

Software Industry, Religious Nationalism, and Social Movements in India: Aspects of Globalization?

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Most theories of globalization have as their point of reference experiences in the developed world, thereby confining the debates to time-space compression or distanciation for example, or to quarrels about whether the world is becoming homogenous or heterogeneous. Such theoretical efforts are indicative of both the preoccupations of metropolitan academia, and also the lack of a cohesive theoretical thrust from the leftist intellectuals which takes into account developments in contemporary forms of global capitalism. The sometimes contradictory ways in which the diverse effects globalization are experienced or utilized in different parts of the developed world have come to academic and theoretical attention only very recently. Considering that the majority of the established canon of literature on the subject has been written by academics in the West, this is perhaps not surprising. However, as indicated in the assumption that globalization is merely an extension of Western norms of modernity to the developing world, the almost total absence of any attempt to tackle the long-standing relationship between the West and the rest is worth noting, as is the similar neglect of social movements in several parts of the contemporary world which question the values underpinning aspects of globalization, and by doing so challenge the legitimacy of Western dominance (Marfleet, 1998, p. 69).

This article is an attempt to begin the process of addressing this theoretical lacuna by bringing into sharper focus three signifi-

cant aspects of contemporary India: the rise and political legitimation of religious fundamentalist nationalism, the growing popularity (if not influence) of social movements, and the much celebrated software industry which is emblematic of the apparent 'forward thinking' entrepreneurship riding on the crest of the Indian government's economic 'reforms.' Linking these apparently disparate spheres, it will be argued, is the orthodoxy of neo-liberalism; in other words, interpreting such developments is well nigh impossible without taking into account theories of global economy and the power relations within contemporary global society engendered, among others by information technology. As Gill (1990) has pointed out, "the prevailing orthodoxy of the ruling forces is based on the doctrine of economic liberalism, with its stress on efficiency and competition and the primacy of the private sector in economic and social life" (p. 292). Such a "transnational historic bloc," he argues, "is rooted in material as well as ideological structures which have global reach, and which are strongly associated with the political programme of transnational capital" (p. 293). Given the conditions of contemporary global capitalism, classical theories of imperialism appear anachronistic, and need to be modified to take into account the transnational nature of the capitalist interests. This is not the place to enter the debates concerning the role of the nation-state, whether or not it can be said to play any meaningful role in a globalized world. To discard the