
Theoretical Deployments, Caste Expositions and Research Agendas: Macro-scoping Neoliberal Globalization, Saffronization¹ and Dalit Poverty and Educational Prospects in India

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Abstract: *This article advances the proposition that theoretical productivity in relation to questions of caste/iesm, Dalits, and Dalit poverty and educational prospects in India would be better served by critical sociological deployments that aim to expose (and subsequently point out tentative directions for a Dalit politics) casteism/untouchability by encouraging research agendas which macro-scope Dalit poverty and educational in/opportunity in relation to the current trajectories of neoliberal globalization and saffronization. Tentative contours of a critical-indigenous Gramscian-Marxist research agenda/approach (with examples of related foci) are mapped and briefly discussed to illustrate the likely contribution of such lines of inquiry towards a Dalit political and educational agenda squarely aimed at caste-class hegemony and the continued democratization of Indian society and political-economy.*

1. Introduction: Contemporary Caste Realities in India

The teacher would ask me to keep a distance from him so that he could not be touched. He would not accept my notebook from my hand—he would ask me to place

¹ Refers to the rise of Hindu fundamentalism in contemporary Indian electoral politics and beyond from the early 1980s and related responsibility for the post-Mandal (affirmative action/job reservations) backlash, the demolition of the Babri Masjid (1992) and Godhra communal violence (2002) as key examples of some defining moments of this trend. See Tanika Sarkar (2005); Radhika Desai (2004) for what she refers to as the systematic 'saffronization' of state and civil society; Sumit Sarkar (2002); Menon and Nigam (2007); and Guha (2008).

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it on the table after checking it, would throw it on the ground in front of me to pick up. He never hands me the notebook as he does with the others. He has never accepted water from my hand and I have been told not to use the common drinking glass and am always forced to sit in the last row of the class. (Bunty, 11-year-old boy)

During the mid-day meal I was standing first in the queue but the teacher, who was drunk, came and pinched my cheeks, dragged me out of the queue and started beating me saying, "The Chamar wants to become a Brahmin after studying in school, does she now?" (Mamta, 7-year-old girl)

(National Campaign for Dalit Human Rights/NCDHR, 2007, pp.20-29)

NCDHR had to persevere to try and ensure the inclusion of Dalit rights on the agenda for the World Conference against Racism held at Durban (2001) and eventually managed to do so with mixed results (Guru and Chakravarty, 2005). The Indian government's position in international and UN forums has been to assert that caste is not race and therefore caste-discrimination fails to fall within the ambit of racism and racial discrimination. Furthermore, the state points to existing Constitutional and Legislative mechanisms in India as being adequate for the protection of Dalits and often resorts to pointing out that socio-cultural change is a slow process, i.e., there is no need to apply external human rights mechanisms to what is essentially seen to be within a realm of "cultural practice" (UN CERD, 2007: 3). According to the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (UN CERD, 2007: 3), however,

there is a strong comfort level in both society and the state that crimes against Dalits do not matter, and need not be punished. This attitude of impunity is rooted in social and cultural values and though the Constitution has made a very conscious change, the mindset in society has not changed.... Protecting the rights of marginalized and vulnerable persons is

probably the most overlooked and disregarded area of human rights in India.

For these reasons perhaps, Dalit movements and campaigns including the International Dalit Solidarity Network, the World Council of Churches Dalit Solidarity Program and the National Campaign for Dalit Human Rights (NCDHR) systematically engage international forums and transnational alliances in a boomerang pattern of activism that aims to bring pressure to bear on the Indian State by activating transnational networks at UN forums and international conferences such as the Global Conference against Racism and Caste-based Discrimination (New Delhi, 2001) and various World Social Forum (e.g. Mumbai World Social Forum) events.

Our own work through the Center for Research and Development Solidarity (CRDS)², suggests that casteism in its various garbs, Dalit poverty/inequality and the practice of untouchability are manifest and prevalent in the state of Orissa (Kapoor, 2007a; 2007b). Caste-blind rhetoric that equates the legal ban on untouchability with its disappearance (Deshpande, 2003) and the subsequent relegation of critical caste conversations to the dustbin of history or to the work of an allegedly misguided or obsessive critical minority, is at the very least, naïve if not mischievous and/or simply casteist in a vain attempt to buttress caste-privilege while simultaneously denying its continued relevance in the perpetuation of caste-hegemony.

Contrary to indulging in a gratuitous sensationalism or engaging in a production of a narrative of suffering as spectacle for commoditization through professional appropriation (Kleinman and Kleinman, 1997) or what other's have referred to as a "trafficking in national identity for international consumption" (Spivak, 1992: 803), the

² An Adivasi-Dalit people's organization in South Orissa that supports Adivasi-Dalit social movement struggles (Adivasi-Dalit Ekta Abhijan or ADEA) to secure and push for Constitutional Rights and Safeguards, at least theoretically available to Scheduled Tribes (Adivasis) and Scheduled Castes (Dalits--literally meaning downtrodden or broken peoples, as defined by Dalit leader and Indian Constitutional architect, Dr.B.R. Ambedkar) in the Scheduled Areas to ways of life, water, forest and land.

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impetus for this paper is derived from the pressing and unfortunate reality, if not the sheer intensity, of caste-based atrocities and injustices in Orissa³ and the decibel level of the *mute appeals* of persevering victims (e.g. 2007/08 violence perpetrated by saffron groups against Dalit Christians for the most part and Adivasi Christians in Kandhamal, Orissa). Every society and culture has its schisms and attendant oppressions which compel critical examination and the need to act to privilege the categories of those being oppressed (Nandy, 1987). Post-structural criticisms of caste/subaltern post-mortems while instructive in terms of the cultural politics of re/presentation by “caste/other outsiders” (etic perspectives), when taken to a political extreme, produce an “analytical standpoint” akin to “a theory-imposed disarticulation of social suffering” (Baxi, 2000: 37-39). Taking a page from Spivak (1992: 781-782) herself, “in a crisis, no hand is clean” and the onus, then, is on academics (scholar-activists and vice versa) for instance, to make the history and predicaments of the caste-subaltern known.

The changes and gains made during the post-independence period whether they be Constitutional, cultural, educational or political-economic are first and foremost a testimony to the perseverance of a multi-trajectory Dalit politics. Given the Vedic roots of the caste system going back to 1500BC, these changes over a relatively mere sixty three year period of independence from a British colonial experience that valorized caste and deployed it in the interest of colonial rule given the symbiotic political-economic and cultural links between cultural (Hindu/caste) nationalism, imperialism and colonialism (Deshpande, 2003; Guru, 2007; Sarkar, 2005), give continued cause for optimism for Dalits, Indians and radical democrats alike who are concerned with the continual democratization of all forms of class, caste, gender-based inequality and the struggle to create political-economic and socio-cultural-religious structures that recognize, valorize and substantively nurture the dignity of communities and persons.

³ For instance, see Chatterji and Desai (2006) for a report on communalism in Orissa.

This paper considers the role of deploying (making productive) theory/academic perspective, research and scholarship in a politics of caste expositions and related prospects for a politics of social change that addresses the caste-class nexus of power and inequality in India. It is suggested that such an endeavor could benefit from a macro-scoping of the emergent imbrications and impacts of neoliberal globalization (i.e. the globalization of capitalism and privatization and marketization agendas post 1991 liberalization of the Indian economy) and saffronization (post-Mandal in the 1980s and after the 1992 demolition of the Babri Masjid and the concomitant rise of the party-political Hindu right) and their implications for Dalit poverty, educational prospects and assertion. This in turn (or simultaneously) requires a re-negotiation of theoretical/perspectival discourses that have guided caste scholarship; a re-negotiation that begins to privilege (or makes more space for) “critical sociological deployments” than has typically been the case to date (Deshpande, 2003). A *critical-indigenous Gramscian-Marxism* is proposed as an example of one possibility that would continue to help build momentum in this direction. It is suggested here that the conscious deployment of critical sociological perspective(s) is more likely to enable scholarship that seeks to understand and expose caste/ism, while pointing to the realm of possibility for political-economic and socio-cultural change in the interests of a Dalit political and educational agenda. Education and schooling spaces need to be subjected to similar analyses for both, the potential to encourage and produce socio-cultural change while paradoxically (or predictably—as per Gramscian notions of hegemony—see Peter Mayo, 1999: 35-57) also being implicated in the reproduction of caste privilege, untouchability and discrimination against Dalits.

After a brief excursion (as background for those unfamiliar with this territory) into caste constructions and Constitutional provisions, the paper focuses on the question of critical sociological (theoretical) deployments and Dalit political and educational agendas; a discussion of perspectives that culminates in introducing/moving towards what could be referred to as a *critical-indigenous Gramscian-Marxism*. The following and final section considers how such

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a critical sociological deployment might lend itself to an examination and exposition of the imbrications and impacts of neoliberal globalization and saffronization on Dalit poverty, educational prospects and related avenues for socio-political assertion.

2. Caste Constructions and Constitutional Provisions

Derived from the Latin word *castas*, meaning chaste or unmixed, caste references the mainly segregated social groups of a hierarchical ordering of Indian society according to four *varnas* or broad caste categories, including *Brahmins*, *Kshatriyas*, *Vaishyas* and *Shudras*. Outside these four *varnas* are the casteless (outcast or *avarnas*) 'untouchables' (*achyut*) or Dalits, a term preferred by politically active anti-caste groups. The theological basis of caste is derived from the *Purushasukta* verse from the *Rig Veda* (ancient Hindu scriptures) and the Code of Manu (ethical and legal commandments pertaining to custom, caste and caste-institutional practical prescriptions inspired by the *Vedas*) which states that the *Brahmans* came from His mouth, the *Kshatriyas* from His arms, the *Vaishyas* from His thighs and the *Shudras* from His feet implying vertical hierarchy and corresponding occupational specialization as the *Brahmans* performed religious rituals and were the keepers of sacred knowledge, the *Kshatriyas* were warriors and protectors, the *Vaishyas* farmers and traders, while the *Shudras* performed menial/labor tasks. The 'outcasts' (Dalits) were relegated to performing polluted and polluting tasks such as sewage disposal, tanning of hides and the removal of carrion and refuse. Pollution-purity divides (e.g. refusal to share well-water or cooking utensils or refusing food from the hands of an *achyut*), caste endogamy, refusal of entry in to places of worship, denial of freedom of movement (e.g. use of certain village streets/thoroughfares) and even the curtailment of spaces for defecation are some of the visible manifestations of casteism, untouchability and the daily assault on the dignity of persons (see Guru, 2009 for related theoretical/discussions on untouchability and "humiliation"), allegedly sanitized by appeals to the theological justifications for such degradations. Gupta

observes (2000: 19), given that there are no natural differences that can be discerned by the naked eye to help distinguish between castes, practices of caste segregation continue to be employed to justify and perpetuate economic and social inequalities among people as “nature is forced by culture to act on its behest”.

The term Scheduled Caste (SC) was introduced by the British in the 18th century and today’s Constitutional Schedules list 1,116 SC groups who together constitute 17 percent of the Indian population (over 167 million Dalits). Article 46 of the Constitution recognizes that the state is obligated to protect these constitutionally recognized marginalized social groups from all types of exploitation and social injustices and must actively promote with special care the education and economic interests of SCs. Article 14, meanwhile, prohibits discrimination on the grounds of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth and Article 17 states that the practice of untouchability is abolished and its practice in any form is forbidden. Article 23 prohibits any form of forced labor and this is significant given that over half the Dalit workforce are landless agricultural laborers, while some 66 percent of bonded laborers are Dalits (Sainath, 1996). Additionally, India ratified the Convention on All forms of Racial Discrimination in 1968, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights in 1979 and the Convention of the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) in 1993, a significant commitment since Dalit women bear the brunt of caste prejudices and exploitation as “the boundaries and hierarchies of caste are articulated by gender” in contemporary Indian society (Dube, 1996: 21). However, state amelioration related to such commitments only applies to Hindu, Buddhist and Sikh Dalits, since the Indian state is yet to recognize Christian and Muslim Dalits as Scheduled Castes (SC) entitled to such protections (Massey, 1998: 6). Such communal conceptions of caste based on a sacral view are misguided attempts to withdraw and limit the number of groups entitled to state support and protection, as studies have demonstrated that caste exists and affects the Christian community today, even though castes are rarely a part of the “Christian sacral order”, i.e., caste alone determines who a Dalit is and not class or religion as even if

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a Dalit moves up in social class or changes religion, the social stigma of caste remains (Webster, 2007).

3. Critical Sociological Deployments and Dalit Political and Educational Agendas

According to French Indologist and anthropologist Louis Dumont, the “caste system is a state of mind, a state of mind which is expressed by the emergence, in various situations, of groups of various orders generally called ‘castes’” (Dumont, 1972: 71). For Dumont, the “conscious model” is the most important level of reality determining how people are to act or will act in a given situation. The conscious structure of ideas and beliefs act as determinate infrastructure/base in pre-capitalist societies and subsequently, for him, Hindus avail of the benefits of industrialization only in areas which the caste system considers unimportant (Dumont, 1972). Beliefs (caste beliefs) then become the absolute determinants of human behavior. The very origins of the caste system are tracked to the “Hindu mind” which is guided solely by an original caste perspective of sorts and is perpetually bound by it. It follows that if a more just and egalitarian order is to be brought about through, for example, educational attainment and social mobility, the belief in the caste system will first have to be erased from the minds of Indians or relatedly, the constraining logic of the purity/pollution divide can only be exploded when “the purity of the Brahman is itself radically devalued” (Dumont, 1972: 92). “The road to their [caste] abolition is likely to lie in caste actions, and only the content of a caste action indicates whether it initiates for or against caste...” (Dumont, 1972: 270). By claiming the primacy of the ideological level, Dumont’s religio-culturological perspective worked towards crystallizing specific cultural traits peculiar to caste minds and “the finessing of ideological details by returning to Hindu texts like Manusmriti... as if caste practices in everyday life are unquestioningly preordained by what Brahmanical texts have had to say” (Gupta, 2000: 181). Ideology as primary level of reality and the notion that all social action conforms to it, was hugely influential in sociological and

anthropological theorizing/studies on caste, amplifying the belief that caste conditions material reality in its own image and that caste consciousness is delinked from all traces of economics and politics. By receding in to the mind (or Brahmanical texts) to unearth caste inscriptions and in the process simultaneously dehistoricizing caste construction, such scholarship depoliticized the prospects for progressive change in caste structures by indulging in a politically impotent descriptive prognosis of caste and the relatively mute prospects thereof for “caste action” and education for social change. Furthermore, by paying attention to ideological formations alone, Dumontian-Indologists failed to account for the possibility that traditional intelligentsia often seal knowledge from forces contrary to it thereby preserving the illusion that in tradition “thought remains the same” (Mannheim, 1960: 6). That is, Dumont is blind to the role of hegemonic possibility in social configurations, not to mention that he dismisses the significance of political-economic interplays as secondary aspects of the caste system and subsumes them within religious values and beliefs emergent from the Brahmanic ideology of purity and pollution: “Just as religion in a way encompasses politics, so politics encompasses economics within itself. The difference is that the politic-economic domain is separated, named in a subordinate position as against religion whilst economics remains undifferentiated within politics” (Dumont, 1988: 165).

Predictably, the architects of *Hindutva* (Hindu nationalism) capitalize on such conceptualizations of a social order not founded on a social compact but on an organic growth where “the structure is born, not made” (Sarkar, 2005: 71). Asymmetries are then fated to remain so (chaos and anarchy are posited as the alternative) and neither the individual nor the caste group should have educational aspirations to move beyond the predestined and born order which is akin to an organ of interrelated and mutually sustaining parts (“Dumont’s Religious-Structuralist Holism”, Michael, 2007; Selvam, 2007). This conceptualization/logic precludes the possibility of a critical analysis of caste oppression, poverty, the class character of states or the contradictions within civil society and proposes little in the manner of possibilities for education and social change or

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indeed, even the need/possibility for change or education for Dalits, i.e., in an interesting inversion of approaches to postcolonial critique and directionality, Dumont does not see caste as an inexplicably unequal system that violates a fundamentally egalitarian human nature and suggests that “the idea of equality, even if it is thought superior, is artificial” (Dumont, 1970: 54-55), a realization that the West has been systematically denying for 300 years given its failure to recognize the legitimate innateness of homo hierarchicus. Dumont goes further in response to his critics when he states that they confuse inequality with exploitation by pointing to “their failure to see that the system assures subsistence to each proportionately to his status” (Dumont, 1988: 32) thereby borrowing from the karmic theory of compensation prescribed under Brahmanism which fails to acknowledge that appropriations at the top of the hierarchy are at the expense of those at the bottom (exploitation), not to mention that it is a system pronounced by self-appointed spokespersons (Brahmins) who stand the most to gain from such conceptions. Dumont’s conceptions would point to the futility of a pedagogy of the caste-oppressed, let alone a pedagogy of liberation for oppressors (dominant castes) and oppressed (Dalits) alike (Freire, 1970) and if nothing else, helps us “understand” dominant caste attitudes towards Dalit educational aspirations to better themselves and their lot in life or the self-evident convictions of a teacher who said, “What is the point in teaching Dalit children? Let them learn how to beat drums, that is good enough” or another who referred to Dalit’s as “kadu-jana” (forest people) incapable of learning with or without being beaten (NCDHR, 2007: 25). Such treatment and attitudes are, in turn, partially responsible for poor attendance and higher drop out rates among Dalit children, as high as a 66.6 percent drop out rates for Dalit-girls at the elementary stage or 50 percent Dalit-girl dropout rate in rural areas (Nambissan and Sedwal, 2002).

Liberal scholarship, notably the work of M.S.A Rao (1982) as suggested by Gopal Guru (2007), views the Dalit condition and prospects for change in terms of a sociology of regulation and incremental change founded in notions and concepts of relative deprivation, reference groups and social mobility that may have described/captured the Dalit

condition at a particular historical juncture when Indian society was trying to release itself from the feudal ethos. This, however, fails to explain current situations of absolute deprivation (inadequate descriptions of social phenomena) as the total marginalization and annihilation of rural Dalits, the Hinduisation of the Dalit masses (given a resurgent Hindutva nationalism/politics) and the growing crisis of the Indian welfare state (neoliberal globalization and privatization impacts with deleterious consequences for weaker social segments relying on state ameliorative actions) have together created the conditions for the “total alienation and exclusion and the threat of physical liquidation” of Dalits (Guru, 2007: 153-54). Such liberal conceptions fail to appreciate the extent of marginalization and subsequently underplay the need for more drastic intervention through intensive (given the extent of marginalization) state provisions for livelihood and education and/or radical challenges to caste-structurations of selective deprivation/privileging in education, as when Dalit children are deprived of free school text books when there is an “orchestrated shortage” (NCDHR, 2007: 23). More significantly, such an approach “denies to sociology a critically subversive character” (Guru, 1988: 157) and it also

denies an emancipatory consciousness to the groups under reference...it impels Dalit groups to organize their thought and action not in their own authentic terms but in terms of those privileged sections whose hegemonic world view underlines the structures of domination (Guru, 2007: 157).

Additionally, the liberal conception of relative deprivation of Dalits and associated deficit-views of those “relatively deprived” provides a blue print for a meager caste-paternalistic state-reformist welfarism that shrewdly moves to re-distribute resources through welfare mechanisms at a rate of trickle down that is just enough to mitigate the prospect of radical challenges to caste privilege, thereby all-the-while ensuring the place of such privilege. Perhaps it is a case in point when India ranks at the bottom (115th) with Bangladesh when it comes to its dismal 3.6% of GNP education allocation for countries with populations of 100

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million or more (Tilak, 2002). Until the VIth plan, barely 0.52% of plan outlay was allocated as Special Central Assistance (SCA) exclusively for addressing the educational needs of Dalits, Tribes and other backward castes. Improvements to 12 percent by the VIIIth Plan are welcome trends (Nambissan and Sedwal, 2002: 76).

The functionalist sociology of M.N. Srinivas (1952), while presenting sociological insight in to Hindu religion and society by placing religious beliefs and practices in their socio-historical context, can be similarly criticized for the same excesses as liberal conceptions of caste and society. Moving from the onto-epistemic position that all society is functionally integrated to ensure social solidarity, Srinivas' work is preoccupied with explaining the spread of Hinduism all over India, primarily by Brahmans and through the concept of Sanskritization, whereby Hindu beliefs and ritual have been adopted by an ever increasing number of groups, including Dalits, in a relatively harmonious manner. In an expanded conception of Sanskritization, Srinivas (1966: 6) defines it as a

process by which a low Hindu caste or tribal or other group changes its customs, ritual and ideology and way of life in the direction of a high, frequently twice-born caste. Generally such changes are followed by a claim to a higher position in the caste hierarchy than that traditionally conceded to the claimant by the local community.

As Hardiman notes, "One is made to believe that the goal towards which everyone is expected to strive is that of Brahmanical purity" (1984: 214) or to put it in Selvam's (2007: 186) words,

though he admits in a later study that economic and political conditions should be taken in to consideration, his analysis is based mainly on cultural elements and does not provide an insight in to the origin, sustenance and hegemony of this specific cultural process that placed a group of castes above the rest and made their cultural practices influential.

In fact, Srinivas does not recognize the political function of the Brahmanical rituals and ideology and though he attempts to combine history, his analysis makes this cultural process appear as though it takes place outside the realm of ideology, politics and economy (Hardiman, 1984). Such renditions also fail to explain the rise in Dalitisation as a counter-force, as a new assertive identity and as part of an increasing sense of confidence and dignity among the people of lower castes.

Alternatively, Gupta (2000: 178) argues for a sociological approach that seeks to unearth the material and historical roots of the caste system in order to correct the “widespread impression that caste is somehow a peculiar ideological construction that the Hindu mind spontaneously conjured” and that the sociology of caste return to investigating the “social and historical forces responsible for the rise and transformations of different knowledge and belief systems” (p.179). By returning to the material and historical roots of the caste system and the specific features of India’s material history which were responsible for the genesis of the caste system and its development, Gupta (2000) points to the centrality of Marxism and Gramscian-Marxism that links ideology with material reality and seeks to locate ideological articulations and political expressions in relation to concrete social practices and struggles for dominance within the context of class struggle. However, he is quick to point out that there are certain Marxist and/or Gramscian conclusions that would need to be avoided. “It should not be assumed that the ideology of caste is a creation of Brahmans alone, or that it is thrust on others, either against their will, or that the lower castes are in the ideological thrall of upper castes, to justify economic exploitation” (Gupta, 2000: 182). While Brahmans have played a major role in codifying the caste system, they are not the sole motivators. Similarly, while upper castes strain to maintain economic exploitation on caste grounds, this is not blindly accepted by lower castes as had this been the case, there would have been little evidence of caste mobility in any form. While dominant castes work to hegemonize caste constructions and most castes abide by these these norms, it does not mean they intrinsically believe (thick theories of hegemony) in them since lower castes are also

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kept in line through the use of violence and the threat of force, for example. The role of agency and the place for education and praxis addressing attempted caste-hegemonies is left open, despite the odds of a contest with historically-ossified caste-power, as has been made abundantly clear by Dalit campaigns and movements for access to education/schooling and employment (NCDHR, 2007) and adult education processes within these movements that nurture and magnify counter-hegemonic possibilities (Kapoor, 2009; Omvedt, 2006).

Dominant class analyses of Indian poverty have also generally tended to neglect the consequences and imbrications of caste and the economy. As Gopal Guru and Anuradha Chakravarty (2005) note, Marxist analysis has largely ignored the economic consequences of the caste system and is silent on many fronts, including for example, the links between caste and income distribution. Caste is explained away as the residue of feudal and semi-feudal modes of production (Asiatic modes), which in turn is seen to constrain our ability to understand the economic impact of caste under conditions of capitalism and the globalized market. And as noted by Gupta (2000), Marxist understandings of social relations as superstructure determined by economic base limit an appreciation of the independent impact of social structure (e.g. caste) on the control over the means of production. Furthermore, when it comes to prospects for class solidarity and struggle, the correspondence of class (stemming from occupation/occupational history) and caste can no longer be assumed as numerous studies have documented this among all castes. This problematizes the possibility for activating caste ideology for economic or class war as caste ideology separates classes over and above the fundamental classes of Marxism. If caste divisions do correspond with social class distinctions then such activation might prove useful as an instrument for caste-class social change processes. Similarly, Deshpande (2003) notes the paucity of statistical aggregations, profiles and analysis based on caste categories as Marxist and other statistical compilations point to rural-urban divides and/or religious/communal divides in poverty and education but the “Dalitization of poverty” and education (Guru and Charavarty, 2005: 136) and its

disproportionate impacts on the educational access, experience, completion and subsequent employment prospects of Dalits is a relatively recent development in terms of a sociology of poverty, education and inequality that is informed by caste-structuration of Indian society (Govinda, 2002; NCDHR, 2007). Marxist analysis, while quick to pick up on the impacts of the privatization of schooling in urban/rural areas on different classes/social stratifications, has been less forthcoming in terms of identifying similar impacts in terms of caste (Gupta, 2000; Jogdand and Michael, 2006).

Despite the short-comings, such insights can mostly be gleaned from a *critical-indigenous Gramscian-Marxist* scholarship/research agenda that politicizes the historical, political-economic and sociological appreciation (macro-scoping) of the shifting terrain and interests of caste ideology/culture (the exercise of caste-hegemony) and its material ramifications (links to an *indigenized* caste-conscious Marxist political-economy) and related prognosis for social change. That is, *critical-indigenous Gramscian-Marxism* recognizes the fundamental caste-Hindu structuration of Indian society (hence the importance of critical excavations of *saffronization*) and its shaping influences on class dynamics (political-economy) and the related prospects for radical struggle (counter-caste-class hegemonic politics of resistance) squarely aimed at the subversion of caste structurations of both. The relatively recent entry of the macro-dynamics of neoliberal globalization and its real/potential contribution towards the exacerbation and continued caste-class structuration of the impoverishment of Dalits (or the Dalitization of poverty) and educational marginalization/inequality also predictably becomes a key focus and defining element of caste-concerned research agendas and macro-scopes. Such *indigenized* critical-sociological deployments are more likely to excavate, expose and suggest directions for change in educational spaces and in relation to how the education of Dalits can lead to a subversion of caste and a renewed political-economic and socio-cultural-religious engagement in the country.

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4. Critical Sociological Perspectives, Research Agendas and Caste Expositions/Directions for Social Action: Neoliberal Globalization, Saffronization and Dalit Poverty and Educational Prospects

A *critical-indigenous Gramscian-Marxism* (see Selvam, 2007 for a possible partial-application/example in relation to Brahmanic hegemony and ideology and what I am alluding to here) that is cognizant of the centrality of caste structurations (ideological and political-economic), malleability and agency (as opposed to purely anthropological and religio-culturalological standpoints or liberal-structural functionalist perspectives that speak *within and from* caste), will encourage scholarship that looks at Dalit-relevant questions and research pertaining to several possible and connected critical caste-expository foci (see Kapoor, 2008a), including (for instance): (a) the Dalitization of poverty (Guru and Chakravarty, 2005) and its implications for Dalit education and vice-versa and (b) the real (emergent) and potential impacts of the socio-political and economic trajectories being unleashed by neoliberal globalization (Guha, 2008; Menon and Nigam, 2007) and saffronization (Desai, 2004; Guru and Chakravarty, 2005; Sarkar, 2005) (as distinct and conjoint social vectors which compound socio-economic and educational marginalizations) with respect to the Dalitization of poverty, inequality and the structuration of dubious educational prospects for Dalits. As Ravi Kumar (2008: 9) notes, “The neoliberal onslaught on education in India has not only commodified education but has created a host of institutions to produce knowledge congenial for the new economy... and has also manipulated alternative discourses on education within a framework suited to its own ends”, i.e., educational policies need to be understood in relation to theoretical/research deployments (encouraged by relations of rule) that connect such policy to the ruling caste-class interests and the enactment of the current politics of domination and hegemony.

The Dalitization of Poverty and Educational Inequality/Marginalization

The state of poverty and inequality in India would need to be exposed and explained in terms of its caste-basis and its Dalit face. As the revolutionary poet, Narayan Survey says, for Dalits the roti/bhari (round bread) is not only round as the moon but is also just as distant, as they are forced to “consume poisoned bread, a symbol of the domination of human dignity, each time Dalits eat leftover food from the homes of upper castes as a routine course of survival, or are forced to consume wild leaves and the flesh of dead animals in times of drought” (quoted in Guru and Chakravarty, 2005: 139). Sixty-six percent of bonded labor in India is Dalit, while 66 percent of migrant agricultural laborers are Dalit women who earn 17-54 cents/day (Sainath, 1996). Forty-eight percent of Dalits in rural India live below the poverty line (Parikh and Radhakrishna, 2005). Three quarters of rural Dalits are agricultural laborers of whom 70 percent own less than an acre of land, while 1 percent have access to irrigation facilities and cultivation can not ensure enough food for even two meals a day (Guru and Chakravarty, 2005). Oommen notes (1984: 46-47) that Dalits as a group continue to be subjected to “cumulative domination” and experience multiple deprivations that stem from “low ritual status, appalling poverty and powerlessness”. On the job front, Deshpande (2003: 120) and Panini (1996) both note that “caste clustering” and the dominance of upper caste control continues to be true in engineering, medicine, banking journalism and academics. Despite public sector job reservations and affirmative action quotas, in 2001 60.45 percent of central government jobs held by Dalits was in the category of “sweepers” (NCDHR, 2006: 33).

Poverty and inequality shape Dalit prospects in education and the educational experiences themselves. Dalit women’s literacy rates are at 27 percent compared to 38 or higher for other women and in 1994, only 46 percent of Dalit girls in the 5-14 years age group attended school in rural areas compared to 61 percent for others (Govinda, 2002). While school attendance rates have been improving, drop out rates for Dalit girls is at 66.6 percent at the elementary stage (49.9 percent for the same in rural areas), while 40.5 percent (rural) and 27 percent (urban) discontinue school (Nambisan and Sedwal, 2002: 83). According to the same study (p. 79),

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irregular income, frequent migration in search of work and the death/illness of a breadwinner places Dalit children and their education under pressure as Dalit poverty remains a huge deterrent to Dalit education. Untouchability and caste-discrimination in schools are other mitigating factors as caste-based segregation (due to pollution-purity divides) affect social and physical access to schools (Govinda, 2002) as Dalit children are forced to walk around (as opposed to through) dominant caste villages, teachers refuse to teach Dalit children (just 11 percent of teachers are scheduled caste) and Dalits are special targets of verbal abuse and physical punishment by teachers and higher caste classmates, not to mention one study's observation that children of the Balmiki caste (scavengers) were made to sit on their own mats outside the school room/at the door (Dreze and Gazdar, 1996; Govinda, 2002; Sainath, 1996). When it comes to Dalit students in higher education, Dalits constitute a mere 8.37 percent of graduate students and 2.77 percent at the doctoral and research levels (NCDHR quoting from the University Grant's Commission Annual Report of 1999-2000, 2006: 26).

Neoliberal Globalization, Saffronization and Dalit Poverty/Inequality and Educational Prospects

Unlike the emphasis on national production/building under the post-independence Nehruvian scheme where producers addressed the needs of the nation, the contemporary neoliberal policy regime values production for the global market place and foreign exchange earnings, as the patriotic producer gives way to the cosmopolitan consumer. The later is emblematic of a post-patriotic identity built upon the pro-globalist imaginary driven by transnational ideas and institutions or a patriotic pride derived from the ability to partake of global consumption patterns previously enjoyed by an international elite (Deshpande, 2004). The adoption of IMF-World Bank driven liberalization schemes by successive governments since the 1991 fiscal crisis has opened the economy (including education) to foreign investment on corporate terms and has led to:

(i) the shrinkage of the state/public sector which is the only sector obligated to carry out affirmative action and educational upliftment of Dalits, not to mention provision of food subsidies, health and agricultural supports/services to the poor which have been severely curtailed under IFI driven adjustments leading to poverty, hunger and malnutrition (Patnaik, 2007) (e.g. neoliberal globalization is encouraging a further decline in agricultural share of GDP from 53% in 1960-61 to just 13% in 2002-03, while the workforce in agriculture has declined only marginally and market rates of return have come down, prompting cotton-farmer suicides in the thousands in Andhra Pradesh and at least four other states, as the individual debt burden climbs--Kumar, 2008) and

(ii) the acceleration of development dispossession (e.g. TNC mining/dam displacements) in the rural hinterlands or market/economic violence (Kapoor, 2009, 2008b; Rajagopal, 2003) which have a disproportionate impact on marginalized castes/Dalits alike, who are then doubly challenged by virtue of development-led impoverishment and prior conditions of economic exploitation/impoverishment (as development-displaced-persons or what the state euphemistically refers to as DDPs) to seek an education for children in an increasingly privatized/fee paying school system.

Under the neoliberal regime, while higher education has been opened to private capital, the state is now encouraging public-private partnerships in secondary education subsequently paving the way for private providers and subsequent divestments by the state as per “the demands of private capital and the larger conglomeration of the ruling elite” (Kumar, 2008: 9). The franchising of parts of the education infrastructure to corporate and civil society/voluntary religious bodies (see related discussion on saffronization below) enables the Central Government to “close down its schools, sell its assets and to deliberately allow government schools to deteriorate, allowing replacement of same by fee-charging private schools”

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(Sadgopal, 2006: 23). Micro studies on the privatization of schooling (there are now well over 38000 private unassisted schools/PUAs in the country according to the NCERT) suggest that the clientele in these schools is biased towards males and the privileged castes (Govinda, 2002) and that Dalit families sending children to these schools are doing so at considerable cost to the family as PUAs take advantage of the “perception of quality” (Nambissan and Sedwal, 2002: 79). Teltumbde’s (2006) analysis of higher education prospects and realities for Dalits points to a similar process of reproduction of caste privilege/discrimination as neoliberal globalization and privatization enhances dominant caste control over higher education while actively raising the barriers to entry by Dalits.

The privatization agenda encouraged through neoliberal globalization has also led to the concomitant enhancement of civil society (development NGO) involvements in education in pursuit of Education for All (EFA) and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), i.e. education has not only been opened up to private-for-profit investment in education markets (market-led privatizations) but liberalization has also meant an increase in funding/provision by international NGO actors and multilateral agents (voluntary/civil-society led non-profit privatizations) (Govinda, 2002; Jogdand and Michael, 2006; Kumar, 2008) as the neoliberal state is presented with two possible avenues for the abdication of what were considered a state welfarist responsibility for all citizens. While NGO-led education has opened up some opportunities (e.g. NGOs have improved access to basic education for Dalits/poorer segments—see Watkins, 2000), the proliferation of parallel systems of education, state provided and NGO or market-provided, encourages state withdrawal and the likely exacerbation of educational inequalities as the scale of provision is weakened (Watkins, 2000), not to mention that international/donor control over NGOs often ensures that such interventions are dependent on the donor-fad of the day (erratic provisions) and more significantly, can become portals for linguistic imperialism and neocolonial control over the substance (curriculum and methods) of what is taught and learned (Wickens and Sandlin, 2007).

Gramscian/Marxist perspectives also point to the reality and continued possibility that service and charitable NGOs stifle movement struggles (dissent) directly aimed at the class-caste basis of society and related state policy (e.g. caste control over state education) while NGOs are also considered likely agents (educational and material) for the penetration of “small c” capitalism (e.g. micro-credit schemes) (Kamat, 2002; Kapoor, 2009; Petras and Veltmeyer, 2001), which, when taken in the Indian context, is tantamount to assisting with the continued entrenchment of caste control, given the interpolations of caste and economic domination. More importantly, when it comes to dealings with Eurocentric agencies (INGOs and national level NGOs) and western (including the affluent transnational modern-urban classes) “benevolence and charity”, this needs to be critically assessed in terms of the “politics of doing good”, given Gayatri Spivak’s (1992: 781) cautionary observation that “The most frightening thing about imperialism, its long-term toxic effect, what secures it, what cements it, is the benevolent self-representation of the imperialist as savior”.

The linkage between neoliberal globalization (marketization of education) and saffron agendas (saffronization of education via market and civil society/religious NGO privatizations) also needs thorough exploration (as has been alluded to already) when, for example, a study in the state of Orissa concludes that:

with the increasing impetus to privatize education (the neoliberal compulsion), the RSS has been ... actively inaugurating schools [and that the] government of Orissa has neglected to provide functioning, viable and affordable schools, therefore creating an educational vacuum and market for the education offered by Sangh-affiliated schools [which] seek to offer education that teaches hate and intolerance, and self-loathing (for Dalits) and uses education as a tactic in building citizenship that will rally to formulate an authoritarian state in India (Chatterjee and Desai, 2006: 17-18).

The same report points to the development of a “parallel structure of power to that of the state government” (p.17)

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and alludes to foreign funding of RSS and Sangh-affiliated schools made convenient through the globalization of capitalism and the privatization of education and the economy as Indian diaspora top the charts when it comes to non-resident Indian (NRI) remittances (\$29.6 billion in 2006) (William Kole, 2007). For instance, the US-based NGO, Campaign to Stop Funding Hate (CSFH), in its report “Foreign Exchange of Hate” (www.stopfundinghate.org) alleges that 83 percent of funds raised and disbursed by the India Development and Relief Fund (IDRF) between 1994 and 2000, went to Saffron organizations/front organizations aimed at assisting with Hindutva-education, re-conversions and the spread of an anti-minority sentiment. Research reports (see “In Bad Faith? British Charity and Hindu Extremism”, 2004) from the UK/London-based secular network, Awaaz-South Asia Watch Ltd., make similar substantiated allegations pertaining to monies raised in relation to major natural disasters such as the 1999 Orissa supercyclone and the Gujarat earthquake of 2001. Such possibilities begin to suggest avenues for research that examine and expose imbrications between neoliberal globalization and saffronization as privatization agendas create “civil society” spaces for such reproductions and could well be enabling a politics of caste-class-subordinations and the institutionalization of discrimination and inequality.

Such caste-based political-economic analysis of education along with a research agenda that highlights the contributions, gains and possibilities in education and beyond made by Dalit movements/campaign assertions (Guru and Chakravarty, 2005; Jogdand and Michael, 2006; Ray and Katzenstein, 2005) or of Dalit-based political party assertions (e.g. the rise of the BSP and its varied implications—see Guha, 2008; Sarkar, 2002) will make significant contributions towards the further development of Dalit political and educational agendas in India.

When taken together, these related projects will continue to expose the pervasiveness and intensity of caste-discrimination in the contemporary Indian scenario, while pointing to possibilities for change through state policy, institutional mechanisms and anti/caste assertions (in party political and social movement spaces-local, national and transnational), including through the significant avenue of a

liberatory education (as opposed to reproductory and caste-domesticating approaches) and schooling (Freire, 1970) for Dalit children waiting to take their place as equal citizens of India.

5. Conclusion

This paper makes the case for a *critical-indigenous Gramscian-Marxism* inspired caste scholarship and for the general deployment of a critical sociological research agenda committed to expositions (i.e., macro-scopic perspectives pertaining to the Dalitization of poverty/educational marginalization and related imbrications with neoliberal globalization and saffronization agendas in Indian society and political-economy) of casteism/untouchability in the interests of informing a Dalit politics (assertions) and educational agenda. While such a proposition is by no means definitive in any sense when it comes to “militating against the ontological hurt endured by untouchables” (V. Geetha, cited in Guru, 2009: 107), it is proffered as a minor contribution to a growing chorus of possibility and to a “celebration of reviled knowledge” (p. 107). Dr. Ambedkar’s indictment of Hindu society continues to pose a challenge that deserves an answer and subsequently bears repeating as a stark reminder of the difficult but necessary road ahead, quote, “I stand today absolutely convinced that for the depressed classes there can be no equality among the Hindus because on inequality rest the foundations of Hinduism. We no longer want to be a part of Hindu society” (quoted by T. Pantham in Guru, 2009: 186).

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