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REVIEW ARTICLE

SOCIAL EXCLUSION: UNDERSTANDING ITS FORMS AND IMPACT ON DALITS IN INDIA

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Social Exclusion: Understanding its Forms and Impact on Dalits in India

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INTRODUCTION

The term "Social Exclusion" possess a great popularity among intellectuals and policy makers not only in India but worldwide for it enables locating the gaps for the development of the marginalized sections and downtrodden for the concerned country. The reasons for exclusion differs from country to country in varying times; representing different situation like geography, history and polity, but the outcome will be same in the forms of lack of individual and societal development. Social exclusion results in and impacts the livelihood of the people, for instance; increase in rate of poverty, health, etc. Exclusion and forms of exclusion are visible internationally commonly on the lines of gender, caste, religion, ethnicity, color, race, nationality, and others. Social exclusion refers to the process whereby a person or a group is denied of rights and opportunities which a major section of the population enjoys, resulting in the inability of individuals from excluded groups to partake in the basic processes relating to political, economic and social functioning of the society, thereby resulting in increased and chronic instances of poverty and deprivation among them. Social Exclusion may also be seen as the deprivation to access resources and consequent inability to utilize them. It is further increased by denial of opportunities which enhance access to resources and their utilization. Exclusion can be experienced by anyone who is in position to vulnerability to such impeding conditions. The modern terminology for exclusion emerged as a result of social unrest due to increasing unemployment and economical inequalities in France during 1960s. There exists a lack of theoretical and empirical studies on the concepts relating to social exclusion based on caste, religion, and ethnicity, different forms of exclusion and the indices pertaining to exclusion and its impact on the excluded groups. The paper looks at the issues and understanding of the Dalits of India in the below mentioned frame work of social exclusion.

THE MEANING OF SOCIAL EXCLUSION

In Indian context, the ILO defines social exclusion as "the denial of the basic welfare rights which provide

citizens positive freedom to participate in the social and economic life and which thereby render meaningful their fundamental negative freedoms".

In other words, it is a social process which involves denial of fair and equal opportunities to certain social groups in multiple spheres in society, which results in the deprivation from basic political, economic and social spheres of the society and public life. Social Exclusion can be understood better as a group concept, which includes and describes two situations as unfavorable exclusion and unfavorable inclusion. All those acts which excludes people from having an access and entitlement to certain social groups that are based on socially recognized and accepted principles, norms, value systems and rules can be considered as unfair exclusion, similarly, all those acts which provide access and entitlement to persons from certain social groups but on different terms and conditions can be termed as unfair inclusion. Social exclusion can also be seen in the light of activeness and passivity, the deliberate exclusion of people from opportunities through government policies or other means is called active exclusion, whereas, the passive exclusion refers to the social process in which there are no deliberate attempts to exclude, but nevertheless, may result in exclusion of people from a set of circumstances. The conception of social exclusion can be contextualized to Indian scenario, where institutionalized practices of social exclusion were prevalent particularly in the form of Caste and Untouchability for times immemorial.

SOCIAL EXCLUSION IN INDIAN CONTEXT

From Indian point of view, social exclusion is practiced visibly on the grounds of Untouchability and Caste, which deprives a chunk of population from the rights and privileges which the majority enjoys. The Indian social structure is particularly based on Caste, a highly stratified system based on ascription and traditional occupation. The roots to such a stratified system can be traced to Varnas, references of which can be found in Indian texts. The Varna system divided the group of people into four broad categories of hierarchy, particularly based on birth or ascription.

The four classes consisted of the Brahmins who must cultivate the knowledge, the Kshatriya who should bear arms, the Vaishya should trade and the Shudra should serve all the above three classes. (Ambedkar 1944) The Brahmins, the Kshatriyas and the Vaishyas together formed the 'Dwijia or the twice born' classes which agreed to live in order but the three agreed to beat down the Shudras. A fair number of social and religious disabilities were inflicted upon them which dehumanized their character. The provisions from not being allowed to acquiring wealth, knowledge and arms etc, gives us a picture of how Shudras were treated by the Tryavarnikas as evidenced by the Laws of Manu.

Because of such prevalent practices Shudras were denied of education which resulted in chronic subjugation and eternal servitude, which they accepted as they inescapable fate.

CASTE AND UNTOUCHABILITY BASED SOCIAL EXCLUSION IN CONTEMPORARY INDIA

In present times too, the cultural practices relating to varna system are prevalent in Indian society. The practices against the Shudras in the varna system are not only existent but have gone more rigid with times. Initially these atrocities were actively displayed but with constitutional reforms and reservations, the practices have changed their forms and have gone more passively aggressive. In present times, the Shudras are known as 'Dalits', a Marathi term which means "broken men". According to Census records there are approximately 180 million Dalits which are categorized and classified as scheduled castes in the Indian constitution. Unfortunately almost an equal number of Dalits are subjected to social, economic, political and cultural exclusion deeply imbedded in social practices. In cities, their dwellings are generally in a specific demarcated areas. In Rural areas too, Dalits are denied basic human rights and are not allowed to own property rights or to use public and common property such as the wells, tanks and temples. Although constitutionally the practice of social exclusion in the form of untouchability has been eradicated and made it as a punishable offence under article 17 and 18 of the Indian constitution and have made several developmental provision for the Dalit yet, in spite of this, the practices pertaining to social exclusion and discrimination are still in vogue in one form or the other.

FORMS OF SOCIAL EXCLUSION

Caste based exclusion: The caste system is based on the hierarchical division of people. The unequal and hierarchical structure provides for regulatory mechanism of social ostracism and is reinforced with justification and support from philosophical elements in the Hindu religion. The benefits enjoyed by the upper casts are on the cost of those who belong to the lowest.

Untouchability based social exclusion: the concept of untouchability is based on the the notion of impurity and pollution. The lowest in the caste stratum

were assigned menial jobs which were considered filthy and made such people unfit for social association and Inter-relation with twice born casts. The untouchables suffered the most because of the civil and religious disabilities inflicted upon them.

INDICATORS OF SOCIAL EXCLUSION:

Social Sphere: The practices of exclusion in social sphere generally meant restrictive provisions for Dalits. These restriction included lack of entry into Temples, schools, housing, unequal treatment in teaching etc. Such prevalent practices made an inevitable separate cultural sphere for Dalits which further helped in delineating them from society.

Economic spheres: Exclusion in Economic spheres is clearly visible for low caste groups. The provisions like denial of jobs other than menial and filthy ones, restrictions on sale and purchase of agricultural land, high interest rates and lower wage rates has further aggravated their problems. Denial of education, health and housing has worked as a catalyst to put them in perpetual poverty and restrict all means to develop self-consciousness among them.

Education: Discriminatory practices in schools assume the form of denial of access to education and the skill development among the Dalits children. This results in the reduction of the quality of human resources and employability. This has resulted in a vicious cycle of landing upon low earning manual wage labor, consequently, high rate in illiteracy, low skill development and Poverty.

Health Sphere:

The discrimination based on Caste and Untouchability prohibits Dalits to avail healthcare facilities. The forms discrimination may range from restriction on giving information on healthcare facilities to denial of visiting to Dalits, thereby forcing them to avail private services causing extra expenditure burdens on them.

POLITICAL SPHERES:

Traditionally, Dalits were given no voices in decision making processes.

They had no political rights not even the most fundamental ones such as right to justice, freedom of expression, rule of law, etc,. Although constitutional provisions has been made to politically empower the Dalits and give them a voice, which was unheard but unfortunately satisfactory results have still not been achieved

IMPACT OF EXCLUSION ON DALITS

The long continuing exploitation has made Dalits a vulnerable community. The continuous oppression and denial has resulted in the loss of self-consciousness among Dalits, perpetually making them dependable on others, that is, the upper casts. Exclusion has been responsible to such an extent that even in contemporary scenario Dalits are subjected to social, economic and political exclusion. In 2006, a study was conducted on untouchables living in rural India. The study covered 565 villages in 11 states which revealed the extent to which untouchability and social exclusion is practiced in spite of officially banned by the constitution of India. (The data below mentioned is taken from sc/st commissions report, New Delhi)

IN GOVERNMENT JOBS

In spite of constitutional mandate for social justice various local institutions in India facilitates and practice untouchability. Almost **37.8%** of the villages Dalits students are made to sit separately in government schools. **27.6%** of the Dalits in rural areas were restricted from entering police stations. About one fourth of the village Dalits are restricted from entering ration shops. Around 33% of the village public health workers refused to visit Dalits homes.

14.4% of the village Dalits are not permitted to enter panchayat building. **12%** of the village Dalits is forced to form separate lines at polling booths.

AT WORK

About one fourth of village Dalits are paid lower wages than non dalits, work longer hours and have more delayed wages and suffer from verbal and physical abuse.

In religion and rites

Around **64%** of Dalits were restricted from entering Hindu temples and almost half of village Dalits was restricted to use cremation grounds.

CONCLUSION:

In conclusion it can be said that the social exclusion is a process whereby a particular set of marginalized groups are prevented from entering into mainstream of development, through the agencies of institutionalized social systems. The most suffered and affected population is of Dalits who lag in all spheres of developmental activities. Therefore, the situation demands for serious efforts and visionary policies which can change the course of exclusion and marginalization into all inclusivity.

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