



CASTE BASED SOCIAL EXCLUSION- INDIAN SCENARIO AND ITS IMPACT ON BACKWARD CASTES

Prof. Rajshree Rathod

Tilak College of Education, Pune

Abstract

“Social Exclusion” the term is very much use in the field of intellectuals and policy planners worldwide for identifying the gaps for the development of the neglected people and the pertaining country. The causes for exclusion can vary from country to country in different times; reflecting deferent situation such geographically, historically and politically but the results will be the same in the form of lack of people development and the country. One form of social exclusion which is characteristic of Indian society is Caste based exclusion. A caste system is the major feature of Indian society, it is not only reflects in social life of Indian people but also economic and political behavior of people are governed by the caste system. Caste is the identity of a person in Hindu society. In India, exclusion or inclusion in the economic activities such as production, distribution or any gainful job to a particular person depend by his caste. The paper examines the caste as exclusion of backward castes people from social respects and economic benefits, and to find out its implication on overall development in general and in particular of backward castes.

Keywords: *Social Exclusion, Caste system, Development, Caste based exclusion, Indian society, backward castes.*



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INTRODUCTION

The concept of social exclusion is seen as covering a remarkably wide range of social and economic problems. Kabeer maintains that social exclusion captures “an important dimension of the experience of *certain groups* of being somehow ‘set apart’ or ‘locked out’ of participation in social life”. Social exclusion is “a multi-dimensional concept and varied dimensions in which people are excluded can be – livelihood, security, employment, income, property, housing, health, education, skills, and cultural capital, citizenship and legal equality, democratic participation, public goods, family and sociability, humanity, respect, fulfillment and understanding”. Defining the word “Caste” itself is harder than thought to be. It can be defined as endogamous and hereditary subdivision of an ethnic unit occupying a position of superior or inferior rank of social esteem in comparison with other such subdivision. Caste is

the term derived from a Portuguese word, *Casta*, meaning breed, lineage, or race. According to Dr. Babasahab Ambedkar, it is mainly the custom of endogamy that has preserved the castes and prevented one caste from fusing into another. In India, caste is a system of stratification based on institutional sanction of the society, which ascribe the status for different caste based on their place in social hierarchy. The network of economic, political and ritual relationship between castes outlines the working of caste system. Although this or other forms of differentiation exist in all human societies, it become a problem when one or more of these dimension overlap each other and become the sole basis of systematic ranking and unequal access to valued resources like wealth, income power and prestige . The India caste system is considered a closed system of stratification, which means the social status of the individual is ascribed by the caste he/she born into. In India 'Jati' is the common word used to define the endogamous communities. Dube defined the main attributes of Jati as a) Jatis are endogamous units; b) They are hierarchically graded; c) They invariably Jati-linked occupation; d) Consideration of purity and pollution determine the interaction between different units. According to him, the caste system in its principle of exclusion, isolation and disintegration is reminiscent of the savage man.

CONCEPT OF CASTE EXCLUSION AND DISCRIMINATION

In India, exclusion revolves around the societal interrelations and institutions that exclude, discriminate, isolate, and deprive some groups on the basis of group's identities like caste and ethnicity. The nature of exclusion revolving around the caste system particularly needs to be understood and conceptualized. It is the caste-based exclusion, which has formed the basis for various anti-discriminatory policies in India. Historically, the caste system has regulated the social and economic life of the people in India. Theoretical formulations by economists recognized that in its essential form, caste as a system of social and economic governance or organization (of production and distribution) is governed by certain customary rules and norms, which are unique and distinct. The organizational scheme of the caste system is based on the division of people in social groups (or castes) in which the civil, cultural, and economic rights of each individual caste are pre-determined or ascribed by birth and made hereditary. The assignment of civil, cultural, and economic rights is therefore, unequal and hierarchical. The most important feature of the caste system, however is that it provides for a regulatory mechanism to enforce the social and economic organization through the instruments of social ostracism (or social and economic penalties), and reinforces it further with the justification and support from the philosophical elements in the Hindu religion. The caste system's fundamental characteristics of fixed civil, cultural, and economic rights for

each caste, with restrictions for change implies “forced exclusion” of one caste from the rights of other caste, or from undertaking the occupations of other castes. Exclusion and discrimination in civil, cultural, and particularly in economic spheres such as occupation and labor employment, is therefore, internal to the system, and a necessary outcome of its governing principles. In the market economy framework, the occupational immobility would operate through restrictions in various markets such as land, labor, credit, other inputs, and services necessary for any economic activity. Labor being an integral part of the production process of any economic activity, would obviously become a part of market discrimination. The principles of equality and freedom are not the governing principles of the caste system. Unlike many other human societies, the caste system does not recognize the individual and his/her distinctiveness as the center of the social purpose. The primary unit in the Hindu society is caste, and hence, the rights and privileges (or the lack of them) of individual are on account of him/her being a member of a particular caste. Also, due to differential ranking, and the hierarchical nature of the caste system, the entitlements to various rights become narrower and narrower as one goes down in hierarchical ladder in the caste system. Various castes get artfully interlined and coupled with each other (in their rights and duties), in a manner such that the rights and privileges of the higher castes become the causative reasons for the disadvantage and disability for the lower castes, particularly the untouchables. Castes at the top of the order enjoy more rights, at the expense of those located at the bottom. Therefore, the untouchables located at the bottom of the caste hierarchy have much less economic and social rights.

FORMS OF CASTE EXCLUSIONS AND DISCRIMINATIONS

In the light of the above, the caste and untouchability-based exclusion and discrimination can be categorized in the economic, civil, cultural, and political spheres as follows:

1. The exclusion and the denial of equal opportunity in economic spheres would necessarily operate through markets and non- market transactions and exchange.
 - Exclusion can be practiced through the denial in labor market in hiring for jobs; in capital market through the denial of access to capital; in agriculture land market through the denial in sale and purchase or leasing of land; in input market through the denial in sale and purchase of factor inputs; and in consumer market through the denial in sale and purchase of commodities and consumer goods.
 - Discrimination can occur through what Amartya Sen would describe as “unfavorable inclusion”, namely through differential treatment in terms and condition of contract,

one of them would reflect in discrimination in the prices charged and received by discriminated groups.

- Exclusion and discrimination can occur in terms of access to social needs supplied by the government or public institutions, or by private institutions in education, housing, and health, including common property resources like water bodies, grazing land, and other land of common use;
 - A group (particularly the untouchables) may face exclusion and discrimination from participation in certain categories of jobs (the sweeper being excluded from inside household jobs), because of the notion of purity and pollution of occupations, and engagements in so-called unclean occupations.
2. In the civil and cultural spheres, the untouchables may face discrimination and exclusion in the use of public services like public roads, temples, water bodies, and institutions delivering services like education, health and other public services.
 3. In the political spheres, the untouchables can face discrimination in use of political rights, and in participation in decision-making process.
 4. Due to the physical (or residential) segregation, and social exclusion on account of the notion of untouchability (or touch-me-not-sum), they can suffer from a general societal exclusion.
 5. Since there is societal mechanism to regulate and enforce the customary norms and rules of the caste system, the untouchables generally can face opposition in the form of social and economic boycott, violence, and act as a general deterrent to their right to development.

This overview of the development of the concept of the “exclusion” in general, and that of caste untouchability based exclusion and discrimination in particular, brings out various dimensions of the concept in terms of its nature, forms, and consequences. The caste and untouchability based exclusion and discrimination, essentially is “structural in nature”, and comprehensive and multiple in coverage, and involve denial of equal opportunities, particularly to the excluded groups like former untouchables.

IMPACT OF CASTE BASED SOCIAL EXCLUSION

Social Exclusion results in the following main consequences:-

- 1. Geographic Segregation:-** It is generally observed that the so-called untouchables (Dalits) and even minorities are residentially segregated from the mainstream of the society. They are

made to live and construct their residential places and dwellings outside the villages or at the periphery of village or town.

2. Intimidation:-It can be observed at every level in a society. It is a major form of control used by men over other men and women. Verbal abuse, sarcastic remarks, threat of harm is the main means of intimidation.

3. Physical violence:-When threat of harm does not work actual violence is used. It can be committed by the state, community, group or individuals. Violence against women in the household and poor people and ethnic and religious minorities is reported to be practiced all over the world. Domestic violence is rooted in the norms of gender inequality and patriarchy.

4. Barriers to entry: At many places and in many spheres, people excluded are debarred from entry. Barriers to entry involving the state are mostly related to documentation requirements other than documents, transition costs is another way to put hurdle in the entry of the excluded.

5. Corruption: It is the main cause of many social evils in India and elsewhere. The people who are excluded from obtaining goods and services do not have the required necessary amount to pay for securing jobs, health care and other public services. It causes insecurity among the excluded. Corruption denies access to resources, opportunities and information.

6. Other Impacts

- It leads to various kinds of deprivations-economic, educational, cultural and social.
- It leads to impoverishment of human life and human life and develops a poorer sense of well being.
- It leads to inequality, poverty, unemployment and involuntary migration.
- It leads to social stigmatization and marginalization.
- It develops fear complex among the excluded.
- It puts various restrictions on the excluded about their free and full participation in the economic, cultural and political activities.
- On the whole, it puts on intense negative impact on the quality of life.

EDUCATIONAL IMPACT

As regards educational development, the children of lower castes face various forms of discrimination in schools, making education a painful process for them and, in turn, discouraging them from continuing their education. IIDS study and various other newspaper reports also show how lower castes children often face subtle forms of discouragement and

ostracism that make school a painful place to be, resulting higher drop out among lower castes children. There are evidences of discrimination in midday meal where lower castes students are served food separately, thus seriously affecting their confidence and dignity. Government interventions for promoting participation of lower castes in mid day meal scheme as cooks and social cohesiveness as initiated by Ms. Mayawati during her Chief Minister ship faced strong opposition from other caste Hindus, resulting in withdrawal of the proposal in Uttar Pradesh. The persistence of a dualistic public and private model of education and the deteriorating quality of education in public schools have led an increasing segregation of students on the lines of economic status. At the same time the deteriorating quality of education in public schools has adversely affected the educational development of lower castes, which largely depend on public educational institutions. Discrimination of lower castes students is also documented in higher education institutions, even in premier institutions such as AIIMS and IITs.

Educational level of youth is improving yet at slow pace in case of lower castes. The mere attainment of higher literacy levels does not have an impact in terms of enhancing the employability of youth. Much depends on their transition to higher and technical education and vocational training, especially its quality. Viewed in this perspective, there is large gap in the educational and skill levels of youth, with the lower castes lagging much behind the others. While the attainment of higher educational levels is crucial for improving the employability of youth, in general, there is evidence of discrimination against the marginalized groups in the labor market as mentioned earlier. This often discourages lower castes parents from sending their children for higher education by foregoing their current income.

STRATEGIES TO HANDLE CASTE BASED EXCLUSION

Making Social Inclusion Central for Reducing Inequalities

The strategy is to be undertaken in human rights based approach that tackles exclusion and inequalities-not just poverty.

Monitoring

Regular monitoring is crucial to ensure proper functioning of a program. There is a need to empower other committees with clear guidelines relating to roles and responsibilities. The existing guidelines need to be made caste sensitive to address social background related discrimination and exclusion.

Training and Sensitization

There is need for periodic training in service delivery and its management for the line department workers related to various programs as it is very weak at present. This would require production and distribution of training material among the service providers. Community level awareness on the impact of the exclusion and discrimination need to be pegged up.

Administrative Guidelines

Though there is a legal framework for addressing discrimination based on caste and religion, there are few administrative guidelines to safeguard the interests of marginalized and poor communities.

Governance, Institutions, Accountability and Effectiveness

It must ensure that the institutions which have been created for governance effectively reach out to the most marginalized and deprived population groups, and urgently act upon their voices and concerns.

CONCLUSION

Caste system created the infrastructure for formation of social relations and interactions between different groups, people and social systems in Indian society. From the above evidences, we can conclude that the old age caste system is still perpetuating in Indian society. However some changes have been observed in its representation and nature but still caste based discrimination, exclusion and divisions are persisting as Institutionalized system directed towards the marginalized, downtrodden and oppressed people through restricting all means and resources for enhancing their life chances and upward mobility.

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