parents manage to buy digital devices for their children so that they can study but in villages, even if the children do have access to gadgets, still they are not able to access proper teaching facilities because of poor internet connection in their areas.[17] Many teachers still find using a gadget difficult which only makes it more difficult for them to teach in online mode. On the other hand, children of upper-class families living in cities enjoy access to almost all the resources that are available. But there are many other cases as well where we see that a child from a poor family (or from a lower caste) without much help from the outside world, through his hard work and courage, completes his education and achieves great heights.[18]

Healthcare

In the healthcare sector, we have seen huge growth in terms of quality. New pieces of equipment and accessories are available in the market. More colleges and hospitals are opening with world-class facilities to cater to the needs of the patients. Still, it is not enough to accommodate patients in times of emergencies such as a pandemic. Also, high costs are required in hospitals with good facilities and poor people cannot incur these expenses. Therefore most of the big hospitals usually cater to the wealthier section of the society because of the affordability factor and hence, the lower sections of the society find it comparatively tougher to get treatment at such places.

Similarly, an increase in the number of private healthcare institutions has, on one hand, boosted the expenses incurred on medical innovations and equipment, but on the other hand, it has also created a wider gap between those who can afford their cost and those who can't.

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[16] *Ibid*

[17] S Gidla, *Ants Among Elephants: An Untouchable Family And The Making Of Modern India* (Harper Collins 2017)

[18] Ahuja R, *Social Problems In India* (3rd edn, Rawat Publications 2014)

Increased mobility between borders (as a result of globalization) has supported the sharing of innovative ideas, knowledge, manpower, and import and export of essential drugs and other medical equipment between India and other nations; but it is also one of the principal reasons for the spread of deadly diseases in the country. Thus, it has also been a significant factor in this assessment of the healthcare system.[19]

CONCLUSION

The main idea behind the introduction of the Varna system was to establish and maintain peace, just order, wilful adherence to the law, and above all, being true to one's responsibilities and duly performing them to attain moksha or enchantment. In India, the story of globalization has mostly been about westernization and modernization. India has had a long history with the caste system as initially, the work was divided among the groups based on their caste, and thus, caste was the primary factor that determined the economic status and as a result, the lifestyle of the people. Even today, the social, political, and (to some extent) economical dynamics within India, are still somehow influenced by the caste dynamics.

But the seeds of the class system, as introduced by the British, in the form of changes that they brought into the Indian society, soon displaced the much older caste system, and hence the class dynamics (based on affordability, occupation, education, and financial condition) initially provided the weaker sections with a better chance to improve their position in the society, irrespective of their caste. But every system comes with its loopholes. Globalization has also uplifted the people from the shackles of discrimination based on caste. Nowadays, we see an upper caste person working and sharing the same space with a lower caste person. It has led to increased competition between the local and global traders which has automatically led to more competition between the same class of people which in turn has enhanced the quality and quantity of the goods and services produced. All in all, we can say that with globalization, the dynamics of caste and class systems have changed considerably. It is, however, important to keep tabs on the loopholes that caste and class dynamics possess and to tackle them through

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[19] *Ibid*

good governance, both at personal and legal levels, for the smooth development of the country.