

Globalization: Theoretical Perspectives
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Lecture 52
The Modernity of Caste and the Market Economy Part – II

(Refer Slide Time: 00:15)

- Three interrelated processes: First, the differential valuation (ranking) of occupations and derivatively markets; the effect of categorical distinctions, caste identity, and caste networks; and, third, the combining of these as discrimination.
- Evidence for the persisting differential valuation of work, workers, businesses, and markets is strong. Dalit sweepers, Brahmin cooks and so on.
- The caste segmentation of labour markets and business indicates a cultural logic embedded within and perpetuated through economic activity. It is demonstration of the fact that, in economic transactions, people are treated differently according to their social identity—an idea central to the field of 'identity economics'. In labour recruitment, etc



Welcome back to the class, and we are in the second session in which we are discussing the essay by David Mosse, a critical sociologist or anthropologist from the UK, a very senior scholar who has been studying caste relations and the caste system in India for the past several decades.

So, in a very lengthy essay around 47 pages, the article appeared in modern Asian Studies, a prestigious journal; David Mosse is looking at the transformation of caste relations in the neoliberal era. So, we discussed the first part of the essay in the last class where he shows how caste was primarily perceived as something confined to the realm of the social or that the religious and the cultural and why that it was not seen as a part of the larger economy or that of the markets, it has its roots in colonial as well as in post-colonial scholarship.

And he also argues that in the 1990s, ever since the market was opened or India experienced the pros of liberalisation, more and more focus was put on this relationship. This role of caste in the market and a host of exciting studies emerged. So, he argues that the kind of significant scale changes that happened in the Indian economy, the relation this, this, the separation of caste with

the occupation, the occupational criterion of caste has been very significantly damaged. But that does not mean that the caste has become an irrelevant category to understand the mobility of different sections of the population.

So, in the previous section, the concluding area, we argued that the inferior priced class, that the lower caste, the Dalits, are predominantly seen in the occupations that are considered to be lowly considered to be at the bottom of the economic structure, they have not made sufficient movement up in the hierarchy of jobs and occupations and other things, which are usually monopolised or just traditionally occupied by the more privileged sections of society.

He identifies three interlinked processes that have contributed to that. First is differential valuation or ranking of occupations and derivatively markets. So, he says professions are not ranked equally; different values statuses are attached to other fields, and needs are closely connected with caste.

Second, the effects of categorical distinctions, caste identity, and caste networks, and the kind of effects of these categorical distinctions. And third, the combination of these two processes is an outright form of discrimination. So, these are the three ones. So, evidence for persisting differential valuation of work, workers, business and markets is vital. Dalit sweepers, Brahman cooks and so on.

So, if you look into a host of available jobs, different types of occupations that are available, we know that they have been graded, and there is a powerful sense of social prestige and honour attached to each one of them. Even though we say that every job has to be respected, you know. We know that that is only a very hollow word. That is not how our society looks at the different positions; specific jobs always carry higher prestige and higher honour.

For example, the job of a teacher, doctor, engineer, bureaucrat, or IAS officer carries a lot of very high employment and prestige. At the same time, a person who works manually, a blue-collar worker, a barber, and a washerman carry much lesser social honour than the people who do, supposed to be the most menial jobs. Still, please keep in mind that these menial jobs are essential services.

Like, sweeping the roads, removing the garbage from the house, or sanitary workers, people clearing the drainage systems when your toilet is blocked, you cannot use the bathroom, then

somebody has to come in. So, who are the people who are coming and then cleaning up your clogged toilet pipelines? They are the people who are coming from the lowest sections.

So that is considered the most polluting kind of job. We never give any prestige or respect to such positions because they are those jobs; it is a dirty job, you are supposed to deal with contaminated objects, it stinks it is very undesirable to see. So, the whole question is that this gradation of these jobs has a historical context. In Indian history especially, concerning the caste system, you have had different sections of the population doing these traditional occupations for the past several centuries.

So, that the upper castes did not have to think about some of their very essential services, they did not have to think about some of these foul polluting aspects of their life; they did not have to think about how to wash their soiled clothes, they did not have to think about what to do with their human excreta every day, there were specialised people, there were people who specialised in removing or cleaning these jobs, they never had to worry about who will cut their hair, there were specific sections for that.

And it is not only that they were a division of labours, it was, but they also were a division of labourers with, with a very high degree of status attached to people, say from the priestly class, from the teachers, from upper caste whereas, whereas a shallow sense of or there is a kind of disdain was attached to people from the lower section. And the point is that even now, that continues.

So, one of the essential points that David Mosse points out is that this differential valuation of work continues, you will find Dalits being the most predominant section among the sweepers or the people who clean our roads or our toilets, in IT establishments, in government schools, in government officials, in corporations, in municipalities, in panchayats you will find that.

And conversely, you will find there is heavy demand for Brahmins as priests, heavy order for Brahmins as cooks because food prepared by Brahmin is considered the purest, and there are sections of the population who would consume food that is designed only by Brahmins. So, you have this very differential form of treatment towards jobs; we do not look at them as jobs that trained people can do; it is not only about training, it is not only about your aptitude or ability; there are many more things that are involved in it.

The caste segmentation of labour markets and business indicates a cultural logic embedded within and perpetuated through economic activity. It demonstrates that people are treated differently in financial transactions according to their social identity, an idea central to identity economics in labour recruitment, etc.

So, this exciting field is identity economics tries to understand that. For example, there are often critical arguments about why specific jobs are reserved only for people with very fair skin, film industry jobs, marketing careers, media, and television. In these professions, if you are somebody with fair skin, that is a sign, significantly added qualification. It is challenging for people with a much darker complexion to break into that.

Because they are your visual appeal matters, the way you speak matters, your pronunciation matters, your etiquettes matter, your personality, your soft skill matters. And for each of these aspects that I mentioned now, your decency, speaking skills, pronunciation, and demeanors all have a particular caste connotation.

The people who are pretty good at English with the neutral accent and with them or kind of excellent communication skills, in most likely they are supposed to be they come from the most privileged sections, which is translated into people from the upper class and upper caste system.

So, many exciting studies talk about how caste and these matters reflect labour recruitment. Because of labour recruitment, you usually think it is only a certificate; your performance matters. It is not; there are fascinating studies done by scholars like Sukhdev Thorat and others where identical resumes fake resumes were created.

And the only things that they changed were the caste and cast off the applicants. And that they were sent to different recruitment agencies and the response. They were able to show a very statistical difference in that the cast of the people, which are demonstrated us higher, were given far better treatment than the people who led a very negative lower caste thing. So, there was always this caste segmentation of labour markets and business concerning these notions of prestige associated with that.

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- Network-based labour recruitment through gang leaders and foremen, including the construction-site and brick-field destinations of 'super-exploited' seasonal migrant casual labourers, produce caste-segmented labour forces and underline the necessity for (or inescapability of) categorical membership.
- Caste networks are especially important in business regulation where risks are high, formal institutions weak, and 'selective trust' at a premium.
- Occupational ranking, categorical exclusion, opportunity hoarding, and the work of networks combine in the third caste effect: discrimination.

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And then, network-based labour recruitment through gang leaders and supervisors, including the construction site and brickfield, brickfield destinations of super-exploited seasonal migrant casual labourers, produce caste segmented labour forces and underline the necessity for, or inescapability of a categorical membership if you look into it because this migration is a critical area that has attracted a lot of scholarly attention.

So, if you look at how migrations take place, from say, from quite a lot of northern states, like West Bengal or Orissa or Bihar are UP, there are a lot of people coming to move into different metropolitan cities, people moving to southern states, like Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Karnataka. So, many of these things are mediated explicitly through caste relationships. So, it is the network, the person who recruits the people, they he uses his caste, network kinship network to recruit further people.

So, they are all; they all work based on this caste relationship. Caste networks are critical in business regulations, where the risks are high, formal institutions weak and selective trust at a premium. And as I was mentioning, some of the very high value, enterprises like diamond industry or gold industry, or such kind of things, where the trust is something significant, they may not have this very sophisticated account keeping mechanism, so surveillance cameras or another thing, but there is a, so much a premium on the trust, because they are dealing with very expensive artefacts.

And usually, you tend to trust your caste members more than you; you treat, you trust others. And it is a very tragic scenario because you consider cast as a replacement for the personnel qualifications or personal qualities, but that is how it works. That is how a host of traditional guild systems operated in the Indian context. But the point is that such notions continue to work in the Indian context.

Now, occupational ranking categorical exclusion, opportunity hoarding, and the network combine the third cost effect discrimination. So, he also uses the term opportunity hoarding, opportunity hoarding; we know that we are; we have heard about hoarding food grains. Now, it is not much news because food grains are freely available in the market.

But there were times when especially at the time of famines, there were times when the traders would hoard massive amounts of food grains to see that their prices go up and then sell it in the black market. So, what does it mean? It means that you are; you keep a host of a vast number of resources to yourself and then sell it off at a premium. So, opportunity hoarding is also a term that was made familiar with social scientists to say that people can withhold a lot of opportunities, especially in terms of employment, or to themselves and so that others do not get into that.

And I can give you several examples, take the case of say, for example, a school psychologist managed by a private caste association, that there are a host of voice, of colleges or schools established by caste associations and invariably, job opportunities in these institutions are given to members of their caste. And in a way, it is nothing but opportunity hoarding. Even when equally competent, equally qualified people are waiting outside, this is not given; they are not admitted or offered a job.

Instead, they would wait for somebody from their caste group to come and give that, which will have cascading effects in the long run. And the most tragic part is that even in government-funded institutions, where the management can make appointments, management makes appointments people on the base of this caste, or they take colossal money. The whole burden of providing salary to these people falls on the government, which means from the taxpayer's money that a group of cast members who get employment in these institutions are paid a salary and pension till their death.

And then usually, nothing happens in such scenarios, and the situation continues. So, he says that all these factors, categorical exclusion, occupational ranking, opportunity holding all these things, combined with the third point, discrimination.

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- It is well understood that Dalits face barriers to gaining qualifications within school and university systems, including just when the premium to education rose in the post-liberalization period.
- There is good evidence that the Indian labour market discriminates both directly on caste identity and on imputed characteristics.
- The job market implicitly demands of applicants traits, skills, linguistic, and cultural competences that the education system does not explicitly give and that come from families transmitting a dominant class-caste culture bundled as individual ('merit') (and indirectly signalled by caste identity)- Cultural Capital by Bourdieu



It is well understood that Dalits face barriers to gaining qualifications within schools and university systems, including just when the premium of education rose to the post-liberalization period. I hope you are familiar with the kinds of debates about the reservation system in educational institutions, especially institutions of higher learning, prestigious institutions of higher education, and prestigious institutions like IITs and IIMs.

So, the host of data has shown that many of these institutions cannot fill the required number of seats reserved for the people from the backward communities, whether in the PC program or other programs. And we have absolutely no data about the number of people who complete that; the number of dropouts also is very high among these disadvantaged caste groups.

So, despite these reservations, so many legal and constitutional provisions in place, the educational attainment of Dalit or backward caste groups is much below that of the upper caste, upper-class sections. So, now, especially in this time, premium education rose in the post-liberalization period.

Because now, in a post-liberalisation period, your educational qualification is seen as the most crucial point, not your family honour, not your prestige, not anything else, your educational

qualification seems to be the most important one. Yet that seems out of bounds for many people from less privileged backgrounds.

And I also must remind you that it is not only about caste discrimination, but it is also about privatisation of education, especially higher education has been privatised significantly, where education comes at a very, very high price and people from the lower class and caste find it very difficult to pay such massive amounts.

And there is good evidence that the Indian labour market discriminates directly on caste identity and imputed characteristics. The job market implicitly demands applicants, traits, skills, linguistic and cultural competence that the education system does not explicitly give and that come from families transmitting a dominant class caste culture bundled as individual merit.

And I am indirectly signalled by caste identity, the whole concept of cultural capital by Bourdieu. Sometime back, I mentioned the role of language speaking skills or fair complexion in getting specific jobs. There are fascinating theories about that, one of the essential theories provided by Pierre Bourdieu, a French sociologist and his theory of cultural capital.

So, he argues that cultural capital is the trait that you accumulate over time. For example, the importance you give to education and that in specific communities, maybe your family or parents are so serious about your education. They give you; they compel you, they scold you, they punish you many times, they all the time tell you to study more, and they would give you a gift if you get first place in your examination.

So, there is an atmosphere which puts so much pressure on you to study well. And suppose you compare another family coming from an impoverished background. In that case, you may not or will not find so much of preoccupation with this, the whole question of studying well, and of course a host of other things like your traits, your skills, linguistic skills, your ability to use specific software, your exposure to social media, your exposure to technical stuff, your linguistic ability to use English, your pronunciation your accent, and then cultural competence, that they educate.

So, these are the things our educational system never gives any importance to or the education system trains you in. These are the traits that you accumulate and then come into an educational institution, but these do matter later at a time.

For example, when you sit for an interview, the interviewers would be impressed along with the academic content of your answers; they would be impressed by your complexion, your beauty, your language skills, your ability to, the way you look more sophisticated, all these things play a vital role in the contemporary market scenario.

There is no denying that. It is straightforward to say that these things do not happen, but they happen. So, in such a scenario, the dominant class culture is bundled as individual merit because these things will be seen as merit. They take this particular argument of Marie Tandon indirectly signal by caste identity by cultural capital by Pierre Bourdieu.

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- Such discrimination then produces caste-differentiated expectations, since upper-caste/class graduates experience prejudicial norms and networks as casteless merit, whereas Dalits find themselves negatively identified with their caste background at every turn.
- A host of studies that document the prejudices and discriminations faced by industries owned by Dalits



So, such discriminations then produce caste differentiated expectations since upper-caste class graduates experience prejudicial norms and networks as casteless merit. In contrast, Dalits find themselves negatively identified with a casting background at every turn. So, there is an interesting argument that the upper castes, the so-called the general category, they, so what does available means, available in reality means the upper caste, but they never, but it is never used in that way.

You have a schedule caste, OBC, and you are general, but the general is nothing but the upper caste. So, Satish Deshpande has a fascinating argument about the upper caste's invisibility and the lower castes' hypervisibility; I found that idea extremely fascinating because you never talk about the caste of that the general caste, the available people they are seen as casteless.

Or you never talk about the caste of people who pay huge money as management fees and then get admission. They are seen as management seats. They are never seen as people who spend cash and then come, and that is never seen as an assault on the meritocratic meritocracy. Whereas the caste identity of the lower caste people, lower caste who avail this reservation is always highlighted, there is hypervisibility towards that.

Dalits find themselves negatively identified with their caste background at every turn because they are seen as people who do not adequately have merit. The price is supposed to be compromised; it is usually said that the value is compromised with the introduction of

reservation. I am not going into that debate, but it is a critical debate—a host of studies document the prejudices and discrimination faced by industries owned by Dalit. Lots of enjoyable studies. You can look into this David Mosses essay; there are quite a lot of references.

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What can be concluded about caste in the post-liberalization economy?

- As seen in the village, caste is subject to powerful forces of change. Ideas and practices of markets bring expectations of equality and, in many contexts, an emphasis on skills, experience, and competence have replaced the ascriptive characteristics and complementarity of caste. But, at the same time (and in the same places), caste-based identity, networks, interactions, and judgements are unavoidably part of the way many markets work, as caste 'transforms itself as a regulative structure of the economy'.



So, what can we conclude about caste in that post-liberalisation economy? He concludes. As seen in the village, caste is subjected to powerful forces of change. Ideas and practices of markets bring expectations of equality and, in many contexts, emphasise skills, experience, and competence have replaced the ascriptive characteristics and complementarity of caste.

Indeed, these large-scale changes have significantly altered the traditional caste system. The host of new contexts, experienced in skills, experience and competence, have replaced them as scripted characteristics and complementarity of caste. What do you mean we ascriptive characteristics? Ascriptive characteristics are the things that are given to you.

For example, you are supposed to follow a particular rule, a particular job, then social and religious disabilities. All these things are gone to a large extent. Still, at the same time, at the same place, caste-based identity, networks, interactions, and judgments are unavoidably part of the way many markets work as caste transforms itself as a regulative structure of the economy. That is the most crucial point. The caste transforms itself as a regulative structure of the economy. And please keep in mind; we are talking about a globalised economy.

We are talking about a globalised economy. We are talking about a neoliberal economy, where ideally, all these factors should not have been there. Everybody on the market must work typically based on rationality, economic rationality, where all these considerations have no place. Still, we see caste playing a significant role in reality.

(Refer Slide Time: 25:16)



The power of caste as a social structure of regulation in the economy, controlling the supply and price of goods, rents, and labour, and influencing the operation of formal institutions and the market, as Harriss-White argues, comes from the fact that the part of the economy that involves the majority of people is informal, without regulation by legal-institutional structures of the state. As such, these influences remain hardly touched by liberalization (Harriss-White).



And let us end this thing with a quote by Barbara Harriss White, another very senior academic scholar from Britain who has done significant works on Indian society. The power of caste is a social structure of regulation in the economy, controlling the supply and price of goods, rents, and labour, and influencing the operations of formal institutions and the market, as Harriss White argues, comes from the fact that the part of the economy that involves the majority of the people is informal, without regulation by legal institutions structure of the state.

As such, these influences remain hardly touched by liberalisation. Say host of aspects that are so predominant in the Indian economy continued to be informal. Whether in rural or semi-urban areas, most of the work in urban areas, most of the economic activity takes place in the informal sector, and the state early regulates them. And these are Barbara Harriss White strongly argues that they remain hardly touched by liberalisation.

And that is the kind of a conclusion that David Mosse also wants to draw. So, I hope you would have found this essay interesting because it combines fascinating arguments about the longevity of caste and the relevance of caste in a contemporary era.

So, please do a look up at this article. You can easily find it o Google, which is freely available. You can download it. It is an excellent essay. I would strongly recommend it to anybody interested in studying caste in India. So, let us conclude the session and meet you for the next class. Thank you.