

Problematic of Good Life: an exploration of social movements and the rise of global Capital

Dr. Moggallan Bharti¹, Assistant Professor, School of Development Studies, Dr. B. R. Ambedkar University, Delhi (AUD)

Abstract

The paper explores the political roots of the putative idea of ‘good life’ that presumes what form of an economic foundation a nation state must have in order to provide good life to its citizens. The paper attempts to underscore that the building of a political economy that could possibly facilitate over all wellbeing to its citizens cannot be conceived in a situation where the societal ethics are dissociated from the issues of justice. It is then contended that the actualization of such a political society – society of ethics and justice – is preconditioned on the availability of the politics of social justice, an idea central to the political world view of Dalit and the indigenous social movement in Latin America. The paper highlights the differential responses of both the social groups – Dalits in India and indigenous people from Bolivia – to the market economy. It is shown that despite their ideological resistance to neoliberalism, there are sections within the Dalits and indigenous people who view things differently. The opportunities offered in the changed political scenario where market has an overarching presence, these groups are willing to exploit the same for their representation – something which was never available to them in earlier economic arrangement. However, the papers tread carefully on the larger the social and political difference between Bolivia and India, and attempts to account for the structured hierarchies in both the countries. Taking an eclectic view, the paper underlines the significance of the entrepreneurship possibility among the people who have been denied the same for ages, and put emphasis on the significance of the

¹ Email: mogallan@aud.ac.in

economic opportunities made available – albeit limited – in the new political economy driven by neoliberalism.

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1. The idea of Good Life

The construction of a good life has been one of the most integral components of the politics of all times. Be the proponents of the welfare economics, of the free market or even those who are hardened Marxists – who conceives a possible good life *only* after the demise of capitalism – have all, but a common denomination of an achievable conception of a good life with varying ideological differences. There has been ample work in the field of philosophy, economics and anthropology which put great emphasis on the significance of politics that serves the objective of extending the fruits of good life to the larger public.² The desired aims of a political society, hence forth, are to achieve a life of fulfilment for the people. This idea, in the formation of a political society, remains at the centre of some of the most profound philosophical debates and questions exploring meaning of lives and its purpose. From Plato's 'ideal state' to Aristotle's 'rule of law', to the cherished values of enlightenment era, conservatives not excluded, up till the more contemporary concerns for social justice – the ways for realizing a good life has been implicit in the varying world of liberal political philosophy.

However, such political society promising good life requires the building of a political economy conducive to accomplish such a life. Consequently, economics plays an instrumental role in the assembling of such a political order enabling to people's needs and requirements for having a better life. In other words, even before politics comes to have a go at it, the philosophical necessity that remains is the form of economic foundation that will lead to such a life for its inhabitants. Are there some universal guiding principles for the realization of good life? Are the ethics and morals important for the making of such a life? How much is the share of economy in the formation of such a

²Avishai Margalit, *The Decent Society*, Harvard University press.1996; George Akerlog, and Kranton, 'Economics and identity', *The Quarterly Journal of Economics* 115.3 (2000): 715-753.; Adam Smith, *The theory of moral sentiments*, Penguin, 2010

society that promises good life? Is the liberty of an individual integral to such a formulation, or the construction of a good life must negate everything of individual interests at its core? Essentially then, the central question which arises is that what form of economic foundation must a state lay down in order to realize such completion.

Discussing the similar question of what constitutes a good life, it is contended that in the world of philosophy both the ‘theories of justice’ and ‘morality’ have seemingly taken to ‘their own separate path today’.³ Any possibility for ‘morality’ joining cause with the ‘ethics’ can only happen when ‘an ethical self-understanding’ informed through moral insights underlines the necessity of ‘one’s own well-being with the interest in justice’.⁴ With this insight we must then locate the construction of a plausible political economy – a condition necessary to realize good life – in the politics of social justice. Amartya Sen underlines the increased chasm between ethics and economics leading to deficiency in contemporary economic theory. For him, any meaningful economic reorganization both at the level of theory and practice must engage with the study of moral philosophy.⁵ Building on Rawls predicament that happiness is not synonymous with one’s well-being, where the former is simply a ‘momentous achievement’⁶, Sen put forth the idea of going well beyond the ‘self-interest’ seeking definition of well-being to something more grounded and tangible rooted in individual capacity. Evidently two things become clear, first, the presence of the welfare state is essential and second, any such likely political order must then de-centre the individual self-interests and listen to the qualified concerns of community. In other words, it become obligatory to look for the ‘common good’ approach instead of merely thinking in the domain of ‘rights’ where an individual – albeit sovereign and supreme – self-limits the probable political possibilities of his own wellbeing.

It is in the background of such a discourse exploring the idea and meaning of what constitutes a good life and the economic contours of the same that we shall attempt to understand the missing link in the broader politics driving the same objective. Additionally, it is through the politics of the social movement engaged on such alternative

³Jurgen Habermas, ‘Are there Postmetaphysical Answers to the Question: What is the “Good Life”?’ in *The Future of Human Nature*, Polity Press 2003, Pg 1 – 16

⁴ Ibid. page 4.

⁵ Amartya Sen, *On Ethics and Economics*, Basil Blackwell 1987.

⁶ Ibid. page 60

political economy which then bring us closer to desired understanding of the idea of good life. The study of social movements in the context of Dalit and indigenous people's struggle for the life of liberty, equality and dignity informs the very infrastructure of a political process that can define the constituents of well-being for the people at large. Both indigenous peoples' thought and the political discourse among Dalit community give primacy to organizing a communal life, derived through their own rich cultural past which has been up till now left marginalized and unexplored in most of the standard academic work of political economy.

The available rich corpus of the theoretical writings on the political economy from so called third world nations is conspicuous by the absence of an understanding imparted by such marginalized discourses on political economy as that of Dalit-indigenous world view. Hence in order to arrive at the Dalit-indigenous response to the current economic crisis – formulated through the social movements in Bolivia, Latin America, and Dalit movement in India – we must then locate the same in the broader sequence of world system of capitalism and attempts to understand the process of unbridled growth of global capital.

2. World Capitalism and the growth of Market Economy

The evolution of capital, the corresponding spread of the Western imperialism, the exploitation of the colonies fuelled by the industrial needs of the west, anti-colonial struggles against the abject exploitation of the colonies and the subsequent formation of the sovereign independent government in the new nation-states, is all but one seamless trajectory, wherein lies the Dalit-indigenous voices trying to etch out a new world perspective from the misery of their long drawn exploitation both at the hands of colonial plundering and by the incessant social apathy of their 'fellow natives' in their respective geographical location. The hegemony of capital and its associated trade behaviour has been at the centre of five hundred years of the history of colonial plunder in Asia, Africa and particularly in South America where it all began with Columbus finding of the 'new

world' in 1492.⁷ One important aspect of colonialism in this light has been the continuous search by imperial west for finding new markets along with its hunt for more natural resources to fuel the growth of the then ongoing industrialization in the imperial core. Even after decolonization, perhaps the expected withdrawal of global capital's hold from third world remained elusive. The new 'nation states' were soon sold the dream of novel 'development path' now widely known as neoliberalism.

The alternative economic model of socialism and welfare economics remained an aberration in the world where economics as a discipline has been deliberately studied in isolation from politics. French economist Francois Morin is correct in saying when he points out the need for bringing the economy in the realm of 'political economy' and the need for more political economist at work who could see the world of deception and global scams set out by the hegemony of the free flowing finance capital.⁸ The monopoly of resources thus ensue the meteoric rise in the wealth of the already wealthy, and has further pushed the working masses to the brink of starvation and to the status of an entirely impoverished and a dispossessed lot.⁹ The inevitability of the free market seen as the most efficient way of organizing economy became the new norm not only at home of the capital but more importantly among the former colonies. A process which was succinctly highlighted as "the two independent master processes of the [modern] era: the creation of a system of national states and the formation of a worldwide Capitalist system".¹⁰ The birth of the nation state and the spread of global capitalism have been both, the obverse and the reverse side of the same coin, where the world witnessed the emergence of the domestic bourgeoisie tethered to the economic interest of the metropolitan.

In other words the newly emergent nation states through its bourgeoisie acted as a catalyst for the spread of global capital, as the former lacked the infrastructure of capital which continued to be centred at its home in the west – a point very well explained by the

⁷ Eduardo Galleno, *Open Veins of Latin America – Five Centuries of the Pillage of a Continent*. Three Essays Collective, 2010

⁸ Francois Morin, *A World Without Wall Street?* Seagulls Books, 2013

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Charles Tilly, *Big Structures, Large Processes, Huge Comparisons*, New York: Russell Sage 1984. Page 147

Peruvian philosopher Anibal Quijano.¹¹ Latin America, as is known, has been the first to delink itself from its imperial masters and declared independence in the beginning of the nineteenth century. However, its relationship with the coloniality¹² remains to be of one continuous struggle against the European and now North American socio-economic interests dominating its land.¹³ The pre-colonial and the post-colonial world as we see today would not have been possible but for the colonization of Americas, which is ‘the constitutive act of the modern world-system’.¹⁴

This new mode of operability of the capital at the global scale is also termed as the ‘financialization’ of the capital or the ‘finance capital as the latest and highest stage of world capitalism.’¹⁵ This very aspect of financialization occurs not as an aberration to Capital, but as its integral component, whereby the financial expansion which defines the global economy of today ‘is not a new phenomenon but a recurrent tendency of historical capitalism from its earlier beginnings.’¹⁶ Furthermore, this financial expansion of the global economy is not merely a recurring phenomenon to capitalism but also reorganizes the regime of capital accumulation. In other words, capitalism resorts to finance capital in the time of its crisis, developed due to the factors internal to it, in order to further its hegemonic grip on the world economy.

The dynamism of historical capitalism gives us a peek in to the neoliberal world order of more contemporary times, wherein one sees the everyday rising anger and frustration among the common masses against the economic order which has caused severe unemployment and acute agrarian crisis. Keeping the alternate perspective offered from indigenous Bolivia against the hegemony of the world capitalist system and the churning

¹¹Anibal Quijano, Imperialism, Social Classes, and the State in Peru, in *Theories of Development: Modes of Production or Dependency?* Edited by Ronald H. Chilcote and Deale L. Johnson, Sage publications, 1983

¹² Coloniality is defined as the ‘creation of set of states linked together within an interstate system in hierarchical layers’ in Anibal Quijano and Immanuel Wallerstein, *Americanity as a concept, or the Americas in the modern World-System*, ISSJ 1992, Page 550

-It is further explained as something which continues even after the end of ‘formal colonial status’ and the hierarchy of the coloniality which is actually the extension of the colonial hierarchy between the Colonizer and the Colonized gets manifested in the socioeconomic and political realm which then in turn informs the world-system economy.

¹³Anibal Quijano, Coloniality and Modernity/Rationality, in *Globalization and the Decolonial Option*, edited by Walter D. Mignolo and Arturo Escobar, Routledge 2010

¹⁴Anibal Quijano and Immanuel Wallerstein, *Americanity as a concept, or the Americas in the modern World-System*, ISSJ 1992, Page 549 – 557

¹⁵ Giovanni Arrighi, *The Long Twentieth Century – Money, Power and the Origins of our Times*, Verso 2010

¹⁶ Ibid. page 371.

among the Dalits vis a vis neoliberalism, there is an attempt here to understand the underdevelopment of the global south and the subsequent political discourse generated to address the same through social movements in both the country.

3. Decolonization and the Third World Nationalism

After the decolonization wave in Asia and Africa and the two great wars, the economic arrangement favouring the erstwhile colonial powers in furthering their imperial interests remained largely intact.¹⁷ This continuance of their economic hegemony, is a question to the ‘nationalist’ churning in the so called third world, even before one engages with the socio-political movements leading to decolonization. The legacy left by the anti-colonial movements was claimed by the ruling elites on the promise of forming a new nation completely absolved of its colonial past. However, barring few honourable exceptions, the writ of colonial paraphernalia is written all over the postcolonial state. And this mirroring of the colonial structure was never as complete as it is in the restructuring the economy of the post-colonies, which has been designed to suit the economic interest of the developed rich countries of the global North. Following which, we have the new discourse of asking a neoliberal state to intervene in order to provide basic common goods like health, education and employment for the well-being of the people.¹⁸ Expecting neoliberal post-colonial nation states intervening to provide material benefits to its citizens and at the same time work towards achieving the neoliberal dream of a ‘good life’ for its citizens is a plain, big contradiction. The alternative economic model must be then be worked out in the global south which should be critically distanced from the global capital outreach.

4. Neoliberalism: India & Bolivia

The parallel and glaring aspect of both the corresponding Bolivia and India’s economy has been the totalizing impact of the neoliberalism and at the same time, the inclination of the ruling classes to embrace the same. The functioning of the neoliberal state in both the

¹⁷ Kwame Nkrumah, *Neo-Colonialism: The Last Stage of Imperialism*, 1965

¹⁸ Jean Drèze and Amartya Sen, *An uncertain glory: India and its contradictions*. Allen Lane 2013

country, to follow Harvey's analysis, works against the interest of labour and working class in general, while at the same time strongly promotes the 'restoration or formation of class power' mostly at the expense of the former.¹⁹ This crisis of the global economy could not be better explained than the persuasive message which informs the politics of social movement in Latin America. What the indigenous people of Bolivia have achieved politically in the recent history is something of a major significance for it being the people's weapon against the dictates of the global capital. Indigenous peoples' government led by Evo Morales seemingly has been so far the most effective bulwark against the neoliberal push of the neo-imperial West.²⁰

However, both the nation states continued to remain under the ideological tutelage of global capitalism. What had defined the world economy in the colonial period through 'accumulation' from the colonies now preserve its hegemony through 'appropriation' or what Harvey describes as 'accumulation through dispossession'.²¹ This latter articulation of accumulation is very much the state of economy in Bolivia, also understood as 'extractive economy', wherein the primary source of state's revenue come through the extraction of its natural resources.²² However, this extractive economy, while is tethered to the exploitative trajectory of global capitalism, has brought a huge change in the domestic economy of Bolivia under Morales' presidency. Seeing their economic limitations and also more importantly due to its dependency on the extraction of natural resources, we see the emphasis of indigenous social movement on the politics of '*vivir-bien*', rather than relying entirely on macroeconomic growth through the extractive model.²³

¹⁹ David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, OUP 2005, Page 76

²⁰ Robert Albrow, 'The Indigenous in the Plural in Bolivian Oppositional Politics', *Bulletin of Latin-American Research*, 24, 4, 2005. Page 433–53; also Linda C Farthing and Benjamin H Kohl, *Evo's Bolivia: Continuity and change*, University of Texas Press 2014

²¹ David Harvey, The 'New' Imperialism: Accumulation by Dispossession, *Socialist Register*, 2004, Page 63-87

²² Linda C. Farthing and Benjamin H. Kohl, *Evo's Bolivia: Continuity and change*, University of Texas Press, 2014

²³ Vivir Bien, which would roughly mean "well-being" or "living well" in English, is at the center of indigenous communitarian world view which under the leadership of Evo Morales aims to bring a decent and good life for all the people, as opposed to the western-liberal 'pursuit of happiness' which is considered by the indigenous people as individualistic and selfish in nature.

For further details, see Melania Calestani, *An Anthropological Journey in to Well-Being – Insights From Bolivia*, Springer. 2013; also see, Alex Tilley, *Coordinator of the Bolivia Information Forum*, Vivirbien (Living Well): a new model for development from Bolivia's indigenous process of change, at www.boliviainfoforum.org.uk/news-detail.asp?id=99

The situation of indigenous people must be then seen in the sense of what Harvey conceives as the socioeconomic questions of a given time and spaces and that are defined by the distinct ‘socio-ecological and political-economic processes’ in a given society.²⁴ It is to these distinctive patterns of processes in their respective social and political location that informs Dalit-indigenous’ understanding of what constitutes social and economic injustice and the politics subsequently evolved to remedy the same. Both the social movements have taken a very distinct recourse – while resisting the overall neoliberal project – in their ideological response to the age of neoliberalism. The common theoretical premise underneath both the political movement is essentially couched in the politics of social justice, without which it is impossible to construct a society that can enable good lives to its inhabitants marred by pervasive social inequalities.

5. Response of the Indigenous people

The indigenous exclusion from the domestic economy was far more total due to the negation of their very individual economic agency from the inception of the idea of a possible political economy, ever conceived in the country. It is a historical fact that as peasants, miners and petty workers engaged in Bolivia’s unorganized economy, indigenous people have always faced the brunt of capitalist exploitation in the domestic economy. In short, their socioeconomic status remained more or less as miserable as it was in the colonial period.²⁵ The dye of the capitalist accumulation of indigenous Bolivia casted in the colonial period carried on to its republican phase and bloomed to its bursting hue in the times of neoliberalism. The ruling elites of Bolivia have always neglected and denied indigenous people any role in the planning, and in the socio-political restructuring of domestic economy.²⁶

²⁴ David Harvey, *Justice, Nature and the Geography of Difference*, Blackwell Publishing, 1996, page 6

²⁵ Herbert S. Klein, *The Crisis of The State, 1841 – 1880*, in *A Concise History of Bolivia*, Cambridge University Press.2011; James Dunkerley, *Rebellion in the Veins, Rebellion in the Veins: Political Struggle in Bolivia, 1952–1982*, London: Verso. 1984; June Nash, *We Eat the Mines and the Mines Eat Us*, Second Edition, New York: Columbia University Press. 1993 and also Jeffery R. Webber, *Red October: Left-Indigenous Struggle in Modern Bolivia*. Brill. 2011.

²⁶ Herbert S. Klein-A Concise History of Bolivia (Cambridge Concise Histories) - Cambridge University Press (2011); Rutilio Martinez and Vish Iyer, *Latin America’s Racial Caste System: Salient Marketing Implications*. International Business & Economics Research Journal – November 2008, Volume 7, Number 11; Mariategui, Jose Carlos, *Seven interpretive essays on Peruvian reality*, University of Texas Press. 1971. Available on <https://www.marxists.org/archive/mariateg/works/1928/>

The handful of those indigenous people who were involved in the unorganized economy of Bolivia in petty trades and mercantilism were further marginalized with their minimum access to formal education and due to their long exclusion from 'state bureaucracy, universities and professional associations' which might have otherwise enabled them in finding their own niche in the domestic political economy.²⁷ The wretched lives of Bolivia's indigenous gentry was not merely due to the *mita* (free labour) arrangement (something akin to the system of *begaar* under feudalism in India), but their woes has its roots in the total exclusion that they face from all the avenues of the political economy which enables a person with less to no choices to earn their livelihood. Therefore, it is only but natural for them, then to look for the infrastructure and the support system for any economic activity within the traditional and social network of their own indigenous moorings. Thus, the indigenous social ties and traditional setting came to play an instrumental role in developing the entrepreneurial traits among *Aymara* traders of *altiplano* Bolivia.²⁸ This *indigenismo*²⁹ of shared economic life through communal ties has been singularly remarkable both in terms of indigenous political mobilization, as well as in their economic well-being. However, in the contemporary neoliberal era, an indigenous petty trader is further crammed between the larger state apathy and the dynamism of free market economy which works in negating the rights of the weakest and in benefitting the already privileged classes.³⁰ The politics of social movement thus put together have not only confronted the neoliberal regimes but have successfully worked for an alternative world informed through *vivirbien* for all as against global capitalism which excludes all, except the few powerful.

Nico Tassi, explains the response of indigenous *Aymara* people vis a vis the local economy as 'globalization from below' or the emergence of social structure of local economy under the aegis of indigenous/local as 'non-hegemonic world system'.³¹ It is

²⁷Nico Tassi, *The Native World-System – An Ethnography of Bolivian Aymara Traders in the Global Economy*, OUP, 2017

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ The idea of *indigenismo* is a historical one and is derived or translated from 'indigenism'. However, there are significant distinctions between the two concepts. While *indigenism* is more a contemporary socio-political development; *indigenismo* is more 'a twentieth-century intellectual and artistic movement that sought to valorise indigenous culture.' For more detail, see Andrew Canessa, *Todossomosindígenas: Towards a new language of national political identity*. *Bulletin of Latin American Research* 25.2 (2006): 241-263.

³⁰ Nico Tassi, *The Native World-system: An Ethnography of Bolivian Aymara Traders in the Global Economy*, Oxford University Press, 2017.

³¹ Ibid. page 10.

through such consolidation of ‘local power structures’ rooted in their socio-cultural norms, where no state ever reaches, let alone the depth of global capitalism, that *indigenismo* (asserting and valorising indigenous culture) ensures the ‘access to the market on their own terms’.³² The idea remains to make the local traders further enabling in the changed economic scenario of post liberalization polity, whereby they are ready to utilize all the possible resources at their disposal in order to capitalize more on their own socioeconomic status and on the ‘possibility of expanding their structure of power’. By adhering to their cultural ties and traditional set ups they have been able to create a market manifestly different from the existing mainstream understanding of economic practices. They have been particularly instrumental in bringing the social at the centre stage of economy as now conventionally understood. For instance, the internationally well-known, electrical goods manufacturers like Samsung and Sony, as a result of the opening of the domestic markets to international trade and commerce, have come up with their authorized showrooms in the swanky areas of La Paz, capital of Bolivia. However, their role in the larger market transactions is very restricted and confined only to illustrate the technical features of the product. The agreement between the local indigenous traders and the authorized shops is such that, that the latter is barred from selling the merchandise and also from even discussing the prices of their products. The same commodities can only be bought from local retailers.³³ This arrangement drawn between the pull and the pressure of neoliberalism and the indigenous commerce, albeit within the same market frame, is simply ingenious and would have been otherwise difficult to reach, if not for the availability of the local network of indigenous socio-cultural ties and their distinct ways and forms of accumulation, which has enabled the existing and the emerging indigenous traders and small entrepreneurs to access the market on their conditions.³⁴

Such a market intervention on the behalf of indigenous traders, however small numerically, serves two very important purposes. First, by deploying their social and cultural network to their benefit they have redefined the relationship between the market and the indigenous people as a whole for the benefit of the latter. The sizeable *Aymara* traders of La Paz and El Alto – a city towering over La Paz valley – are no longer seen as

³² Ibid. page

³³ Nico Tassi, 2017, page 57

³⁴ <http://www.ipsnews.net/2008/12/bolivia-aymara-traders-mix-tradition-and-modern-day-savvy/> (Accessed in the year 2017)

the timid *indios*, who have always been living at the margins of the economy. On the contrary, they are very conscious of their newly acquired economic agency and the corresponding wealth thus accumulated, and they therefore, leave no opportunity in flaunting the same.³⁵ Secondly, the political assertion of the native Indians through three decades of social movement has given them the agency to be an informed market individual rooted in its immediate cultural moorings. This duality of an indigenous individual which has remarkable similarity with the Dalit agency in India has enabled them to understand the politics rooted in empowering modernity and led them to mirror its ethos to their surroundings, which effectively implies accepting both – the liberating values of European enlightenment along with preserving their social character at the same time. This process is central to their understanding of outlining the very idea of a good life which is both social and individual at once and where an asserting individual becomes a political necessity in order to supplement and preserve their social rootedness – a characteristic indispensable for organizing a just political society.

6. Dalit Response

Notwithstanding the internal contradictions of colonial India the formation of the new ‘nation’ couldn’t alter the reorganization of relations of production, determined by the continuous overarching presence of the global capital.³⁶ In fact, India’s initial phase of development planning and the idea of development state has eventually been a major failure.³⁷ The promise of the development state, post decolonization did indeed give socio-economic relief to the people; however, the initial enthusiasm was eventually a short lived one.³⁸ Equipped with the constitutionally mandated policies for eradicating practices of untouchability among the caste Hindus in India (and not the caste system per se), the post-colonial state brought the first generation educated Dalits in its fold and gave

³⁵ https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/in-bolivia-new-andean-architecture-applies-new-money-to-old-traditions/2014/10/27/7be3a532-1fa2-443c-895a-ec9f3572ee49_story.html(Accessed in the year 2017)

³⁶ Prabhat Patnaik, *The Retreat to Unfreedom: Essays on the Emerging World Order*, Tulika 2003

³⁷ Vivek Chibber, *Locked in Place – State-Building and Late Industrialization in India*, Princeton University Press, 2003

³⁸ Mark Juergensmeyer, The Lonely Modernity of Model Town, in ‘*Caste in History*’, edited by Ishita Banerjee- Dube, OUP 2008, Page 266

them a decent life in the newly established urban centers.³⁹ The economic divide in India – triggered by the development in the policies of global capitalism – was to become wider in the days to come.⁴⁰

The immediate post-colonial scenario in India, then, while was certainly of a political victory against British colonialism, the emergent socio-political discourse was outrightly defined by Brahmanism. It continued to be so even now. The economic model adopted by the very first government was one of balancing both the assorted group of big corporate/domestic bourgeoisie and the landlords – along with active state regulation of the economy through installing government enabled various industries, popularly called the public sector units (PSUs). It was the model designed on the lines of demand management to spur the economic growth determined by a welfare state, that was in turn inspired by the Keynesian policies successfully implemented in the post war Europe from early 1950s till late 1970s termed as the golden period of western capitalism.⁴¹

Although modern in its inception, the Nehruvian model could not bring a substantial restructuring of the dogmas in the society based on the principle of *chaturvarna* (caste system divided into four classes). Harish Damodaran in an extensive work on India's capitalist class highlights the working of this unique caste alchemy in India and how most of the organized domestic economy is tightly controlled and managed by the vast network of caste and kin.⁴² The state protectionism of the domestic economy has rather reinstated and made the existing hierarchy all the more entrenched instead of dismantling the same as mandated by the constitution of the newly independent republic.

Chandra Bhan Prasad expounds on this very inefficacy of the state in bringing down the Caste order in Indian Society, as he explains that although state can definitely provide for public sector jobs and representation in legislature through the affirmative action policy and even perhaps yet to be met demand for representation in the private sector, but it does not actually disrupt the caste order, let alone dismantling the same.⁴³ Prasad argues that

³⁹ Ibid. page 267.

⁴⁰ For a more detailed analysis of this point, see Amiya Kumar Bagchi's *Perilous Passage – Mankind and the Global Ascendancy of Capital*, OUP, 2005

⁴¹ Amiya Kumar Bagchi, *Perilous Passage – Mankind and the Global Ascendancy of Capital*, OUP, 2005

⁴² Harish Damodaran, *India's New Capitalists – Caste, Business, and Industry in a Modern Nation*, Permanent Black, 2008

⁴³ Chandra Bhan Prasad, *Markets and Manu: Economic Reforms and its Impact on Caste In India*, Centre for the Advanced Study of India, University of Pennsylvania, 2007

market economy helps in dismantling the caste hierarchy based on blood and occupational purity.⁴⁴ Thus, a discourse is developed favouring economic reforms initiated in 1990 and which strongly advocates neoliberal model as the new framework for Dalit's emancipation.⁴⁵ One of the reasons behind espousing the free market is not for the liberating opportunities available in neoliberal India, which of course is questionable, but this perceptive understanding emanates from the colossal failure of the state to reign in caste atrocities against Dalits and in dismantling the upper castes social and economic hegemony. However, the fact remains that in the aftermath of sweeping reform of its economy since 1990s, the country has been increasingly witnessed to an alarming level of rising inequalities.⁴⁶

Jean Dreze and Amartya Sen outlines this growth trajectory of the development project in India and also highlights on the need of what could be done for the betterment of its most deprived sections among which Dalits invariably makes a large presence.⁴⁷ However, both Sen and Dreze do not necessarily counter argue the free market economy as such, but they focus more on the outcome aspect ensured through a more proactive role of the state. In other words, for a majority of such scholars like Sen, Dreze, Nayyar, Stiglitz, and numerous others, the fundamental rule for the success of the free and fair market economy remain to be not the withdrawal of the state, but the indispensability of a much more efficient state regulation of the market. Seen in this way, their ultimate analysis for providing for the well-being of the people hinges on the fair and equitable distribution of the growth income provided for by the efficient management and regulation by the state institutions. The human agency has an important role to play in their scheme of development serving two important objectives, first in terms of state's accountability as a political task for the social movement and second as for the well-being of people as recipient of economic growth.

However, the development impact in India, by and large, remained inconsequential for Dalits, *adivasis* and other religious minorities considered the most deprived and among the weakest section of the Indian society. Dalits along with other deprived sections

⁴⁴ Ibid Page 16.

⁴⁵ Devesh Kapur, Chandra Bhan Prasad, Lant Pritchett, D Shyam Babu, Rethinking Inequality: Dalits in Uttar Pradesh in the Market Reform Era, *Economic and Political weekly*, August 28, 2010

⁴⁶ Jean Drèze and Amartya Sen, *An uncertain glory: India and its contradictions*, Allen Lane 2013

⁴⁷ Jean Dreze and Amartya Sen, *An Uncertain Glory- India and Its Contradictions*, Allen Lane, Penguin Books, 2013

together forms the overwhelming majority of the country and their socioeconomic status then actually exposes the real face of the development state. With years of development planning along with the legal and constitutional safeguards available to Dalits in India, the state has not been able to address the problem of acute discrimination prevalent against them. That the majority of the landless agriculture labours, migrant workers, workers in the unorganized economy belongs to Dalit community along with other discriminated groups is a telling account of the India's lop sided economic growth.⁴⁸

It is in this context of the abysmal neglect faced by Dalits at the hands of the post-colonial development planning on one hand, and later on finding themselves a total misfit, due to their socioeconomic exclusion in the neoliberal economy that the discourse advocated by Prasad and others should be understood. In doing so, we must not forget the horrors of capitalism and the havoc that it has brought in the lives of millions of Dalits and other poor sections of Indian society. And yet, we must not be closed to the newer debates making claim to the opportunities seemingly generated in the neoliberal economy. And in the course of our analysis we can then make some sense of the upcoming modern Dalit agency negotiating its share in the new economy – very similar to their indigenous counterparts in Bolivia.

However, we must also pay attention to the question of whether the neoliberal phase of the Indian economy has brought any positive changes to Dalit social mobility or has it caused further marginalization among them.⁴⁹ It has been argued that the social exclusion 'affects culturally defined groups' and that it 'is embedded in social relations between them, and results in deprivation or low income for those (who are) excluded'.⁵⁰ Dalits being socially and economically marginalized get further excluded because of their social embeddedness. It is due to the structural inequalities associated with the caste order that the political response of Dalits vis-à-vis neoliberalism has to factor in first and foremost their social freedom from the graded caste hierarchy of the Indian society. The discrimination thus faced by Dalits have far reaching implications on the income distribution and more importantly it leads to the denial of equal opportunity in terms of their access to market opportunities.

⁴⁸Alpa Shah et al. *Ground down by growth: Tribe, caste, class and inequality in 21st century India*, Pluto Press, 2017

⁴⁹ Clarinda Still, *Dalits in Neoliberal India: Mobility or Marginalisation*. Routledge, New Delhi. 2014.

⁵⁰Sukhdeo Thorat, Katherine S Newman, *Economic and Political Weekly*, October 13, 2007

The effect of caste on the economy is more in terms of suppression of competition, and resultantly on the unavailability of equal opportunities, and thereby inefficient allocation of labour, low profit, low wages. The entrepreneurship deficit among the Dalits and indigenous people then stems from the structural discrimination in their respective societies. Hence, solutions may not always be realized in the ‘conventional’ politics of protest wherein the market must be opposed and fought with. And for the same reasons, we then witness the emergence of a section of both Dalits and indigenous people, in their respective political economy, engaging with market economy and making their presence felt, with whatever minimum opportunity available to them therein.

It has been argued that consumerism – that has sky-rocketed ever since the neoliberal reforms in 1990s – is something which helps in breaking the traditional set up of inequalities.⁵¹ Hence, Dalits by adopting new ways of life style are coming out of their old hierarchical set up and enabling themselves by adopting the new occupations, which in turn is facilitated by the new market reforms. However, the emphasis here is on the consumption, and not on Dalits as producers in the market economy. How far then, being a consumer helps in bringing substantial change in the lifestyle of this vast marginalised section is a question which need to be probed further. However, one must examine whether new market reforms has brought any substantial change in the availability of the ‘new opportunities’ among Dalits. ‘Dalits can now buy and brandish them’, speaks more about their rising political consciousness and assertion rather than its being a ‘marker of prestige’ on a standalone basis.⁵² The market, then, is not immune to existing social structure, as against those who see market as something which weakens, if not completely eradicate, the caste structure of Indian Society. The neoliberal achievements, if any, have by far been exclusively in the favour of a class which has the necessary means to participate in the market. Hence, India too like the other parts of the global south is increasingly fraught with deprivation on the one hand and the rising assets of the tiny minority of the capitalist class on the other. And this hiatus between the rich and the poor is ever increasing. The well-being of a tiny few at the cost of the vast majority, understood in the most mechanical way under neoliberalism is not the part of the moral world order as envisioned by the social movements of marginalized. The market in India

⁵¹ Devesh Kapur, Chandra Bhan Prasad, Lant Pritchett, D Shyam Babu, Rethinking Inequality: Dalits in Uttar Pradesh in the Market Reform Era, *Economic and Political weekly*, August 28, 2010

⁵² Ibid.

is not – as is generally presumed – caste or for that matter gender neutral.⁵³ In reality, it is not the growth of the capital or the modern market economy which has brought ‘significant changes’ to the lives of the disadvantaged. On the contrary, it is the progressive ethos of modern liberal politics guaranteed under the liberal constitution of the country which acts as the leveller and provide for equality and liberty among people, particularly for Dalits. Because without the availability of the rights it is difficult to conceive a minimum equality of opportunities, let alone an entrepreneurial activity.

7. Language of rights and entrepreneurship

The contemporary discourse of free market economics must be understood alongside the evolution of the language of rights. The language of rights, central to Dalits’ political discourse, owes to liberal political philosophy and its adoption within the constitutional republic. If not for the state guided affirmative action policy and the language of ‘liberty, equality and fraternity’, a vibrant Dalit movement would have been a rare sight if not altogether impossible. The rights, thus ensured through a liberal-socialist constitution played an important role in shaping India’s politics in general and Dalit politics in particular. In this milieu, the work which advocates the free market economy for the larger welfare of Dalits not only ignores the devastation created by the neoliberalism, but it also puts forth an ill-conceived imagery of free market economy as a modern variant of liberalism. Nothing can be farther from the truth. The immediacy of ‘Dalit capitalism’, as advocated by Prasad and others, need to be understood within the history of political struggles that made the ground conducive for Dalit movement, and not to become a mere insignificant cog inside the exploitative capitalist structure, but to be the entrepreneur working towards enhancing and restoring the dignity for Dalit lives.

In other words, there is a socio-cultural deficit among the Dalits when it comes to the possibility of entrepreneurship among them; which is not exactly same as that for the indigenous groups in Bolivia, who have old social ties and a vibrant kinship network in place within their communities. The idea of entrepreneurship while is certainly an idea worth seen to be actualized, but even there (among the sizeable sections of the upwardly

⁵³ Sukhdeo Thorat and Katherine Newman, “Economic Discrimination, Concept, Consequences, and Remedies”, Thorat, and Newman (ed.), *Blocked by Caste: Economic Discrimination in Modern India*, 2010

mobile urban Dalits) to break away from the stigma attached with caste is quite an uphill task even now. For example, economic mobility for Dalits does not make their social status disappear from the society they are living in. On the contrary, there have been ample studies which shows, that Dalits often have to adapt to the pulls and pressures of upper castes in order to progress in economic activity – opportunity for which became possible in the changed domestic scenario post neoliberalism.⁵⁴ With institution like DICCI (Dalit Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry) in place, Dalits have still to overcome the very basic infrastructure of human kinship which is almost negligible among them. It is due to the non-availability of any such kinship network in the sphere of trade industries that the very idea of Dalits utilizing the market opportunities continues to be a distant object, if not the entirely misplaced one.

8. Conclusion

So far we have discussed the near identical course of Dalit-indigenous social and political struggle for restoring their moral worth as an equal human being and how both the movements have reposed their faith in the constitutional democracy in order to achieve the same. We have also discussed their distinctly self-assured politics embedded in their social identity and how their newly gain language of the rights has been enormously helpful in furthering their politics of protest and social change. Within this context both the social groups have their distinct take on the existent neoliberal economic policies in their respective socio-cultural setting. They both emphasize on the fact that any possible conception of a good life for the well-being of an individual is contingent upon what Avishai Margalit calls a ‘decent society’. In other words, having a decent society where the rights of the fellow beings are not violated is a minimum precondition for having a good life for its inhabitants.

For Dalit-indigenous politics, the commonality is that the community and the individual member both inform and complement each other socially and politically. It is the right

⁵⁴ Aseem Prakash, *Caste and Capitalism*, available at www.india-seminar.com/2012/633/633_aseem_prakash.htm; Also, Dalit entrepreneurs in middle India, in *The Comparative Political Economy of Development: Africa and South Asia*, Edited by Barbara Harriss-White and Judith Heyer, Routledge, 2010, Page 291; See also, Barbara Harriss-White, *India Working: Essays on Society and Economy*, Cambridge University Press, 2003

bearing individual which eventually leads to the creation of a politically assertive Dalit identity and the same became possible with the advent of indigenous rights discourse for indigenous social movement. The idea is neither to give up the language of rights nor to debunk the moral economy of the shared beliefs of a community that has been politically attained and socially coalesced. Hence, their respective view on political economy, though unconventional, enables them to strive for a society where economic sustainability and political freedom could be self-determined and may not always have to be externally relied upon. This of course doesn't mean that they are unaware of the working of global capital. On the contrary, they are aware of the history of the global spread of capitalism and that it does indeed affect them, just as it does have an impact on the majority of the working people world over. However, through their distinct ideological take on the world system economy, Dalit-indigenous people make an attempt to carve out a space which could be construed as an exemplar for the diminishing forces of socialism for the possibility of a better world ahead. We must also not forget that if there is something to be gained from the political churning of the social movements in Bolivia, it is the demonstrated invulnerability of neoliberalism. Experiences from Bolivia is not only a telling account of how an indigenous peoples' social movement braces itself up against the powerful forces of neoliberalism, but it also conclusively proves to their counterparts in India that the path to adapt to 'Dalit Capitalism' is an indubitable recipe of further self-agony in the struggles for realizing the self-respect and human dignity.

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