

**INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF LAW**  
**MANAGEMENT & HUMANITIES**

**[ISSN 2581-5369]**

---

**Volume 4 | Issue 3**

---

**2021**

© 2021 *International Journal of Law Management & Humanities*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://www.ijlmh.com/>

Under the aegis of VidhiAagaz – Inking Your Brain (<https://www.vidhiaagaz.com>)

---

This Article is brought to you for “free” and “open access” by the International Journal of Law Management & Humanities at VidhiAagaz. It has been accepted for inclusion in International Journal of Law Management & Humanities after due review.

In case of **any suggestion or complaint**, please contact [Gyan@vidhiaagaz.com](mailto:Gyan@vidhiaagaz.com).

---

**To submit your Manuscript** for Publication at **International Journal of Law Management & Humanities**, kindly email your Manuscript at [submission@ijlmh.com](mailto:submission@ijlmh.com).

---

# Role of Globalization in India's Caste System

---

YAJAS ACHAL<sup>1</sup>

## ABSTRACT

*This paper is an attempt to see the connection and relationship between globalization and the prevalent caste system in India. Globalization is majorly viewed at and studied from an economic outlook but I would be discussing in this paper its socio-cultural effects and the bearing it has with regards to the different castes (particularly lower caste) that exist in India. The paper further deliberates on the consequences of globalization and whether it helps eradicate the caste system as a whole, has no bearing on it, or further perpetuates it.*

**Keywords:** Globalization, caste system, lower caste, social exclusion.

## I. INTRODUCTION

A Globalization is the connection of different parts of the world which helps organizations operate on an international level and have an international influence. It is the movement and integration of goods and people between different countries. *Even though the term globalization is mostly used in the context of economics it is not limited to economics alone, social and cultural integration is an important aspect of globalization that sometimes maybe gets overshadowed by its economic connotation and impact.*

In India, there is a traditional fourfold caste system, called Varna that is hereditary in nature and consists of Brahmins (the priestly caste), Kshatriyas (the warrior caste), and Vaishyas (the trading caste) and the fourth group, Shudras (the servile caste) in hierarchical order. Dalits are the lower castes, and even referred to as the 'Untouchable' groups. They form 16.2 percent of India's total population and are not just the lowest caste in the caste system but have also come to symbolize the deprived classes in the Indian society.

Many third world countries and developing countries have accepted globalization for the sake of progress and because it is now seen as the only pathway to keep up with the rest of the world in terms of development.

In the Indian context Globalization was adopted in the year 1991 by the government of then Prime Minister Narsimha Rao in an attempt to bring on track the grappling Indian economy. This was done through a set of newly introduced reforms, them being liberalization

---

<sup>1</sup> Author is a student at OP Jindal Global University, India.

privatization and globalization. Since its inception, we have seen major changes in India, not only economically but also socially, culturally, and politically. Today India finds itself as one of the fastest-growing economies in the world and much of that could be credited to the reforms that were undertaken in 1991.

Much like in the economic sector globalization has also had a huge impact on the culture of India, some of the things that allude to this shift are inclusive of but not limited to the changes in lifestyle, family structure and values, technological advancements and social values. An example of this can be the extinction of earlier held values are now giving way to the western culture.<sup>2</sup> The trend can be seen in the rise of nuclear families and rise in the number of divorces in India in recent times.<sup>3</sup> Things like eating habits, leaning towards western attires and outfits, celebrating festivals such as Valentine's Day and New Year are all indicative of this change. People are also becoming more consumer-centric and are looking for more options to consume and spend on. It has had an everlasting impact and its seeds have been very deeply entrenched in the ethos of the country like in the case of any other country which has undergone globalization.

#### **(A) Research Problem**

*Whether globalization as a social phenomenon has had a positive impact on the caste system by eroding it or whether it has widened the gap between the upper and lower castes and divided them further.*

#### **(B) Hypothesis**

*Globalization has a very negative impact on the marginalized sections of the society and it has stagnated the growth of lower castes aggravating the issue that has prevailed in this society for years.*

#### **(C) Methods / Approach**

This research paper uses analytical and descriptive methods on secondary research sources to arrive at an accurate understanding of the hypothesis.

#### **(D) Results / Discussion**

Social exclusion is a procedure that systematically excludes individuals and groups from various features of society such as resources, opportunities, structures of power, rights and privileges, etc. and this is carried out majorly on minority social groups. This as the name

---

<sup>2</sup> (ARGE Bildungsmanagement Follow Pais Shobha - Globalisation and its impacts on families)

<sup>3</sup> (Derné Culture, Family Structure, and Psyche in Hindu India: The "Fit" and the "Inconsistencies")

suggests has a negative effect and is responsible for the stagnation of the excluded groups which more often than not in the case of India are the lower castes.

Social exclusion is not a direct consequence of globalization but in fact has existed before globalization, what and is important to evaluate is how globalization fits into the scheme of things and further aggravates this exclusion.

While social exclusion is a global phenomenon that prevails across the globe, in the Indian context it is different from that of the exclusion that takes place in Europe or any other part of the world.

The exclusion in Indian society has to be understood against the framework of the caste system. The caste system is a form of social stratification which has existed in the Indian sub-continent for about three millennia. It is said to be the most exhaustive of all exclusionary systems. In this system, you are born with a hereditary status which is not subject to amendment and those who are born into the lower caste have to typically face oppression and several social restrictions as a result of them being born into a certain caste. It is important to understand that Dalits are not just a social-cultural group anymore but represent an economic class as well. Studies have shown that over 90 percent of those who die of starvation or diseases are estimated to be Dalits.

The practice of exclusion based on caste was abolished as per the law in the year 1950 however that has not prevented it from existing socially on the ground level. The Constitution on the face level seems anti-discriminatory, inclusive, and it provides for remedies to ensure such a society but ineffective implementation over several decades has not made the society devoid of such wrongs which continue to be practiced among vast sections and demographics of the nation especially in the rural areas.

Globalization is often described as a steady process that gradually takes place, and is inevitable in its development. However in the fight for the rise of a knowledge-technology revolution and the need for countries to be market-driven to compete and survive in the new global scenario it is just as much a revolution and like all other revolutions it disrupts the traditions and customs of the people. The impact of this disruption compounds those who are already vulnerable and excluded, and this observation is particularly amplified in the Indian context.

Globalization talks of global integration that breaks barriers among nations by turning the world into a 'global village'. Contrary to this claim it is a tool for perpetrating the dominance of one country and the elite over the whole world. In an interview with the Indian weekly, Noam Chomsky observed how the marginalized sections of the society were being done away

with as a result of liberalizing capital flow “The global consensus is achieving its aims of enriching small sectors, dismantling social bonds and social support systems, and undermining democracy — one of the chief goals and consequences, of liberalizing capital flow is that disposable people are being removed from society, either left in deteriorating urban slums and collapsing rural communities or sent to prison. Though crime rates have been declining, incarceration has sharply increased, targeting the poor and minorities by various devices. The margins of the society are victims to these social policies of getting away with who they think is excess to this competition.”<sup>4</sup>

Exclusion in India is the result of a lack of commercial and social opportunity, which is the case with the urban poor and denial of social space in the case of the lower castes causing social segregation. The difficulties of the urban poor and the lower caste has been covered in the 2008 Sachar Committee report.

Some manifestations of these exclusions taking place due to globalization are -

**1. Displacement:** Social uprooting is a form of exclusion and the tribal people are facing the brunt of it under the garb of development projects, special economic zones, and displacement from traditional occupations caused by economic liberalization. One can argue that this was taking place pre globalization which holds true to an extent however the “development project” as part of globalization has accelerated and hastened the processes involved. The Sachar Committee has discussed in length the negative effects of economic liberalization on the livelihoods of such people.<sup>5</sup>

**2. Fragmented labor:** Exclusion is also the result of the dissolution of well-organized industrial structures. Multinational corporations and their agents in globalization have replaced the local industry with business process outsourcing. This process has shattered the industrial labor and the indigenous business set ups which operate differently which in turn has weakened the bargaining power of the working class.

**3. Changes in Agricultural sector:** The census figures show that over half of the Dalit workforce were landless agricultural laborers, and India’s agrarian sector is being transformed by global companies. Due to globalization Indian market owners now buy foreign crops and food grains which are cheaper vis-à-vis the Indian crops, this leads to farmers having to sell their crops at the low prices stated by the market owners and being exploited. These factors result in rural impoverishment, indebtedness, and a rise in farmers’ suicides in several regions

---

<sup>4</sup> Outlook January 3 edition, 2000

<sup>5</sup> Government of India, 2006: 21;

and Dalits more than anyone are at the receiving end as illustrated in the article by Radhakrishnan on the sociological reflections of the farmer's suicides in India.<sup>6</sup>

**4. Street Vendors:** Another case in point for the MNCs suppressing the voices of the working classes are street vendors. Despite lack of reliable data research suggests they mostly belong to excluded castes and groups. The total number of street vendors in India is approximately 10 million, valuing for 2 percent of the total urban population. Street vendors form a very important component of the urban informal sector in India, and the street-vendor economy keeps millions employed in the job market, sustains industries and delivers necessities to the poor. Despite their growing number and contributions to the economy, street vendors are regarded as illegal traders. Their illegal status makes them helpless to rent-seeking by the officials and extortion by regional mafias. It is estimated that in Mumbai, around Rs 400 crore is received as bribes annually from street vendors. In Delhi, a study by Manushi showed that the police and municipality collect Rs 50 crore every month from street vendors and rickshaw pullers.<sup>7</sup> Globalization has only added to their misery as the opposition to legalizing street vendors comes from quarters that are all products of globalization and see local street vendors as a threat to their business, for instance, department stores and shopping malls. They want the street vendors to be portrayed as encroachers and this also helps the police and municipalities make money off of them in the forms of bribe which go unchecked.

**5. Educational deprivation:** Exclusion also results from deprivation of access to education and employment, in traditional Indian society lack of access to the education system existed due to the state's failure to provide free or affordable education and generate sufficient employment opportunities in India. The overall percentage of graduates in the 20-24 age group is only about 8 percent. Degree holders in the 20-24 age group estimate for only 2.3 percent of the entire population in this age group among the Scheduled tribes, and 3.6 percent among the Scheduled Castes. This is suggestive of the state's failure to deal with the task of educating India's rising generation in a socially equitable way. In the age of globalization, this disparity of education becomes more severe as the need for higher education becomes a social imperative. In its Survey, the report of the 1997-99 Task Force on Higher Education in Developing Countries resolved that without more and better higher education, developing countries will find it increasingly difficult to benefit from the global knowledge-based market. This report was prepared by the Task Force on Higher Education in Developing Countries,

---

<sup>6</sup> Radhakrishnan, P. (2006) "Farmers' Suicides in India: Some Sociological Reflections." *South Asian Journal*. No. 11. January-March

<sup>7</sup> *Street Vendors in Asia: A Review / Request PDF*. [www.researchgate.net/publication/262125106\\_Street\\_Vendors\\_in\\_Asia\\_A\\_Review](http://www.researchgate.net/publication/262125106_Street_Vendors_in_Asia_A_Review).

convened by the World Bank and UNESCO. The Task Force brought together experts from 13 countries to explore the future of higher education in the developing nations and India's gross enrollment for tertiary education was found to be a dismal 9 percent to 11 percent. Globalization requires only educated manpower and due to this the lower castes and excluded groups have to tackle the traditional deprivation of education as well as being left out of the mainstream due to lack of education in the knowledge-driven society of globalization.

## II. ANALYSIS & INTERPRETATION

Globalization like many put it is a double-edged sword, it has propelled the economic sector of the country, but at the same time has heightened caste tensions and widened social inequalities.

There is a notion that has also been voiced in previous other research works that multinational companies do not discriminate on basis of caste or any other demarcation as their sole objective is to extract talent which would provide the lower castes with an equal platform and hence lead to their emancipation, but this is highly misleading. These claims are often stemmed in the following quotes which are cited to allude to an equitable set up where caste does not have any role to play, "Talent is indeed the foremost priority for companies like expounded by Ravi Venkatesan the chairman of Microsoft's India unit who said: *Talent is the number one issue for all companies.*" There is also the example of Abhishek Jain (executive vice president at IncentOne, a U.S. company that outsources technical work to India) who directly addressed the caste-based discrimination and had this to say "We don't give a damn about any of these differences in caste or religion, it's a global industry. In America, the only caste that matters is talent."<sup>8</sup> While these statements hold true in itself it wouldn't be prudent to look at them in isolation, it is a given that globalization is highly competitive and demands only the best, however due to the stagnation of the lower castes over the years they are not provided with the same platform to begin with vis a vis a person of a different caste who they would be competing with for the said job. Poor financial status, quality of education, lack of technological advancement are some of the contributing factors in creating this polarity which creates a gulf between them and the rest when it comes to their eligibility and their standing for a sought after position. As a result of this, they are not able to reap the benefits of globalization, which further widens the rift between the rich and the poor, which in India's case can be most of the times be interchangeably used with the upper and the lower caste.

---

<sup>8</sup> AEIdeas, *Globalization Erodes India's Caste System*, AEI (June 2, 2021, 10:47 AM), <https://www.aei.org/carpe-diem/globalization-erodes-indias-caste-system>

It is also evident that enough measures have not been taken to educate and empower the marginalized sections and lower castes of the nation. The state has failed to provide free and affordable education as has been promised in the constitution and they let illiteracy serve as a breeding ground for further discrepancies and exploitation of the lower caste.

### **III. CONCLUSION & FUTURE SCOPE**

It is understandable that the countries who do not go down the road of globalization will be left behind but what needs to be done is prioritizing development over globalization itself. The welfare of the marginalized sections of society cannot be compromised for economic growth and then be justified. Globalization, per se, is not development and has many socially harmful elements, so globalization needs to be brought within the ambit of development and needs to be molded by every country keeping in mind the development process as a whole and also curtailing its harmful effects of discriminating against the downtrodden sections of the society which in India's case are the lower caste.

Ensuring and imparting education to all will go a long way in fighting globalization and helping the pockets of society that are not able to avail its benefits (lower caste), Jyotiba Phule had also alluded to the same as she pinpointed illiteracy as the main reason for the exploitation of the lower caste. Education empowers and empowerment brings change and by ensuring education for all we can eliminate a lot of the problems from our society that have existed prior to and that have risen as a result of globalization.

### **IV. INFERENCE**

The above-discussed issues dealt with some aspects of caste-based and minority exclusion in the context of globalization, and even though the discussion is far from complete we can infer from the aforementioned results that globalization has had both positive and negative impacts on India, and while it has been successful to an extent in blooming the economy, technology, healthcare, etc. for which it is given its due credit there has not been enough recognition and deliberation of the social exclusion for which it bolsters a breeding ground, and there is yet to be planned unified approach to combat exclusion. In times of globalization those belonging to the lower castes are not able to compete in the mainstream line of work due to a lack of financial, technological, and educational advancements. Their inability to deploy the benefits and gains of globalization due to the said reasons and hence the huge gap existing between the upper and the lower castes further dilates.

**V. REFERENCES**

1. Bhalotra S. *The Impact of Economic Liberalisation on Employment and Wages in India*. Geneva: International Policy Group, International Labour Office.
2. Derne S. *The Effect of Cultural Globalisation in India: the Implications for Cultural Theory*. *Poetics*, 33 (2005), 33-47.
3. Dollar D. *Globalization, Inequality and Poverty since 1980*. Development Research Group, World Bank.

\*\*\*\*\*