

# Globalization and the Dalit Question: A Multidimensional View

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**Abstract:** As well as being an important component in theories of national development, globalisation is also a significant factor in the relationships between national economies worldwide. While the process of globalisation has, on the one hand, given the world economy a new face through trade, exchange, technological advancement, and other such developments, it has, on the other hand, altered the functioning of social structures and the economy within a country. The purpose of this study is to understand the influence of globalisation on Dalits in India by discussing scholarship from various perspectives.

**Keywords:** Globalisation, Dalits, Caste, Development

**JEL Codes:** F66, O15, J71

## I. Introduction

The word “globalisation” refers to a process that establishes international connections among nations worldwide, thereby integrating their economies into the global economy. The process of globalisation cannot be defined in a single way, as it is associated with phenomena such as differentiation, plurality, homogenization, hybridisation, relativism, and localism (Kumar, 2001). Followed by the introduction of new economic reforms in 1991, the Indian economy entered a new phase through three major processes: liberalisation, privatisation, and globalisation (Maharajan, 2019). The new model of economic policy aimed to develop the Indian economy to compete with the largest world economies in the world by increasing collaborations and integrations between other countries and India (Maharajan, 2019). As the

private sector and global corporations emerged, they influenced the country's social and economic system. The gap between the rich and the poor has grown as a result of globalisation, and the notion of "survival of the fittest" has gained traction at the same time. (Illaiah, 2002; Laxmidevi & Shilpa, 2014). As the state's role was weakened by the introduction of LPG policies, private industry began to take over the public sector. The constitutional safeguards and affirmative actions implemented in government-run institutions began to weaken because they are not mandatory in private institutions. (Kumar, 2001; Mandal, 2014; Ramaiah, 2004).

Dalits who belong to the marginalised sections of society have been adversely impacted due to globalisation because of the weakened affirmative policies and rapid growth of unaffordable private institutions and facilities. But, on the other hand, globalisation has also freed Dalits from the oppressive caste societies by opening opportunities outside the country and expanding their networks globally. Hence, the question of how Dalits can fight within the system and claim their space in the era of globalisation becomes a significant problem to study.

This essay aims to highlight many scholarship programs that have examined "Globalisation and Dalits" from various angles. The introduction is the first of four sections that make up this work. The second section examines the literature on globalisation and Dalits, covering a variety of viewpoints, namely rejecting globalisation, embracing it, and moving beyond dichotomies. The content reviewed in the second chapter is examined in the third section. This section examines the foundations of some claims made in the literature. The final section summarises the paper's main points.

## II. Review of Literature

Globalisation is defined through different perspectives, such as liberalisation, internationalisation, modernisation, universalisation, de-territorialisation, and so on (Scholte, 2000, as cited in Ramaiah, 2004). Countries that accept the International Monetary Fund's structural adjustment programs (SAPs) make globalisation a reality for them. (Ramaiah, 2004). The economic reforms of 1991 aimed to serve as crisis management rather than a strategic, long-term planned intervention, and therefore, the reforms were a combination of SAP and macroeconomic stabilisation (Teltumbde, 2001). Macroeconomic stabilisation includes measures such as currency devaluation, withdrawal of import restrictions, reduction or elimination of subsidies, and implementation of financial reforms to allow the free entry of

foreign agencies, etc. Similarly, SAP includes measures such as the privatisation of government-run organisations and entities, the withdrawal of restrictions on the free entry of foreign capital, and structural changes to encourage growth through exports, etc. (Ramaiah, 2004; Teltumbde, 2001).

### *(A) Critiques of Globalisation*

Some of the major factors that the critics focus on regarding the impact of globalisation on Dalits are food security, education, health, employment, and socio-cultural impacts. Food security deals with the production, distribution, and consumption of food. Government schemes, such as the public distribution system, have ensured food security in the country. With the introduction of the 1991 economic reforms, subsidies, the fiscal deficit, and agricultural credit were reduced. Following the World Bank's recommendations, the poverty line was revised, and most poor people no longer received subsidies because the revised line categorised them as 'non-poor' (Jwala, 2009; Teltumbde, 2001). As per the 2011 census, less than 5 per cent of Dalits have access to basic resources (Maharajan, 2019). According to Dr. Vandana Shiva, "The effect of globalisation has destroyed land and labour of Dalits, small peasants, and landless workers who are working in the agriculture sector" (Jwala, 2009).

Education is another sector that has been affected by globalisation in India. Advancements in technology and communication have improved the quality of learning in India (Maharajan, 2019). Education is a right in India, and Dalits have historically fought for the right to education. Affirmative policies, such as reservations in public schools and institutes, have significantly increased the literacy rate of Dalits in India, but it is still lower than that of the upper castes (Maharajan, 2019; Teltumbde, 2001). As reservations are not mandatory in private institutions, the replacement of public schools and colleges by private institutions is throwing away the reservation policies, thus closing the doors against Dalits. Education expenditures are rising due to globalisation, making it nearly impossible for Dalit students to afford (Mandal, 2014).

As a result of India's participation in the globalisation process, the existing disparities in healthcare have become even more pronounced. Health care has become a commodity that is unavailable and unaffordable to the poor, primarily Dalits, as a result of the replacement of state hospitals with private multi-facility hospitals. (Maharjan, 2019; Mandal, 2014).

Globalisation has brought new opportunities in the employment sector within a country and across the globe. People are getting opportunities to move across the country and to practice new skills and take on new jobs. (Maharajan, 2019). But the replacement of public jobs by global sectors has affected the employment rate, especially among Dalits. Similar to education, reservation in services is not mandatory in private jobs, and hence opportunities for Dalits have declined (Jwala, 2009; Teltumbde, 2001). The introduction of new techniques in farming and agriculture, such as mechanised farming, etc., has replaced traditional work done by Dalits, thus making them fall behind in production and labour. (Maharajan, 2019).

Socio-cultural inequalities and discriminations existing in the country have further widened in the era of globalisation, as there are no strict rules to regulate atrocities and discriminations against Dalits in the private sector. Crimes against Dalits are often unreported or hidden by the upper-caste corporate heads in the companies as well as in the educational institutions (Mandal, 2014; Teltumbde, 2001).

### ***(B) Accepting Globalization***

This perspective examines the possibilities for empowerment and development in the era of globalisation from a Dalit standpoint.

It is true that globalisation has led to the growth of capitalism. Capitalism creates inequality by oppressing the working class, but also creates freedom for Dalits in India in different ways (Rajagopalan, 2021). State measures will be weakened in the era of globalisation, but to what extent can Dalits rely on these policies? This is a significant question (Ramaiah, 2004). Even before globalisation, the state of Dalits was not better. Caste-based discrimination and social exclusion were actively functioning in the Indian society even before these reforms. Globalisation is a reality; therefore, blindly preventing it cannot be a solution. Therefore, Dalits have to remain within the system and seek benefits from the new opportunities (Ramaiah, 2004).

Despite the challenges brought by globalisation, opportunities have opened for Dalit women in the globalised world (N & B, 2020). Dalits, especially Dalit women, have begun to speak up and are emancipating themselves by pursuing education abroad (N & B, 2020).

Industries and institutions that are run by foreign agents are most likely to be free from caste prejudices unless the heads of these institutions are upper-caste Hindus

with caste prejudices. Therefore, such platforms in fact provide opportunities for Dalits to perform well, as they are not seen as 'lower castes who lack merit by birth.' (Ramaiah, 2004). Dalits fall back on advanced farming and agricultural techniques not because they are incapable of learning new skills, but because they are unable to access training in these skills (Kumar, 2001). Similar to the U.S., where affirmative action is implemented in the private sector as well, India should also make it mandatory to implement reservation policies in the private sector (Kumar, 2001; Omvedt, 2005).

Globalisation has encouraged the development of international Dalit solidarity networks worldwide (Kumar, 2001). Similarly, globalisation has led to an increase in the Dalit diaspora worldwide, which has further helped Dalits access advanced technology and resources (Kumar, 2004).

Upper-caste activists urge Dalits to fight against globalization, but overlook the fact that it is practically impossible to stop, and that the plight of Dalits was the same even before the era of globalisation. So, why not have Dalits also try to claim their space in this system, secure the maximum benefits, and take new opportunities to expand their networks worldwide and raise their standard of living (Ramaiah, 2004)?

### ***(C) Beyond 'Fighting against or Accepting': -Breaking Dichotomies***

One cannot simply demand that Dalits fight against globalisation or accept globalisation without understanding the ideas of equality, freedom, and social justice (Omvedt, 2005). This perspective breaks the binaries of opposing and accepting and goes beyond this realm from a Dalit standpoint.

Globalisation has widened the socio-economic inequalities in India, but at the same time, it has opened new opportunities for people, especially Dalits, to get freedom from the caste society and expand their lives across the world. When addressing issues of social justice, it is necessary to consider intersectional marginalities, including class, caste, gender, race, ethnicity, religion, and sexuality. Additionally, a revolution ought to occur on a global scale. (Omvedt, 2005). Instead of blindly fighting or accepting globalisation, alternative approaches should be demanded. The state and markets should share equally in the economy, with affirmative action implemented in both the private and public sectors (Omvedt, 2005). Amidst the current era of globalization, Dalits should begin to own properties and control resources. Capital should reach the marginalized. Chandrabhan Prasad,

a prominent journalist and entrepreneur, defines this as ‘democratization of capital’ or Dalit Capitalism (Maity, n.d.).

The effects of globalization should be looked at within the realm of culture as well. The dignity of Dalits has been strengthened with the new cultural change introduced by globalization (Ilaiah, 2002). When a Dalit farmer uses a tractor instead of manual labour, the dignity of his work rises (Rajagopalan, 2021). Anti-Brahmanical struggles are expanding across the world. The children of the Dalits who struggled to assert their space in the globalized world are getting accessibility toward global skills, technological intelligence, and new cultures (Ilaiah, 2002).

In the fight in the globalized world, societies should indeed fight against the oppressive system propagated by capitalist economies, but demanding separation from the world economy is impractical. Instead, this fight should demand a non-patriarchal, anti-caste, egalitarian society where marginalized groups can assert their space in this era of globalization by gaining advantages from the world’s capital (Omvedt, 2005).

### III. Analysis

Critics have explained the adverse impacts of globalization on Dalits through various factors, including food security, education, and employment. The arguments were primarily based on economic factors. But when we talk about caste-based inequalities and discrimination from a Dalit standpoint, there has to be a clear distinction between economically poor groups and Dalits who are ex-untouchables in the country (Kumar, 2001).

The issues raised by scholars opposed to globalization are significant and must be addressed to create an egalitarian society in the era of globalization. But I also felt that some arguments lacked a historical foundation for addressing the question of caste. The plight of Dalits did not happen after the emergence of globalization. Caste-based oppression and discrimination against Dalits dates back to the Vedic age. It is true that India became independent, but social freedom was not achieved after independence and has not been since. Therefore, the question of what happens to Dalits in the era of globalization cannot be simply answered by talking in the language of poverty alone. The critics who were against globalization from a Dalit perspective did address the question of social injustices and historic oppression faced by Dalits, but predominantly in terms of economic factors.

Capitalism takes different forms across countries (Rajagopalan, 2021). Therefore, the oppression created by capitalism cannot be explained by a single umbrella definition for all parts of the world. India has been experiencing capitalism manifested through Brahmanism. Therefore, when we address the question of class conflict in India, we must contextualize Western theories. Ambedkar posits that our intellects must be liberated from these entrenched dogmas, emphasizing the importance of actions that benefit society as a whole. Therefore, when fighting against globalization from a Dalit standpoint, it is important to understand how much one can address the intersectionality among marginalized groups. Economic lenses alone cannot address this question, and activists who hold this standpoint should not demand that Dalits fight globalization blindly, without considering other factors.

Scholars who wrote about anti-globalization argued that mechanization and advanced technologies were displacing traditional Dalit jobs, leaving Dalits behind. As Prof. Vivek Kumar argued, Dalits are falling back not because they are incapable of using advanced techniques, but because they lack access to training and resources. Upper-caste activists who stand against globalization keep glorifying the 'traditional' jobs done by Dalits, and they speak for Dalits in order to preserve their traditional life. This argument is not appealing to me. Most of the traditional jobs in India are caste-based jobs, and even if Dalits don't want to do those jobs, they are forced to do them. Manual scavenging is one such example. Manual scavengers belong to Dalit communities, and this job is passed to the next generations and is still continued despite the Prohibition Act. If mechanization and advanced techniques are introduced into scavenging jobs, we will not need men to do them. Dalits can be freed from this risky, unhealthy job and seek new opportunities. Even if Dalits wanted to do traditional jobs like farming or textiles, why not use advanced techniques to increase their production and benefits?

Dalits accepting globalization blindly, without considering the consequences, is also an impractical approach. But Dalits can find a space to assert themselves in the globalized world. Dalit capitalism is not just a tool for money accommodation that creates the Dalit bourgeoisie. It is a form of self-respect movement (Rajagopalan, 2021). Land, resources, wealth, education, and many other basic necessities were historically denied to Dalits. Therefore, the solution is not just to make all these resources available for Dalits. Instead, Dalits need the freedom to earn a living. Dalits need freedom from oppression. Dalits need complete autonomy to decide

what they should learn and which college they should attend, so they can live with dignity and self-respect. With alternative approaches and policy implementations, globalization can open new doors of opportunities and networks for Dalits. The era of globalization, in fact, has deconstructed the image of the Dalit that has been perceived by the caste-prejudiced society. This prejudiced vision is the same reason why they call an educated, employed, and independent Dalit an 'Elite Dalit.' 'Elite Dalit' has become an oxymoron, which shows the unacceptance of the caste society to see Dalits as individuals who have achieved a dignified life in the globalized world (Ambalvi, 2019).

#### **IV. Conclusion**

This paper discussed various aspects of globalization from a Dalit lens. Scholars who opposed globalization emphasized factors such as food security, education, employment, and health care. Whereas scholars who argued for globalization focused on the benefits that Dalits could gain from the world's capital. Beyond these binary positions, scholars also suggest fighting within the system of globalization by demanding alternative approaches beyond simply opposing or accepting it.

Globalization has become a reality, and it is not possible for a country like India to separate itself from the world economy. Therefore, there must be a global democracy that aims for an egalitarian society worldwide. Dalits don't, or don't anymore, look for 'help' from the state for meeting basic needs. Dalits demand dignity and freedom to choose whatever is good for them. For this, there have to be national and global-level schemes and policies that aim for an egalitarian society. Scholarships such as the National Overseas schemes for SC/ST students encourage Dalit students to study abroad, but how far these schemes reach Dalits is a concern. Public sectors with affirmative actions are still exclusive against Dalits, let alone the private sectors, where reservations are not mandatory. Therefore, we cannot simply blame globalization for the plight of Dalits, as the existing state measures are weak and inefficient. So there needs to be alternative policies and agendas between the state and the global market. The policymaking process should engage people's voices. The voices of Dalits should be heard. When assistance is extended to a Dalit by upper-caste activists or organizations, the existing power dynamics remain intact. However, when individuals from marginalized communities establish their own enterprises or obtain education from prestigious national or international institutions, they affirm their dignity and self-worth, which, in turn, facilitates social liberation.

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