

Globalization: Theoretical Perspectives
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Lecture 51
The Modernity of caste and the Market Economy Part- I

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The Modernity of Caste and the
Market Economy

DAVID MOSSE

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So, welcome back to the class. We are approaching the final module of this course, globalization theoretical perspectives. And in the last week, we had a discussion or a series of talks on some of the essential substantive themes. We had three sessions on the globalization of religion, and we had a session on environmentalism.

So, as I mentioned in the previous lectures, the number of substantive themes is pretty numerous; one finds it very difficult to stop where or make a selection about the articles to be included in the syllabus and the pieces to be excluded because, you know that globalization has left nothing untouched, in its sweeping, influences and changes. And from this week onwards, we have two more weeks left; I thought I would choose topics closely associated with Indian society.

So, we all the discussion that we had so far, right from the beginning, you know that we gave so much importance to the theoretical understanding of globalization, we did not discuss any specific case studies, we were trying to understand how most of the critical scholars of sociology

have theorised and try to understand this whole phenomenon that is how we looked at scholars like Beck and Giddens and Castells and all these scholars, we buy to look at how, the nation-state is changing, we looked at how the space and time are undergoing significant transformations and so and so.

So, from this class onwards, we will look at a few themes related to Indian society because we know that Indian culture was opened up. Its economy was opened up in the early 1990s with Manmohan Singh as the finance minister. That heralded the era of liberalisation, and you know that now, we are deeply entrenched in the global economy.

Globalization is sweeping across India, and we are witnessing that we are party to that; globalization has again not left anything untouched in Indian society. It is interesting to know the scholarly approaches and attempts to make sense of globalization in Indian culture. In these classes, what I will do in this session, I will stick to one particular essay by one of them some the scholars and then present to that as a kind of a case study.

For example, there could be one session on a dowry, and IT professionals may be in one of the coming lectures. And in this class, I will discuss a fascinating essay on caste and modernity, one caste and neoliberal economy written by David Mosse, a critical British anthropologist. We will have a couple of, maybe one session on globalization and tourism, globalization and music, globalization and consumption, globalization and middle class, or we may also have a guest lecture on globalization and middle class and then work in these call centres.


So, this will give you some idea regarding the kind of scholarly works and literature on the influence and impact of globalization on Indian society. So, this particular essay is written by David Mosse, a very influential senior British anthropologist. This essay is published in *Modern Asian Studies*, a very recent article, 2019 it was published. And some of you might know that *modern Asian Studies* is a prestigious journal, which brings out some critical essays related to Indian society and culture.

So, it is titled, *The modernity of caste and market economy*. Critical essay. Maybe this is not a kind of a research paper as such. It is a review paper because if you look into this paper, it is almost 47 pages, an extremely lengthy essay with hundreds of references. David Mosse has done a remarkable job collating many materials published about caste and economy. He has done a

fantastic job of going through them and then analysing the findings, arguments, methodological innovations, etc.

So, I would strongly urge you or those interested in a study on caste to get this paper; it is freely available. It is an open-access paper, even though it is published in a prestigious journal. So, it is a beneficial paper for those working in the caste.

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- What place does the caste system have in modern India with its globally integrating market economy?
 - Has the market economy and neoliberalism obliterated this institution?
 - Caste has been traditionally identified in the realm of culture and religion.
 - Colonial liberalism that abstracted or disembedded 'the economy' rewrote 'the social' as the market and, in doing so, placed relations of caste (and kinship) in a non-market-protected domain of religion and culture, institutionalizing a disjuncture between the spheres of the economic-public and the cultural-private.



So, the central question that David Mosse addresses in this paper is how the caste system has in modern India globally in the creating market economy? Because this is a very, very interesting question because usually, a caste is not something that is often associated with the cost of the economy. And those who have studied sociology, especially Indian society, through a sociological lens, know about the debate within the Indian community, but I am not going into that.

But usually, caste is seen as a vital institution of ancient times, which was severely challenged during the colonial and post-colonial periods. And it is mainly seen as something confined to the realm of culture and religion. So, the question is, has the market economy and neoliberalism obliterated this institution? What has been the impact of the neoliberal economy on the system of caste in India?

It is a very, very simple question, but it is profound. It is a fundamental question; we know that the caste system is undergoing significant changes. Yet, it continues to be one of the most

resilient systems in India because the that the fundamental pillar on which caste system is still, caste still exist is that of endogamy where the practice where the people get married within their caste and even today, not more than five per cent of the people decide to get married outside their caste.

So, as long as endogamy persists, caste also will continue. But the question is, what kind of impact has the neoliberal economy imposed on the caste system? Caste has been traditionally identified in the realm of culture and religion, a point that I just mentioned earlier. If you look into most of the critical studies, whether it is by, by Andrew Beatty or, Louis Dumont, a critical French sociologist or M. N. Srinivas or a host of several hosts of people, they all used to look at caste as something confined to the realm of religion and culture, not with that of the economy.

So, colonial liberalism that abstracted or disembedded the economy rewrote the social as the market. So, in the colonial scholarships, colonial forms of governmentality, the social as the market, and in doing so, placed the relations of caste and kinship in a non-call protected domain of religion and culture. So, this is a critical observation that many scholars failed to understand the significance of caste in the caste and kinship in the realm of the economy because they thought that this caste and kinship belonged to the realm of the private.

And the economy is the realm of the public. In the economy, you engage based on your rational ideas. These primordial affinities like caste, religion or association, or kinship affinity have no place—institutionalising a disjuncture between the spheres of the economic public and culture private. So, personal is associated with culture, and the economy is related to the public. So, caste was relegated into that of a private sphere. And there was hardly any scholarly attempt to make sense of the role of caste in the economic realm.

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- Caste has indeed become tradition in relation to the modern economy, or the pre-capitalist in relation to the capitalist, culture in relation to economy, private to public, or as that into which economic relations are 'socially embedded', an idea which, presumes an actual realm of pure economic actors and processes with social identity/location-less buyer-seller exchanges, when what is really at issue is the social structuring, indeed the caste structuring, of the economy itself.
- Implicitly, there is also here a claim against caste from the morality of the market—that it should be caste-free.




So, most argue that caste has indeed become a tradition about the modern economy, or the pre-capitalist relation to the capitalist, culture about the economy, private to the public, or as that into which economic ties are socially embedded, an idea which presumes a virtual realm of pure economic actors and processes with social identity or location more minor buyer-seller exchanges when what is really at issue is that the social structuring, indeed the caste structuring of the economy itself.

David Mosse belonged to a group of scholars who think there is a caste structuring of the economy. In the Indian economy, whether it is the economy, in the towns or the economy in the villages, whether you are talking about rural economy, you are talking about, say, small and medium industries, or even large industries. You cannot keep away the caste structuring of that and only things we often choose not to see.


So, what happens, many times it is seen as a tradition, it is seen as a pre-capitalist one, it is seen as private, and it is seen as, so economic relations are socially embedded, an idea which presumes a virtual realm of pure economics actors and processes, with social identity location more minor buyer-seller exchanges. So, many times, you know that economics believes that actors behave in a very rational manner as if they are not influenced by any societal, ties or societal needs and other things because one of the essential pre usages is that if all other conditions are granted, or other conditions are equal.

They think a particular, a kind of a realm of isolation, where all these changes happen, but we know that that does not occur. So implicitly, there is also a claim against a caste from the morality of the market that it should be caste free. Of course, we think that a call must act solely based on its character, its logic; it should not be inflicted with any other non-rational kind of stuff.

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- The scholarly and political shift here was inaugurated by the activism of inferiorized caste groups such as Dalits in the 1990s, coinciding with the liberalization of the Indian economy, and the struggles for dignity born of social experiences of continuing discrimination and humiliation in the age of the market.
- Taking inspiration from the work of Bhimrao Ambedkar on the pervasiveness of caste effects, Dalit scholars rejected the submersion of caste into the analysis of class as much as into colonialism and the post-colonial elite claim to modernity that invisibilized ascriptive caste in society and economy.
- Most important here, Dalit studies have fostered a body of research, chiefly by economists, focused on the caste-regulated and caste-networked nature of the Indian market economy, discarding categorical separations of religion, politics, or economy, while indicating the need for a new model of modern caste.



The scholarly and political shift here was inaugurated by the activism of interiorised caste groups such as Dalits in the 1990s. So, please read the essay. I am not going into the details. David Mosse gives you an elaborate explanation of the cost studies in the colonial and post-colonial periods. I am not summarising that because our focus is on understanding the neoliberal relationship.

So Mosse says, again, I would invite your attention to this term, inferiorised caste, which he uses to indicate that the caste is considered lower. So, he does not use the time lower but talks about them as inferiorised castes; it is not that these castes were inferior, but the upper castes inferiorised them. They coincided with the liberalisation of the Indian economy and the struggle for dignity, born of the social experience of continuing discrimination and humiliation in the market age.

So, he understands the 1990s, especially the Mandal commission report, the implementation of the Mandal commission report by VP Singh government that heralded a new era of backward

class mobility and lower-class mobility. He argues along with the opening of the Indian economy. Taking inspiration from the work of Bhimrao Ambedkar on the perceived pervasiveness of caste effects, Dalit scholars rejected the submission of caste into the analysis of class as much as into colonialism and the post-colonial elite claim of modernity that invisible ascriptive caste in the society and economy, so what does this mean?

You also identify the emergence of a host of Dalit scholars who were not ready to accept the argument that caste and class are equal in Indian society. And who makes this kind of argument that caste and style are similar in this society? The caste question will be addressed simultaneously if you address the class question. Any idea who makes this kind of a claim. Usually, this claim or approach is taken by Marxist scholars. They prioritise the economic character of the society and are very reluctant to acknowledge the role of caste in India.

So, a typical Marxian framework privileges the class structure at the cost of all other identities. So, Dalit scholars rejected that claim, submission of caste into the analysis of class, as much as into colonialism and post-colonial elite share of modernity, the argument that the modernity will make all the tasks disappear. Again, that has not happened, and invisible identity invisibilised ascriptive caste in society and economy.

Most important here, Dalit studies have fostered a body of research chiefly by economists focused on the caste regulated and networked caste nature of the Indian market economy, discarding categorical separation of religion political economy while indicating the need for a new model of modern caste. Now, this is very important, a series of work starting from the 1990s or maybe 2000 onwards by scholars like, say, Surinder Jodhka, a sociologist, but he has worked on that. Then Sukhadeo Thorat was the chairman of UGC. Ashwini Deshpande, Satish Deshpande, a host of scholars basically from Delhi, started to publish quite a lot of material, which brought in the kind of an impact of the economy in the realm of the effect of caste in the realm of economy.

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- Mandal Commission recommendation and the 'silent revolution' of the rise of backward classes
- The story of how Mandal produced a new political category and changed that category's relationship to power is well known. But what is less observed is the relative autonomy of this transformation of caste in the realm of politics from caste in the economy.
- Caste is celebrated community or cultural identity and diversity, part of the vitality of Indian democracy; caste is the culture of business trust. Recoding caste as culture legitimizes and protects inherited status, since claims regarding discrimination cannot be made against the preservation of cultural practices.



So, Mandal commission recommendation and the silent revolution of the rise of Backward Classes. So, this also coincided with the increase of Backward Classes. And this term silent revolution is coined by Christophe Jafferlot, a critical scholar on Indian Affairs. The story of how Mandal produced a new political category and changed that category's relationship to power is well known, but what is less observed is the relative autonomy of this transformation of the cast in the realm of politics from the form in the economy.


So, even the Mandal commission agitation and the subsequent rise of OBCS and Dalits, for example, the rise of Mayawati or Kanshi Ram, that gave so much visibility of caste in the discourses on politics, but again hardly the relevance of caste in the sphere of the economy was overlooked. Caste is celebrated as a community of cultural identity and diversity, a part of the vitality of Indian democracy.

Caste is a culture of business trust; recording caste as a culture legitimises and protects inherited status since claims regarding discrimination cannot be made against the preservation of cultural practices. This may be a fundamental argument, usually known as the culturalization of caste, propounded by Balmurli Natarajan scholar. Balmurli Natrajan is a faculty in the US; he teaches in one of them. He is a professor of sociology or anthropology in one of the universities in the US, but his work on the culturalization of caste has been very significant.

So, he argues that off late caste has been seen as a realm of culture, as a cultural identity. And that of diversity. So, Hindu society is presented as a peaceful, non-problematic assemblage of different and separate castes. And each caste has its diversity. So, they are all existing, coexisting peacefully. And that, because diversity is also seen as something very, very desirable part of the vitality of Indian democracy. A caste is the culture of business trust; in some businesses, trust is significant, especially when dealing with certain precious things, such as diamonds, gold, and other stuff.

This trust is something essential. Recording caste as culture legitimises and protects inherited status, since claims regarding the discrimination cannot be made against the preservation of cultural practices because there, his, Balmurli argues that, the kind of a hierarchy and the kind of discrimination that is that exists within caste system is never questioned, when you look at caste as only as a repository of culture, please do read that I am just summarising that.

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- Ethnography of Mosse in Tamilnadu village: In the village as in the nation, caste recedes as an archaic system of group rank and honour, with market relations providing the idiom for transactions unbound to caste, and, second, that 'caste politics' now has an autonomy from everyday economic life in the village.
 - the abandonment of cultivable land to wood-fuel shrubs, farmers' reliance on crop insurance pay-outs, public distribution rice, or employment-scheme wages as much as tilling the land, and the huge diversification of non-farm business within the village, and work outside, all signal what is a national trend.



So, I may not be able to go into the complexities, but I strongly urge you to read that book about the culturalization of caste. David Mosse himself has done a lot of work in Tamil Nadu, so ethnography of Mosse in Tamil Nadu village. So, in the village, what are his observations? In the village, as in the nation, caste recedes as an archaic system of group rank and honour, with market relations providing the idiom of unbound transactions to caste.

And second, caste politics now has autonomy from the everyday economic life of the village. Now, Mosse argues that this is the impression he gets or the response from the people. Now, people of the village, his respondents say or repeat the image that the caste is receding. And, caste is receding as an archaic system of group, rank and honour with market relations providing the idiom of transaction unbound to caste.

So, they are talking about the influence of the market that, if you look into the kind of transformations of villages, many castes people are not bound to do the traditional occupation. Because that has been one of the essential features of the caste system that, that you are supposed to, you are forced to do your traditional occupation, and you take up any other work was seen as non-acceptable and many times even punishable.

But we are no longer in that face. People are free to move out of there, of their traditional occupation. And that has brought in quite a lot of flexibility. People, including Dalits sources, speak about a scenario where they seem to be; they seem to be out of the whole caste question. The abandonment of cultivable land and wood fuel, shrubs, farmers, reliance on crop insurance payouts, public distribution of rice, or employment scheme wages as much as tilling the land.

And the vast diversification of non-farm business within the village and work outside all signal to what is a national trend, the kind of sweeping changes brought in by specific political, social and economic changes. It is no longer a closed, rural economy, where you have a single landlord, and then you have, maybe tons of, hundreds of, landless labourers working in this thing, the caste system intact. So, that phase of society is gone.

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- An overall decline in poverty is, nonetheless, accompanied by an increase in inequality as the poorest depend upon uncertain casual work in railways, cloth mills, bakeries, bottling liquor, or brick kilns or migrating as construction workers. The impact of such change on caste relations is a complex issue.
- The factors accounting for the different impact of labour and other markets on caste and caste on rural markets are varied—histories of land control or reform, urban proximity, caste demography, and political mobilization among them—and do not permit generalization about the erasure of caste effects in the post-liberalization rural economy.



Now, an overall decline in poverty is, nonetheless accompanied by an increase in inequality as the poorest depend upon uncertain casual work in railways, cloth mills, bakeries, bottling liquor, or brick kiln or migrating as construction workers, the impact of such change on the caste relation is a complex issue. Now, what Mosse argues is that, even while there have been so much of changes brought in by the new economic policy.

So, this kind of economic transformation, the impact of such changes on different sections of the population, on different castes, would be very different. And you cannot generalise that easily. For example, there is an overall decline in poverty which is a fact; simultaneously, inequality accompanies it. The kind of inequality of different sections of the population that is increased that is not brought, it does not come down. And that is a fundamental question.


Because the caste system was seen as a system that perpetuates inequality, the people at the bottom of the caste structure, the people considered to be the inferiorised groups, the Dalits who are supposed to do the most menial jobs. So, they should have come up with others, but that has not happened. So, what has happened is that they started working railways, in cloth mills, in bakeries, bottling liquor, or brick kiln or migrating to construction workers.

David Mosse's focus is now on this kind of unequal, unequal transformation of different sections. Accounting for the additional impact of labour and other markets on cast and cast on rural markets are varied. Histories of land control or reform, urban proximity, caste demography,

and political mobilisation do not permit generalisations about the erasure of caste effects in the post-liberalisation rural economy.

So, just like any seasoned sociologist, most would be highly cautionary. He would caution you that please do not think that the cast has disappeared, even when the lower caste people say that there is no caste system or other thing. It is one thing to listen to your respondents, and the other thing is to accept it at face value and then believe in that. So, he proposes a series of exciting studies and observations made by other people who can spell out a particular relationship between caste and economy.

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- Caste was important in structuring opportunity in the world beyond. Caste was an alloyed effect, bound up and disguised in the mobilization of capital, dowry payments, or networks into institutions (of government, the Church, and so on). Caste was embedded in relations of kin, friendship with class-mates, priests, or agents mediating work abroad, and, of course, marriage, through which entry into higher education, urban employment, or business was navigated and which reproduced the historical privileges of caste such as inherited wealth (land) and productive networks.
 - Caste was now mobilized not as public status, but as a network resource—not for the preservation or enhancement of the status of the group (as in earlier conflicts that canalized economic opportunity into the idiom of ritual rank), but in support of individual mobility (redirecting symbolic capital to economic opportunity).



So, caste was essential in structuring opportunities in the world beyond. Caste was an alloyed effect, bound up and disguised in the mobilisation of capital, dowry payment or networks into institutions of government of the Church and so on. Caste was embedded in relations of kin, friendship with classmates, priests or agents mediating work abroad and of course, marriage through which entry into higher education, urban employment, or business was navigated and which reproduced the historical privilege of caste such as inherited wealth, land and productive networks.

It is not that you look at the caste as a singular entity, which can be seen, which can be understood, which can be kind of a critique, the form is more pervasive, it is more kind of a, a variety of flowing, it is more pervasive and, and it appears it can be, it can disguise itself in so

many different forms. For example, caste was embedded in a relationship of kin. Your relationship between your neighbours and relatives is strengthened through caste and friendship with classmates. It is supported if they belong to the same cast or priests or agents mediating abroad.

So, unseen caste relationships are very, very strong in all these things. That is the crucial argument of David Mosse. Caste was not mobilised not as a public status but as a network resource. This is a critical point. Caste is seen as a network resource, not for the preservation of the enhancement of the group's status, as in the earlier conflicts that channelised economic opportunity into idioms of the ritual rank, but in support of individual mobility, indirectly symbolic capital group economic opportunity.

So, it is not that the earlier forms of you trumpeting your caste, you giving so much importance to your caste and then making it a public claim of an upper caste, it is not happening at that level. Instead, it is happening at the individual level, individual level, which can influence your mobility. So, what sections of people can make use of the opportunities of this neoliberal economy to move up in the ladder is greatly influenced by their caste status.

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- Shift from honour to opportunity—from action around group status to group action for individual mobility—decreases the visibility of caste effects. Caste reworked as private connections and capital is not easily perceived as such.
- In the nation and in the village, there appears to be a disjuncture between the public narrative of caste (as market-eroded tradition and identity politics) and the processes of caste, which are firmly part of the modern market economy.

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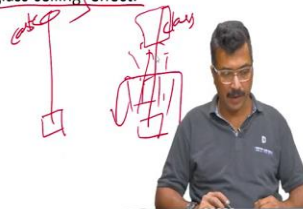
So, a shift from honour to opportunity, from group status to group action for individual mobility, decreases the visibility of caste effects. Caste reworks as private connections, and capital is not easily perceived as such. So, in the previous slide, for example, this movement the symbolic means to economic opportunity, something significant every caste used to have it their own, its symbolic capital, you are an upper caste person, it can be distinguished based on the kind of dress that you have, worship patterns that you have, lifestyles that you have, and that can be, or that has been quickly translated into economic opportunity.

So, caste reworked as private connections and capital is not easily perceived. There appears to be a disjuncture between the public narrative of caste as market eroded tradition and identity politics and the caste process, which are firmly part of the modern economy in the nation and the village.

So, this is what Mosse sets up in the very first thing; even though there is in the nation and the village, there appears to be rhetoric that the market has completely eroded the cost structure and, and now it is, it is an open thing only your merit is counted, but in reality, for a sociologist, for very seasoned sociologists, caste is firmly a part of the modern market economy.

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- At the scale of national data sets, it becomes clear that post-reform development and its economic diversification have not, as regards employment, broken the association of 'upper' castes with higher-status professions and Dalits with manual and casual labour.
 - For the post-reform period, the data reveal glass walls against Dalit occupational mobility out of caste-typed roles or low-end service trades into more profitable ones, or self-employment. Widening caste disparity in earnings at the top of the income distribution, and in access to the most prestigious jobs, indicates a (glass ceiling) effect.



Now, at the scale of the national data set, it becomes clear that the post-reform development and its economic diversification have not, as regards employment broken the association of upper caste with the highest status professionals and Dalits with the manual and casual labourers. So, how do you make any understanding about this? For example, there are two types of vertical systems.

If you consider this as a caste and if this is a class, there are upper caste, there are no people at the top bottom of the class structure, there are lower caste here, and there are impoverished people at the bottom. So, when you are talking about mobility in an open market system, ideally, you should see that everybody, despite the upper caste and lower caste, must move up in the class ladder and be kind of equally represented in every class position.

Suppose it was a kind of an ideal situation. In that case, you should have a sort of a proportional number of very upper caste people among the poorest and also a lower caste people must be there in the wealthiest area. But the data does not show a high preponderance of upper caste in the upper class and a high prevalence of over a presentation of lower caste people in the poor group.

And there are fascinating works on that by scholars like Satish Deshpande, using NSSO, National Sample Survey Organization data, which shows that there is a kind of complementarity between the class and caste. So, for the post-reform period, data reveal glass walls against Dalit's occupational mobility out of cost type roles or low-end services trades into more profitable one or self-employment.

You are widening caste disparity earning at the top of the economic distribution. And in access to the most prestigious jobs indicate a glass ceiling effect. I hope you are familiar with this term called the glass ceiling effect. Usually, it was assumed, it was used in the context of, of feminist literature, concerning women, that when you, when you look inside from a building, which has glass ceilings, it seems you can see the top you think that you will be able to go up, Still when you move up, you know the very substantial obstacles, ceilings, glass ceilings, which is not visible to that.

So, the argument is that widening caste disparity in earning at the top of the income distribution and in access to the most prestigious job indicates a glass ceiling effect for the delegates. So, Dalits are getting new and new, novel employment opportunities, but most of them are confined to the lower sections of the class later. Let us end the session now, and we will continue this class in the next session. And we will conclude this paper with the next session. So, thank you.