

CASTE IN GLOBALISATION CONTEXT: THE PERCEPTION OF INTERNATIONAL AID AGENCIES

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Abstract

The present paper is an attempt to understand the working of international aid agencies with the marginalized groups of India. I argue that the functioning of these agencies is not innocent and the same can be revealed by critical understanding of the internal dynamics of their operation, particularly in the broader field of empowerment of marginal communities that they are engaged with. Despite the fact that the International aid agencies have their imprints in India for decades, there is no visible or substantial change in lives of the communities they seek to change. Those, particularly the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, other marginalized communities continue to be at the lower strata of the society devoid of socio-political, economic and welfare measures of the so-called egalitarian state. One reason that led to the failure of these agencies is their un (conscious) inability to understand the socio, political and cultural dynamics of Indian caste system. Without proper understanding of the caste system, one cannot comprehend the resultant systematic exclusion, which in fact led to the perennial poverty of these communities. Furthermore, the paper seeks to understand the institutional setup of these aid agencies in India and argues thereby that any developmental, reformist and empowerment agenda adopted by such agencies is inherently 'exclusive' and therefore bound to fail in the promises that they make. This paper critically views the aid agencies' mainstream perception of caste discourse, their lack of will to include the members of the marginalized communities into their policymaking bodies. Moreover, I argue that any developmental intervention without the active participation of marginalized communities will be a charade in the name of charity. The paper divided into 6 sections. In the first section, I look at the role of caste in modern context, synthesizing the views of scholars such as K Sathyanarayana, Susie Tharu, G Aloysius, Gopal Guru, Sundar Sarukai, N. Sukumar and AS Ajith Kumar and argue that caste is reconfigured and more rampant in modern times. In the second section, I argue that, with the formation of Brahmanical caste based organizations across the countries, caste has become a world problem; third section is about understanding of caste in international aid agencies. In the fourth section, I draw your attention on the caste diversity and staffing practices of international aid agencies in India, which disproportionately occupied and operated by privileged sections with Brahmanic cultural capital. In the fifth section, I argue for the need of challenging the caste in conscious level to symbolic boundaries. The sixth chapter is the conclusion and seventh one is the annexure, list out the Brahmanical caste based organizations formed in the countries across the world, eighth one is the table that indicates the diversity and accountability in the aid agencies in India

Keywords: Caste, India, Aid Agencies, Modernity, Globalisation, Discrimination, Diversity

1. MODERNITY AND CASTE

Caste inequalities in Indian society basing on Chaturvarnya¹ principles of hierarchy are reconfiguring in the modern times and becoming omnipresent, nuanced, and embedded into all modern spaces with modern faces. It is now difficult to identify and fight the caste discrimination. The perpetrator can easily hide and justify his act of discrimination as a logical and justifiable incident with all modern means. A readymade sensibility of 'caste blindness' allows a common person to conclude saying that 'it is not caste discrimination'. As observed by K.Sathyanarayana and Susie Tharu in 'No Alphabet of Insight', "*Caste is configured as a form of power, it has structured social relations... it works in a renewed and updated forms in modern context and modern institutes*"². Gopal Guru and Sundar Sarukai concede with observation above "*In spite of various attempts to eradicate active caste consciousness in our society, it continues to erupt in most obnoxious ways thus consolidating caste identity. The active and effective presence of this caste consciousness has spread from the confines of the family to the political arena, from the private to the public spaces.*"³ Citing the post Mandal⁴ atmosphere in modern institution like universities and government institutions and private institutional workspaces, many studies have pointed out towards the reconfigured presence of caste in modern institution that often plays a vital role in systematic exclusion of the Dalits, Adivasi and, the minorities. This systematic exclusion plays in the name of merit, efficiency, articulations, logic, communication, and performance. One important aspect of such modern forms of exclusion is that as N. Sukumar pointed out "*it seems to unite the perpetrators at the same time that it isolates the victims. While the "excluders" produce exclusion by collectively expropriating public space and refusing to share social opportunities*"⁵. The language of this peculiar kind of modernity legitimizes the dominant caste systematic exclusion and caste discrimination.

The International and National Non Governmental Organizations, the government led State welfare initiatives and progressive people associated with such initiatives see caste as a thing to fight in distant place, and they think that they are all free from the caste, but social reformers and revolutionaries in India have challenged these articulations of caste and their caste practices. For example, Gandhi identified untouchability as a problem that is totally outside the Hindu Brahmanical cultural system, he says, "*Caste has nothing to do with religion. It is a custom whose origin i do not need to know for the satisfaction of my spiritual hunger*"⁶. However, Ambedkar challenged this position of Gandhi by pointing out the caste notion embedded in the Hindu Brahmanical cultural system. Hence, caste as an outside distant thing, which one can fight without shedding away their own cultural biases, is an idea which itself reinforces caste hierarchy that is why Ambedkar said, "*caste is a notion, it is a state of the mind, and the destruction does not therefore mean the destruction of physical barrier. It means a notional change.*"⁷ Here Ambedkar clearly challenge the Gandhian liberal notion of reformed caste practice without untouchability and propose a radical break within socio cultural system that produces and reinforces the caste consciousness. However, unfortunately the Indian mainstream and its protagonists have accepted the Gandhian model as the model of caste reform. This model has never challenged the caste consciousness but enshrined the values of caste hierarchy in all modern spaces. As pointed out by Aloysius "*Caste-Varna as retrieved and reset in modernity has not changed it colors in contemporary India. If at all, its stranglehold on the social polity is expanding as well as tightening. Ascriptive hierarchy, as the basis of social status as well as the method of surplus distribution within society is firmer than ever*"⁸.

National secular institutions and liberal caste reformers follow the same paradigm without challenging the caste consciousness; this often helps them to hide their caste markers. The dominant / oppressive caste people in modern space act as an unmarked citizens while they identify caste in a pre modern, distant village spaces. So often, they are trying to point out this distant caste and waging a rhetorical war against the caste,

¹The general proposition that the social organization of the Indo Aryans was based on the theory of Chaturvarnya and that Chaturvarnya means division of society into four Classes Brahmins (priests), Kshatriyas (soldiers), Vaishyas (traders) and Shudras (menials)

²K. Sathyanarayana and Susi Tharu (Eds.) No Alphabet insight, New Delhi, Penguin Books, 2011, p.11

³Available at <http://barefootphilosophers.wordpress.com/tag/gopal-guru/>

⁴The Mandal Commission appointed in India in 1979 by the Janata Party government under Prime Minister Morarji Desai with a mandate to "identify the socially or educationally backward. It was headed by Indian parliamentarian B.P. Mandal to consider the question of seat reservations and quotas for people to redress caste discrimination

⁵Living a Concept: Semiotics of Everyday Exclusion By N Sukumaran EPW Vol - XLIII No. 46, November 15, 2008

⁶Ambedkar, Annihilation of Caste, Critical quest, 2007, New Delhi, p. 52.

⁷Ambedkar, Annihilation of caste, critical quest, 2007, Delhi, p. 37.

⁸Identity & Politics among the Scheduled Castes in Contemporary India: Some critical reflections Paper Presented by Aloysius at RINDAS International Symposium Series 1 "Voice for Equity Minority and Majority in South Asia" available at rindas.ryukoku.ac.jp/report/upfile/Abstract%20Aloysius.doc

but at the same time, they maintain their own caste privileges, associations and practices. This is legitimizing their deliberate caste practice and caste discrimination in modern times. The dangerous aspect of this paradigm is that this modern unmarked, covert and sanitized caste bodies often objectify the people coming from marginal communities into such spaces and mark them as castiest. They will claim that they too share the lived experience of the erstwhile. Meanwhile in modern places, they themselves make their own caste interest formation by using the modern language like professionalism and follow the caste-based practices. The liberal caste frame never challenge the caste consciousness of modern minds. As A.S Ajith Kumar points out *"Placing caste in the past or in 'not-yet modern' villages doesn't disturb the modern caste mindset. No one, not even a hard-core casteist would mind admitting that there was caste in the past. The progressive liberals would be comfortable with this position. It is when we speak about the modern caste practices that the progressive liberals get disturbed because this places the progressive liberals within the sphere we are talking about caste"*⁹.

This situation is a challenge for the people who work for the human rights, equality and social justice. Unlike others, they are ready to unpack the modern forms of caste discrimination and caste hierarchal power relations objectively; as the progressive liberals will never understand the problem and complexity of any incident of caste discrimination. However, the irony is that the people associated with International Aid Agencies who are claiming themselves as change makers, working for human rights, empowerment, social justice etc... Of marginalized people, simultaneously practice the same modern caste rationality that is in contrary to the basic principles of human rights and social justice. It is difficult to fight these mindsets, which are theatrically progressive, pro dalits and pro poor and covertly castiest. They follow the Gandhian paradigm of caste reform; while maintaining their caste hegemony in new forms.

Neutrality in a caste based society usually doubtful, as no fact is independent, it is fully loaded with value and value also a fact, whatever people consider or express as a fact, they add their values to it. Hence, whatever believed pronounced and acted upon remains relative and subjective. However, quite often it presented in the guise of objectivity and neutrality and worst being an unbiased. Oppressive/dominant caste men will never accept the fact that he discriminated a person due to his oppressed caste status. The perpetrator legitimizes his position and tries to avoid responsibility to the act of discrimination, saying that, he just followed the process and that resulted in discrimination, or he will say, the incident of discrimination was 'not intentional', hence, probably a misunderstanding or communication gap. What is missing here is the fact that modern institutional space and structures itself are constituted for the benefit of dominant/ oppressive castes by themselves. This atmosphere often alienates and discourages people from marginalized communities, so the language of understanding of these institutions itself acts as a matter of exclusion and humiliation. This situation is prevailing in both public and private sectors; state operated institutions, private institutions, and Development sector, the International and National Non Government Organizations (NGOs), which claim to working for the marginalized people and their empowerment.

2. INDIAN CASTE BECOMING WORLD PROBLEM

Caste system is spreading across countries of the world; the caste Hindus carries their caste along with them wherever they go. As observed by Dr. B. R. Ambedkar, "As long as caste in India does exist, Hindus will hardly intermarry or have any social intercourse with outsiders; and if Hindus migrate to other regions on earth, Indian caste would become a world problem."¹⁰ What Dr Ambedkar foretold in 1927, has become the truth today. Those who migrated from India to different countries have formed their caste organizations in other places like the United Kingdom, United States of America, Canada, South Africa and UAE. Below are the links to a few of the websites of caste-based organization across the world. **(SEE ANNEXURE- I)**

The atrocities towards Dalits, namely, untouchability, humiliation, denial of equal opportunities and violation of human rights are similar in Indian organizations as well as in international organizations with notable Indian presence. In addition, the caste practice of honor killings has migrated to the United States, United Kingdom and Canada along with Caste Hindus. In 2008, a so-called upper caste man, Subhash Chander, who lived in Oak Forest, suburb, south of Chicago in USA set fire to his pregnant daughter, his son-in-law and his 3-year-old grandson, and killed them all because he didn't approve of his daughter's

⁹ Dalitizing cinema: A critique of Rupesh Kumar's 'Don't be our fathers', available at http://roundtableindia.co.in/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=6888:dalitizing-cinema-a-critique-of-rupesh-kumar-s-don-t-be-our-fathers&catid=119:feature&Itemid=132

¹⁰ B. R. Ambedkar *Castes in India: Their Mechanism, Genesis and Development*, by, Paper presented at an Anthropology Seminar, taught by Dr. A. A. Goldenweizer Columbia University 9th May 1916, Text first printed in: Indian Antiquary Vol. XLI (May 1917)

marriage, as his son-in-law was a lower-caste man from India¹¹. As caste and its evil social practices spread across countries, the Dalit groups have started fighting back. Because of prolonged battle carried out by several anti-caste organizations, the Government of the UK brought a law, The Equality Act 2010, which treats caste as an aspect of race¹². Equality Act 2010 was aimed at ensuring equality to diverse ethnic migrant groups in the UK. In 2013, when the UK government wanted to bring an Anti-Caste legislation, which is a special legal measure against caste discrimination in the UK among the Indians, some Hindu fundamentalist groups in the UK opposed it.

Then the government ordered a study on the presence of caste discrimination in UK. Dr Meena Dhanda, Reader in Philosophy and Cultural Politics, University of Wolverhampton headed a team of academics to conduct the study on behalf of the Equality and Human Rights Commission. The research was a part of the commission's Caste in Britain project, undertaken at the request of the Government, to help inform the introduction of a new statutory law. This followed the Enterprise and Regulatory Reform Act 2013 requirement that the government introduce a statutory prohibition of caste discrimination in British equality law.¹³

Noting the severity of the problem of caste discrimination, the European Parliament (EP) recognised caste-based discrimination as a human rights violation and adopted a resolution condemning it and urging European Union institutions to address it, in October 2013. The EP consists of 28 member-countries of the EU. Acknowledging that caste-affected communities are still subjected to 'untouchability practices' in India, Nepal, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka, the October 10 resolution stressed the need to combat discrimination based on work and descent, which occurs also in Yemen, Mauritania, Nigeria, Senegal and Somalia¹⁴.

Though caste is still haunting across the globe, the colonial misunderstanding of caste often repeats the same mistake. For instance, dominant caste individuals who do not have a proper understanding of the caste system and its socio-economic and cultural dimensions primarily run International Aid agencies, which claim to be working for the Dalits and Adivasis in India. This is resulting in caste-based discrimination on Dalits in their own institutional spaces! As Ambedkar clearly pointed out on a different historical situation, the negligence of foreigners, including radicals, about the social fabric of India which by default bestows privileges, prestige, and confidence on the Brahmins in accordance with the Manusmriti,¹⁵ thus making the Brahmins the 'governing class' who deliberately excluded all the means for the 'servile class' to achieve self-respect and development.

Ambedkar observes, *"Starting with the Brahmins who form a strong and powerful element in the governing class in India it is no exaggeration to say that they have been the most inveterate enemies of the servile classes, the Shudras (the old name for the non-Brahmins) and the Untouchables who together constitute about 80 or 90 percent of the total Hindu population of India. If the commonman belonging to the servile classes in India is to-day so fallen, so degraded, so devoid of self-respect, hope or ambition, and so lifeless, it is entirely due to the Brahmins and their philosophy. The cardinal principles of this philosophy of the Brahmins were six to use a correct expression, techniques of suppression (1) graded inequality between the different classes;(2) Complete disarmament of the Shudras and the Untouchables; (3) Complete ban on the education of the Shudras and the Untouchables; (4) Total exclusion of the Shudras and the Untouchables from places of power and authority; (5) Complete prohibition against the Shudras and the Untouchables acquiring property, and (6) Complete subjugation and suppression of women. Inequality is the official doctrine of Brahmanism and the suppression of the lower classes aspiring to equality has been looked upon by them and carried out by them, without remorse, as their bounded duty."*¹⁶ Without

¹¹ Monica Davey, The New York times, Published: January 3, 2008, viewed on 17th June 2014 at http://www.nytimes.com/2008/01/03/us/03chicago.html?_r=0

¹² Caste discrimination and harassment in Great Britain, Government Equalities office, Research Finding Paper No 2010/08

¹³ <http://www.wlv.ac.uk/default.aspx?page=39321>

¹⁴ Divya Trivedi, Hindu News Paper Dated 15th December 2013, viewed on 24th July at

<http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/caste-discrimination-a-global-evil-says-european-parliament/article5234387.ece>

¹⁵ Among all the Dharmashastras, Manusmriti is one of the most systematically formulated works, the Brahmins laid down the laws and regulations suitable for the kind of society to ensure their hegemony at the juridical level. they gave shape to it through a complex and competent form of writings to legalize and perpetuate the caste system, which was the life giver for the foundation of Vedic society. the Manusmriti provided an apparently a scientific and historical basis for the creation of an unequal and unjust society. it showed its ruthlessness in obstructing the progressive evolution of society, ensuring its continuance in a static and lifeless form. it played a vital role in providing the basic ideas for the development of fascism and imperialism all over the world

¹⁶ Ambedkar, A Plea to foreigner, available at

<http://www.ambedkar.org/ambcd/43.%20A%20Plea%20to%20the%20Foreigner.htm>, viewed on 1st march 2015

recognising the genealogy of the cultural, social, moral authority in the Indian social fabric, foreigners are taking these unmarked Indian Brahmanical class as representative of India. Ambedkar further says that

“These reasons cannot be beyond the ken of these radicals. Correspondents or no correspondents, is it not the duty of radicals to keep in touch with their kindred in other parts of the world to encourage them, to help them and to see that true democracy lives everywhere. It is a most unfortunate thing that the Radicals of England and America should have forgotten the class to whom they owe a duty to help and have become the publicity agents of Indian Tories who are just misusing the slogan of liberty to be fool and befog the world¹⁷.” Ambedkar again asks foreigners regarding their total faith in the Brahmanical class, *“Do they not realise that for the reasons for which the Sultan could not abolish Islam or the Pope could not repudiate Catholicism, the governing class in India will not decree the destruction of Brahmanism and that so long as the governing class remains what it is, Brahmanism, which preaches the supremacy of Brahmins and the allied castes and which recognises the suppression and degradation of the Shudras and the Untouchables as the sacred duty of the State, will continue to be the philosophy of the State even if India became free? Do they not know that this governing class in India is not a part of the Indian people, is not only completely isolated from them, but believes in isolating itself, lest it should be contaminated by them, has implanted in its mind by reason of the Brahmanic philosophy, motives and interests which are hostile to those who are outside its fold and therefore does not sympathise with the living forces operating in the servile masses whom it has trodden down, is not charged with their wants, their pains, their cravings, their desires, is inimical to their aspirations, does not favour any advance in their education, promotion to high office and disfavours every movement calculated to raise their dignity and their self-respect? Do they not know that in the Swaraj of India is involved the fate of 60 millions of Untouchables?”¹⁸*

3. THE INTERNATIONAL AID AGENCIES AND THEIR PERCEPTION OF CASTE

International aid agencies and charity organizations who speak of human rights, equality and justice, are filled with Brahmins and other allied dominant caste individuals. No aid agency is an exception. This rule even applies to the Indian units of the United Nations. A critical look at the historical formation of these caste interest groups will help us understand the root of this problem. The European understanding of caste and tradition in India is influenced by a Brahman-centric worldview. Colonial knowledge production about India and its past were accessed from Brahmanical sources that were taken for granted as authentic. As Debjani Ganguly observes, *“The predominance of Brahmins as informants, no doubt, led the British, to write accounts of ancient India in terms of Brahmanical sociology of knowledge”¹⁹*

Caste thus understood and institutionalized by colonial forces was derived from the understanding of Brahmanical forces. Now, even annihilation of caste is also sought to be delineated by people from dominant castes who have access to the knowledge of their colonial masters. However, their representation often silences and shuts the voices of lifelong victims of caste oppression. Moreover, by using different international platforms they have been continuing their caste hegemony and diverting the radical idea of caste annihilation into caste reform. Once native informants now act as authentic reformers!

In the European context, social exclusion and marginalisation understood as the problem of individuals that can be solved through liberal individual rights, but in the Indian context, exclusion and marginalisation take place and are maintained through community dynamics. Even a liberal individual cannot simply take back his community inheritance in modern spaces. Without considering this complex social process aid agencies are appointing “unmarked” liberal individual bodies as experts for the development of marginalised but these unmarked bodies often their liberal credentials as camouflage to brutally suppress or invisibilise the marginalised bodies in their spaces. As a result, the disease of ‘casteism’ will definitely affect any international organisation that sets up its chapter in India. Likewise, the casteist Indian who holds some power in any international organisation can also be deadly.

These aid agencies reflect a caste understanding, which is historically rooted in colonial knowledge production in India which was aided by Brahmanical collaborators, and which subscribes to the hegemonic idea of Chaturvarnya and hierarchical social relations. They see it as normal and natural Indian social order, according to their understanding; it cannot be destroyed but may be reformed.

British colonial rule in the Indian subcontinent has strengthened the Brahmin-imagined *Chaturvarnya* caste system, which demarcated the Brahmin as the highest ranking of the four varnas. In Hindu India,

¹⁷ Ambedkar, A Plea to foreigner, available at

<http://www.ambedkar.org/ambcd/43.%20A%20Plea%20to%20the%20Foreigner.htm>, viewed on 1st march 2015

¹⁸ Ambedkar, A Plea to foreigner, available at

<http://www.ambedkar.org/ambcd/43.%20A%20Plea%20to%20the%20Foreigner.htm>, viewed on 1st march 2015

¹⁹ Debjani Ganguly, *Caste, Colonialism and counter modernity notes on a post colonial hermeneutics of caste*, p.43, Routledge, 2009

through the British colonial rule, Brahmins and other allied dominant castes have strengthened their socioeconomic positions by occupying all available positions of power. When the ex untouchable defensive castes, the so-called lower castes, demanded the same treatment from the British rulers, the dominant castes has strengthened the Indian national movement to counter the aspirations of the Indian depressed classes. Aloysius observes here, *"with the establishment of Pax Britannica the vanquishing of the rajas and maharajas on the one hand and the switchover from other sword wielding to pen pushing as the new method of ruling other- the British discovered the religio-culturally but scattered dominant, the Brahmanical (the people of different castes who by birth first, but more importantly conscious – moral adoption believe in practice and stand to gain by Varnashrama in social relations) particularly of the surplus producing river valley as the eminently suited and valued collaborator for the delivery of their colonial objective. This discovery and the mutual beneficial partnership that ensured between what was even flaunted as the reunification of the too long last brothers of the same stock"*²⁰

In other words, Hadwa Dom clearly states, "The Brahmins of India actively collaborated with the English colonialists in their conquest of India. As a result, the English rewarded them by inventing the designated 'Leaders of Hinduism' for their loyal servants, their Aryan Brahmin cousins"²¹. Hadwa Dom further observes: "During British control of colonial India, many missionaries and humanitarians from Britain and other western countries decried the Hindu caste system as unfair. At the same time, the British government in India had often been perfectly happy to align itself with the Brahmins in order to preserve stability and introduce at least a facade of local control in the colonial regime".²²

The Brahmins were in alliance with the British scholars who studied the caste system. They portrayed themselves to be untouchable friendly and caste practices as a cultural heritage of this country. The very idea of caste system that the Britishers and other Europeans had been from Brahmins and other allied caste oppressors, not from the victims of the caste system. The colonial powers influenced by the manipulated knowledge given by the Brahmanical forces enabled dominance of the caste hierarchy and it is still holds sway in all walks of India's life, be it in the judiciary, media, academics, civil service, politics and what not.

4. CASTE DIVERSITY IN DEVELOPMENT SECTOR

Gramsci uses the analogy of civil society as a system of trenches and redoubts surrounding the state.²³ All political attempts by the underprivileged classes--castes in Indian context--to overcome the barriers are drowned by the development sector that claims for itself the status of the civil society. Does the civil society, popularly understood as NGO sector, act as the entry point of marginalized sections into better social positions? We need to think about this aspect seriously because those who were fed up by government and corporate sector are increasingly turning towards the development sector because it looks fancy, politically correct, without realizing that in fact it can be equally hegemonic. The hegemony of the civil society is nowhere more visible than in its reinforcing the existing social norms of hierarchy in their day-to-day activities. It is starkly visible in their staffing practices, which prefer people of privileged backgrounds especially in important positions. Caste is the greatest social reality in India that produces inequality and poverty with its hierarchical social structures, by keeping people from marginalized communities away from accessing resources and power centers. Therefore, any attempts for poverty reduction must deal with caste. The participation of people from the marginalized communities should be a precondition. Defining the caste-divide in Indian social life, Dr B.R. Ambedkar, the chairperson of the drafting committee of Constitution of India put it this way:

"There is no nation of Indians in the real sense of the world; it is yet to be created. In believing we are a nation, we are cherishing a great delusion. How can people divided into thousands of castes be a nation? The sooner we realize that we are not yet a nation, in a social and psychological sense of the world, the better for us".²⁴ However, the Brahmanical governing class in India cherishes the delusion that India is a nation, refusing to acknowledge the fact that the Indian society is divided on caste lines. Every caste has its own distinct social practices governed by the Brahmanical framework of social, economic and political hierarchies. This reality makes it impossible for any caste to represent another caste as social interests are hierarchized. This makes equality an impossible ideal in political practice even in civil society.

²⁰ Aloysius, Brahmanical inscribed Body politic, p.8, Critical Quest, New Delhi, 2010

²¹ Myth of One Hindu Religion PT 2, By Hadwa Dom

<http://www.raceandhistory.com/historicalviews/NoDefinitionofHinduism2.htm>

²² http://asianhistory.about.com/od/india/ss/Photo-Essay-Colonial-India_11.htm

²³ Gramsci, 1971 p.234, available at-<http://marxisttheory.org/antonio-gramsci-theories-of-hegemony-civil-society-and-revolution/#note-635-11>

²⁴ Ambedkar, Thus Spoke Ambedkar, Quotations of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, available at - <http://www.ambedkar.org/Babasaheb/quotations.htm>, viewed on 16th April 2015

When Indian National Congress and its leader M.K.Gandhi's claimed that they represent all castes including the ex-untouchables before the British, during Round Table Conferences²⁵, Dr Ambedkar pointed out that: *"The Congress has been, loudly and insistently claiming that it is the only political organization in India, which is representative of the people of India. At one time, it used to claim that it represents the Musalmans also. This it does not now do, at any rate not so loudly and insistently. But so far as the Untouchables are concerned, the Congress maintains most vehemently that it does represent them. On the other hand, the non-Congress political parties have always denied this claim. This is particularly true of the Untouchables who have never hesitated to repudiate the Congress claim to represent them"*.²⁶

Hence, Ambedkar demanded fair representation in the entire system of governance and administration, but Gandhi, the leader of caste Hindus blackmailed Dr. Ambedkar and made him to sign Poona Pact²⁷ on 24 September 1932. Thus, the term "reservations"²⁸, widely adopted by the government functionaries, media and academicians, instead of the more dignified word "representation." However, the reservation policy remained on paper; the Brahmanical governing class of India consciously resisted in many ways the implementation of reservations for the Scheduled Caste (SC), Scheduled Tribe (ST), and Other Backward Classes (OBC). It never honored in practice of the reservations as the Constitutional principle of social justice. Instead, it has adopted different strategies to recruit their own kith and kin in the positions of power reserved for SC, ST and OBC categories. The SC, ST and OBCs have reservations, but Brahmins and their allied castes have "preservations", as one Dalit activist put it.

Many studies pointed out that 94.01% of the judges in Supreme Court, the apex court of India and High Courts, the federal courts are Brahmins and their Brahmanic²⁹ allied dominant castes. According to *Outlook* magazine survey in 2007, Brahmins are a micro minority community that constitutes 5.6% of the total population of India, but they occupied 47% of chief justice posts and 40% of associate justice positions between 1950 to 2000.³⁰ Around 75-90% of the Class I--Class II officers in the Indian administration, professors, lecturers and readers in all government-funded central and state universities are from Brahmin and Brahmanic allied dominant castes. 88% of most significant positions in the media are also occupied by the same castes.³¹ More than 80% of the land holdings, including other resources and means of production rest with Brahmanic dominant castes. "In 1991, 70% of the total SC households were landless or near landless (owning less than one acre). This increased to 75% in 2000. In 1991, 13% of the rural SC households were landless. However, in 2000 this saw a decline and was 10%. As per the Agricultural Census of 1995-96, the bottom 61.6% of operational holdings accounted for only 17.2% of the total operated land area. As against this, the top 7.3% of operational holdings accounted for 40.1% of the total operated area. This gives an indication of land concentration in the hands of a few."³²

Despite the fact that the practice of reservations system has been on for more than half a century, the total strength of SC, ST and OBCs in central and state government jobs are around 20%, but they constitute 85% of the people. "The backlog in Dalit and Tribal appointments reported to be 25,000 in the State (the

²⁵ The three Round Table Conferences of 1930–32 were a series of conferences organized by the British Government to discuss constitutional reforms in India.

²⁶ Ambedkar, What Congress and Gandhi have done to the untouchables, Chapter –iv, A False Claim, available at - <http://www.ambedkar.org/ambcd/41G.What%20Congress%20and%20Gandhi%20CHAPTER%20VI.htm> viewed on 17th April 2015

²⁷ The Poona Pact refers to an agreement between Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar and Mahatma Gandhi signed on 24 September 1932 at Yerwada Central Jail in Pune (now in Maharashtra), India. It was signed by Pt Madan Mohan Malviya, some Hindu leaders, Dr BR Ambedkar, and some Dalit leaders to break the fast unto death undertaken by Gandhi in Yerwada jail to annul Macdonald Award giving separate electorate to Dalits for electing members of state legislative assemblies in British India.

²⁸ Reservation in India is the process of setting aside a certain percentage of seats (vacancies) in government institutions for members of backward and under-represented communities (defined primarily by caste and tribe). Reservation is a form of quota-based affirmative action. Reservation is governed by constitutional laws, statutory laws, and local rules and regulations

²⁹ The term Brahmanic is used here for the jatis that believe in Brahmanic caste system as an ideology and practice prejudices against unprivileged communities; they are the non-Brahmin landed communities who lead the Brahmanic way of life. They are Kammas, Reddis, Velamas, Rajus and Kapus in the Telugu states, Marathas and Kunbis in Maharashtra. The Vellalar jatis, Thevar and Nadars in Tamil Nadu. Vokkaligas, Lingayats and Reddis in Karnataka. Patels in Gujarat, Jats, Rajputs, Bhumihars, Khatri, Kayasths, Yadavs and Kurmis etc in the various northern states. Baidyas, Kayasths in West Bengal; Karanas in Odisha etc.

³⁰ Brahmins in India", *Outlook India*, June 4, 2007, <http://www.outlookindia.com/article/brahmins-in-india/234783>

³¹ Upper castes dominate national media, says survey in Delhi, <http://www.thehindu.com/todays-paper/tp-national/upper-castes-dominate-national-media-says-survey-in-delhi/article3115113.ece>

³² Problems of Dalits in India, published at- <http://indiacurrentaffairs.org/problems-of-dalits-in-india/>, available at- <https://karthiknavayan.files.wordpress.com/2015/04/problems-of-dalits-in-india.pdf>. p.2

state here is Tamil Nadu and the similar situation prevails in other states too) and 1,000,000 in Union Government services. Some vacancies have not been filled since 1978. Reported by National Daily- Hindu, Feb 2, 1999".³³ This is the story of public sector. When it comes to the private sector, which is answerable to none, the story is worse.

The development sector, which varyingly calls itself as civil society, the NGO and the voluntary sector, does the same thing as public and private sectors. The sector, which claims to be working for the welfare of the marginalized, is disproportionately occupied and operated by privileged sections with Brahmanic cultural capital. They act as bleeding hearts out to work for the welfare of Dalits and Adivasis before the international donor agencies; they write policies and strategies; and they make interventions for the sake of the marginalized communities. However, none of this process involves those affected sections that they claim to represent.

The development workers belonging to the marginalized communities have recently criticized the Brahmanic dominant caste individuals who occupy the positions in the development sector. Their criticism was that, those Brahmanic dominant caste people employed in the development sector actually work against the development of marginalized communities. Mahendra, a development activist, pointed out this fact in his email to hrm@yahoogroups.com, on 26 March 2015, in reply to an article titled, "Does ActionAid International Support Caste Discrimination?"

"it is known fact that large majority of dominant caste who couldn't find jobs in Government Sector, moved strategically to the development sector, saying they are working for the poor and marginalized. Actually, they wanted to control the funds and delay the process of development. It is only few individuals from the dominant caste have really given up their caste prejudices and worked for poor. As long as they continue to practice the Brahmanical rituals, they will continue to discriminate the SC/STs, the trend now among the dalit groups and Christian-background support agencies is appointing Brahmanical candidates as their CEOs/ top positions, so they also don't want backward and Dalit Christians to head NGOs. Sorry state of affairs in the name of development of SC/STs".³⁴

The managements and the people associated with development organisations are always ready to lecture about transparency and accountability particularly in government, often referring to its poor functioning and corruption. Nevertheless, when we look at the development organisations themselves, we hardly see them maintain those values of transparency and accountability in their own institutional spaces. A small study of 34 development agencies, through the Right to Information Act 2005,³⁵ was conducted but no valuable data on the caste diversity within their organisational structures was made available. They were practically evasive. As a lawyer, I was well aware of the fact that technically they do not come under the definition of "Public Authority" according to the RTI Act. However, my intention was to check their moral and ethical commitment towards the ideals of transparency and accountability. Moreover, every legal right was initially an ethical and moral value. By including those values in the legislations, we add legal status to them. In addition, the value of transparency in public life need not necessarily be a technicality requirement imposed by the RTI Act. That these NGOs technically did not fall under the purview of RTI Act does not mean that they need not follow norms of transparency. They are ethically and morally more accountable to the people than the Government.

The study reveals two things; one, the development organizations are not ready to share the information on the caste diversity of their staff. Two, they fear, it seems, that it will reveal their poor record in implementing diversity policies. Of the 34 organizations, only 10 have replied, (**SEE TABLE -1**) and of the ten only two- PRIA (Participatory Research in Asia) and NFI (National Foundation of India) have provided the information. Nevertheless, that information was insufficient. PRIA did provide only the list of their employees, their gender and state of domicile, but not caste status of their employees. The National Foundation of India has provided only a two-line reply, which said that "in professional staff one female and in support staff, two males underrepresented." Still, there was no mention of caste-status of their staff.

[Save the Children – BAL Raksha Bharath](#), which claims "To inspire breakthroughs in the way the world treats children, and to achieve immediate and lasting change in their lives".³⁶ replied saying that "[W]e have a policy of inclusion and equal opportunity policy for our employees, as a policy, we do not ask our employees

³³ Dalit Reality, Peoples Democracy, Chennai edition published on April 6-12, 2015

³⁴ Mahendra reply to the article, Does ActionAid International Support Caste Discrimination email dated 26th March 2015, available at - https://karthiknavayan.wordpress.com/?attachment_id=1816

³⁵ The Right to Information Act (RTI) is an Act of the Parliament of India "to provide for setting out the practical regime of right to information for citizens" passed by Parliament on 15 June 2005 and came fully into force on 12 October 2005.

³⁶ Save The Children Mission Statement, available at - <https://www.savethechildren.in/about-us/mission-and-vision-child-ngo.html>

about their caste, religion or ethnicity at the time of recruitment”.³⁷ This is a self-contradictory statement. Without recognizing the social identity of staff, how can they pretend to follow the inclusive policy? How do they think some people need the benefit of equal opportunity, if they cannot identify the forms of discrimination? They have an inclusion and equal opportunity policies in place, but they never ask the caste, religion or ethnicity at the time of recruitment. Then, on what basis does their inclusion policy work, when the caste, ethnicity and religion themselves form the basis of social exclusion and marginalization? Equal opportunity and inclusion; all tall and high-sounding principles, but they will forever remain in the realm of the abstract without ever transforming into concrete actions.

Aid at Action says that caste is an item of personal information, which cannot be shared with other people. How can caste be a personal thing? It is also contrary to their own understanding that the personal is political. If it ‘personal’, why do people from the Brahmanic dominant castes flaunt their caste-title in surnames in public? Verma, Sharma, Shastri, Pundit, Reddi, Naidu, Patel, Thakur; there are so many such caste tails in India. They are okay with disclosing their own caste in the public because it is a privilege, but they will not disclose the caste-wise data of their staff, even if it was asked for the purpose of a study on social diversity.

[58% of the ActionAid India staff are Brahmanical dominant castes](#)³⁸, who constitute only 18% of the entire Indian population, as furnished to the VODI – Voice of Dalits International. Still, some people on social media argue that, “It just shows that more people from Brahmanic dominant castes are interested in working for the development of marginalized communities.” Is that so? If they are interested in the development of marginalized communities, why can’t they work voluntarily by giving up their privileges and huge salaries? As Ambedkar observed, the idea of charity in India itself is caste-ridden: “Go into the field of charity. With one or two exceptions, all charity in India is communal. If a Parsi dies, he leaves his money for Parsis. If a Jain dies, he leaves his money for Jains. If a Marwadi dies, he leaves his money for Marwadis. If a Brahmin dies, he leaves his money for Brahmins. Thus, there is no room for the downtrodden and the outcastes in politics, in industry, in commerce, and in education.”³⁹ Now the international charity organizations that set up their offices in India continue the same old idea of charity by which their own kith and kin benefit; not the downtrodden people of India

The lack of access to resources and opportunities for the underprivileged castes and classes in the NGO sector is the result of deep-rooted prejudices, which the powerful privileged castes carry along with themselves. The more they claim to adhere to the values of equal opportunity and inclusion in the language of modernity, the less is the possibility of them identifying and overcoming their own biases. Civil society was always seen as the theatre of all forms of power politics, as per the Gramscian understanding. But the term is now colonized by NGOs who claim to represent all the progressive values; but in fact, they have been reinforcing all the hegemonic values that suppress the marginalized. Historically, the movements of the underprivileged have generated many democratic values, but in practice, the NGOs appropriate them; where do they deploy them and to what end should have been important concerns of public life.

5. CHALLENGE CASTE IN CONSCIOUS LEVEL TO SYMBOLIC BOUNDARIES

The British-born sociologist and eminent feminist scholar Ruth Frankenberg argues in the context of white racism “*the physical distance between white and black settlements in the west is the mark of social distance between them, the material boundaries were also the symbolic boundaries.*” She says that “*the production and reproduction of dominance rather than subordination, normativity rather than marginality, and privilege rather than disadvantage*”.⁴⁰ This definition identifies whiteness as something that places white people in dominant positions and grants white people unfair privileges, while rendering these positions and privileges invisible to white people⁴¹. That means whiteness here acts as a privilege. In India, caste acts as a privilege rather than a mere social organizing principle and a tool of discrimination. Caste privileges provide innumerable opportunities and access to people from Brahmanical dominant castes while the people who have no caste privileges are compelled to obey and work according to the norms of the former.

³⁷ Available at - <https://karthiknavayan.files.wordpress.com/2015/04/gmail-letter-to-save-the-children-india.pdf>

³⁸ Available at - <https://karthiknavayan.files.wordpress.com/2015/04/untitled.png>

³⁹ Ambedkar B R, “Prospects of Democracy in India” the voice of America 20th may 1956, available at - http://old.bamcef.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=154:prospects-of-democracy-in-india-babasaheb-dr-b-r-ambedkar&catid=10:news&Itemid=13

⁴⁰ Frankenberg, R. *White women, race matters: The social construction of whiteness*, Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1993.p 236

⁴¹ Meredith J. Green, Christopher C. Sonn, Jabulane Matsebula, Reviewing whiteness: Theory, research, and possibilities, South African Journal of Psychology, 37(3), 2007, pp. 389–419

In intellectual and academic discourse, the Brahmin and Brahmin allied dominant castes are privileged to interpret and introduce the Indian caste system to the world through a systematic organization of institutions. This is possible not only because of their advantaged positions in the academics but also due to their social privilege as upper castes, which endows them with a social legitimacy to speak. As Gopal Guru pointed out in his famous essay titled *How Egalitarian are the social sciences in India*, "There are historical reasons that gave a structural advantage to the top of the twice born (TTB) in consolidating its privileged position in doing theory. Historically accumulated cultural inequalities seem to have reinforced dalit epistemological closure. This in effect left the realm of reflectivity entirely free from the TTB. Such closures have its sanction in Manu's thinking"⁴². The Indian academia, media and other publishing houses has produced caste hierarchy in academics in the name of caste studies and anti caste literature. In a hierarchical caste structure, the people from dominant castes will preach about virtues, good, evil, bad and what to do and what not to do etc by relegating the marginalized to the position of mere listeners and actors. In the same way, academia also reproduces the same caste hierarchical structure by placing marginal people at the receiving end always.

In contradiction to the popular perception, radical thinkers like Ambedkar, Phule, and Periyar identified caste system as part of a larger construction of hegemonic forces of the time to enslave the larger masses. So, for them caste system was not a natural order but a systematic exploitative system supported by economic, cultural and social reasoning. Dr Ambedkar clearly identified the gravity of the caste system identifying it as deeply rooted in the cultural psyche of Indian society. Even victims and preceptors of the system deeply affected in the system so they cannot even achieve a development in their life world. Dr. Ambedkar says "Turn in any direction you like, caste is the monster that crosses your path. You cannot have political reform; you cannot have economic reforms unless you kill this monster"⁴³. This definition of caste by Ambedkar is not taken seriously by the academia and by activists; therefore this resulted in the continuous reproduction of caste and its cultural values in the postcolonial democratic institutions. The international aid agencies who claimed to build an equal society free from 'discrimination' and 'injustice' have fallen into the same trap of practicing caste discrimination through the reproduction of the caste notion. They are not even ready to look at the ideal of annihilation of caste, which will require them to critically reflect upon caste privileges, symbolic boundaries on which caste is working in modern times and caste capital invested in their own institutional system. For them caste is a system that has to be humanized through their reformatory agendas as Hindu liberal nationalist have always tried to do.

6. COMMODIFICATING HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATING DEMOCRATIC RIGHTS

Within Indian nation state, Dalit and Adivasis have at least some constitutional measures to claim their rights and security; they were achieved through painful struggles and mobilization. However, Aid Agencies, securing benefits in the name of Dalits, Adivasis and delegitimizing the valid claims of the very same Dalits and Adivasis in their institutional space while talking about their neutrality and meritocracy. Certainly, there may be good people in Aid Agencies, but the managements and ideologies of Aid Agencies are Brahmanical and casteist in nature and anti-Dalit, anti-Adivasi and anti-minorities. Caste plays a decisive role in the life of any individual in India. The caste system of hierarchy is embedded in the minds of people, and has been brought back into the modern national life of India through all modern means. The Aid Agencies also subscribed to the same Gandhian liberal caste framework in their operations and strategies. Moreover, they maintain the caste hierarchy within their system and fight against untouchability in some distant place. This often done by carrying out discrimination on Dalits, Adivasi and minorities. Now caste is an accepted form of hierarchy and social power, which naturalized in India's social psyche. Therefore, caste is still the only criterion based on which Indians judge and are judged in modern days too.

Caste has gone nowhere; it has to be challenged in its conscious level in modern forms. However, Aid Agencies propagates the idea that the problem with caste is only untouchability. They are maintaining a strategic silence towards modern institutional forms of caste and its social, cultural and political power; this silence legitimizes their own caste practices and discrimination towards marginalized communities. Therefore, their rhetoric of "change or Social Justice" means maintaining the caste status quo and dismissing the radical attempt to annihilate caste and its modern varieties.

Now it is clear that without a serious introspection into the policies, interventions and staff caste diversity in International Aid Agencies, neither can poverty and injustice be fought nor can democracy be established. The tall claim that the Aid Agencies in India are engaged in a so-called fight against poverty and injustice

⁴² Gopal Guru, Economic and Political Weekly, Vol. 37, No. 50 (Dec. 14-20, 2002), pp. 5003-5009

Published by: Economic and Political Weekly, Article Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4412959>

⁴³ Ambedkar B R, Annihilation of Caste, available at

http://ccnmtl.columbia.edu/projects/mmt/ambekar/web/section_3.html, viewed on 12th July 2014

holds no water. Whose poverty are you going to end and to whom do you plan to bring justice without addressing the caste system which itself is the primary contributor to poverty and injustice? If anyone raises such a question, he will find abundant proof that the Aid Agencies, far from planning to end poverty and injustice, are actually giving artificial respiration to the ancient form of Hindu polity of a 'hereditary governing class ruling a hereditary servile class'.

ANNEXURE – I

1. <http://www.bbsl.org.uk/> - Bardai Brahmin Samaj London,
2. <http://www.elebs.org/> - East London & Essex Brahm Samaj,
3. <http://www.bbsl.org.uk/> - Bardai Brahmin Samaj London
4. [HTTP://WWW.ELEBS.ORG/](http://WWW.ELEBS.ORG/) - EAST LONDON & ESSEX BRAHM SAMAJ
5. <http://brahmingsamajcanada.com/> - Brahmin Samaj Canada
6. <http://www.brahmingsamajontario.org/> Brahmin Samaj (society) of Ontario
7. <http://palwadatoronto.com/> Shri Palwada Audichya Brahmin Samaj, Toronto
8. <http://www.vsna.org/> Veerashaiva Samaja of North America (VSNA)
9. <http://www.bsgc-il.org/> - Brahma Samaj of Greater Chicago
10. <http://rajputdhobiusa.weebly.com/> - Rajput Dhobi Samaj -USA
11. <http://www.bardaionline.com/> - Sri Bardai Brahmin Samaj (Leicester) UK
12. <http://www.bardai.net/> Sri Baradi Brahmin Samaj Northomptionshrine
13. <http://hinducouncil.com.au/> - The Hindu Council of Australia
14. <http://www.mycasteishindu.org/> - Alliance of Hindu Organisations
15. <https://www.ataworld.org> America Telugu Association (ATA) Dominated by Kammas
16. <http://www.nataus.org/> - North American Telugu Association- Dominated by Reddis
17. <https://iynaus.org> - The Iyengar Yoga National Association of the United States
18. jaydevjani@hotmail.com - Brahmin Samaj of Georgia Inc
19. <http://mybsfl.com/> - Brahmin Samaj of Florida
20. www.bsoga.org/ - Brahmin Samaj of Georgia
21. www.nhsf.org.uk – National Hindu Students Forum (UK)
22. <http://www.indiansgauteng.co.za> - The Sanathan Shakti Society - Indians Gauteng
23. Transvaal Hindu Seva Samaj- Johannesburg, Gauteng
24. <http://www.hindusamajsheffield.org.uk/> - Hindu Samaj Sheffield – UK
25. <http://hinducouncil.com.au/> - The Hindu Council of Australia
26. https://groups.yahoo.com/neo/groups/uae_brahmins/info- Brahmin Samaj UAE
27. <http://www.agrawalsamajusa.org/> Agarwal Samaj USA
28. <http://agrawalamerica.com/links.htm> Agarwal Association of America
29. <http://iskcon.org/> - The International Society for Krishna Consciousness

TABLE -1
TABLE INDICATING THE 'RTI' RESPONSES WITH REGARD TO THE DIVERSITY

SI No	Name of the organization	Reply	Data
1	Agha Khan Foundation	No	No
2	Agence Francaise De Development (AFD)	Inquired through phone call	No
3	Alternate Law Forum	No	No
4	Amnesty International India	No	No
5	Aid at Action	Inquired through phone call	No
6	Oxfam	Replied that they are not covered under RTI	No
7	PLAN India	No	No
8	Save the Children- Bal Raksha Bharath	Replied that they are not covered under RTI	No
9	Arcelormittal Foundation	Replied that they are not covered under RTI act	No
10	Azim Premji Foundation	No	No
11	Care India	No	No
12	CHRI – Commonwealth Human	No	No

	Rights Initiative		
13	Christian Aid	No	No
14	CRY – Child Rights and You	Replied that they are not covered under RTI	
15	CWS- Center for World Solidarity	No	No
16	Dalit Foundation	No	No
17	DFID – Department of International Development	No	No
18	Dr Reddis' Foundation	No	No
19	European Commission	No	No
20	GMR Varalaxmi Foundation	No	No
21	Human Rights Law Network	No	No
22	IDRC	Replied that they are not covered under RTI	No
23	Infosys Foundation	No	No
24	International Justice Mission	No	No
25	Jindal Foundation	No	No
26	Macarthur Foundation	Replied that they are not covered under RTI	No
27	National Foundation of India	Yes	Insufficient
28	PRIA- Participatory Research in Asia	Replied - Provided information	Insufficient
29	Reliance Foundation	Replied that they are not covered under RTI	No
30	Save the Children India	No	No
31	Sir Dorabji Tata Trust	No	No
32	UNDP	No	No
33	Unicef	No	No
34	ActionAid India	Replied	Provided to VODI

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