



Cover Page



SOCIAL EXCLUSION AND SOCIAL JUSTICE: A STUDY OF DALITS IN INDIA

Dr.M. Damodara

Dept. of Political Science and Public Administration, Yogi Vemana University, Kadapa

Abstract

The paper is looking forward to have a fair idea of meaning and implications of the term 'social exclusion'. The paper will also try to have the origination and concept of social exclusion and its implications in various countries in various forms. The first part of this paper will also try to throw some light on the concept of 'social exclusion' and its attributes in Indian socio-political, religious and economic discourse. In the second part of the paper we shall try understand the concept of 'social exclusion' in particular reference to the conditions of Dalit in our country. The paper will also try to analyse the Hindu system of society and its relevance to Dalit questions in India. A brief discussion on the present condition of Dalits and caste system will also initiated in the later of the paper.

Keywords: Social Exclusion, Marginalisation, Hindu Social System, Dalit Question, Dalit Movement, Dalit Literature

Objectives of the Study

- To examine the concept and nature of social exclusion and its historical evolution in the Indian social system.
- To study the impact of the caste system on the social status, educational opportunities, employment, and living conditions of Dalits.
- To identify the major challenges and barriers that continues to hinder the social, economic, and political advancement of Dalit communities.
- To examine the contribution of social reform movements, civil society organizations, and Dalit leaders in combating caste discrimination and promoting social justice.

Methodology

Data collection both primary and secondary sources from various libraries



Cover Page



Data Interpretation

Introduction to Social Exclusion:

The development of the concept of ‘social exclusion’ or vis-a-vis ‘social inclusion’ can be traced back soon after the American and French revolution. The ideology of freedom, justice, equality and fraternity became the dominant ideology after the revolution and that lead to develop the concept of ‘social exclusion’. But it became the proper shape in the later part of 20th century only. In fact the term was coined by Rene Lenior of France in the 70s. He published his famous book “Les Exclus” which means ‘excluded’. He passed law for the persons with disability, when he was Deputy Minister in the government of Jacques Chirac. Lenoir’s identified the marginalized groups like poor, handicapped, suicidal people, elderly people, abused children; drug addicted etc and he included them as socially excluded groups. The concept of ‘social exclusion’ received good popularity in France. Referring Silver (1994), A D Haan in his essay “Social Exclusion: Towards a holistic Understanding of Deprivation” wrote that the term ‘social exclusion’ gained popularity in France basically due to two reasons. First, the concept of poverty developed in Britain was never been popular or acceptable in France. The Christian charity approach of poverty alleviation and the political theorem like utilitarian liberalism were not popular in France. At the same time idea of welfare state was more acceptable. They thought the social exclusion basically breaks the social fabric. Secondly, during the economic crisis of 80s, they used the term ‘social exclusion’ to refer the social disadvantages. But the term ‘social exclusion’ didn’t remain same as it was in France. It has different connotation in different countries. As we have seen in case of France it is used as a rupture for the social fabric, at the same time in United States of America it doesn’t sound as a social issue. In the market driven economy of USA threw the burden of ‘social exclusion’ is to the individual only. If a person is socially excluded, this is his/her fault. The state has very little to bother about the consequences. It is the individual who should look after his inclusion or exclusion in the society.

Meaning of Social Exclusion:

But what does the term ‘social exclusion’ actually mean or who is socially excluded or even what is the basis of social inclusion? The society offers a bundle of essential rights to the individual to explore his/her potentials or to enjoy his or life to its fullest. In other words, we can say that the process which helps the individuals to attain the full membership of the



Cover Page



society. Those basic social rights or process can be access to power, status, wealth and income. Without the access of those social rights the individual can't be the full member of the society and thus in absence of any of those rights he/she gets excluded from the society. There are numbers of occasions where the member of any society is denied to access power, status, wealth and income. We can divide those occasions into segments like caste, class, ethnicity, gender etc. Denial to those rights on the ground of those segments leads to an inequality in the society and the social inequality eventually social exclusion. Amartya Sen classified the social exclusion into active and passive forms.¹ In case of active social exclusion the individual is directly debarred from taking part in any social process or his/her right is revoked by the state. We can take the example of migrant workers; their civil and political rights are directly denied by the state. And thus they are not eligible to be the full member of the society. On the other hand passive social exclusion comes through a process where no deliberate attempt is made to exclude the individual from the society or denied to be the full member of the society. But the existing set up nullifies his/her right to become a full member of the society. We can take the example of poverty. Due to poverty the individual remains outside the political and other civil rights.²

Social Exclusion in Indian Society:

The Hindu social system itself debarred some its members to access those rights as discussed in the previous para and thus fuels the social exclusion. The deep rooted caste system only debars the members to access the right to be the full member of the society; but it also nullifies even the human rights of some the castes. As far as India is concern there are a number of groups of people who are being deprived to get their full membership in the society. We can take the example of dalits, tribal, minorities, women and children etc. These groups are discriminated in name of caste, race, ethnicity, religion, gender, language etc. This continued for ages in the society and continued in the post independent Indian society as well. Under the leadership of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar certain measures were taken while adopting the constitution of independent India to mitigate the menace of caste system and thus social exclusion. But it still it continued, social groups like tribal, minorities and women are still excluded from the ambit of mainstream society on multiple grounds.³



Cover Page



Social Exclusion and Dalits:

The Dalits are one of the most marginalized or excluded community in India. They are being subjugated by the upper caste Hindu in India for ages. To understand the Dalit questions in India, understanding of the Hindu social system is very important. The Hindu social system itself promotes social exclusion. G.S. Ghurye noted that the indigenous non Aryan races were subdued by the Aryan conquerors and conquered races became the Shudras, they were debarred from sharing the religious and social activities of the Indo Aryans.⁴ The verna (colour) came into existence with a elaborate system called Jati. The society got divided into four jati. French sociologist Durmont wrote in his work “Homo Hierarchicus” that the caste system is a single hierarchy divided into four varnas i.e. Brahmin; the priest and having the position on top of the hierarchy followed by Kshatriya; the warrior, the Vaishyas; the trader, the fourth varna was Shudras; the manual labourer. He said there is also a fifth verna i.e. untouchables.⁵ The Hindu social system eventually, divided the society into various groups and castes. The socio-economic and religious rights became pre-determined by the caste system. The distribution of those rights was so unequal and there was stringent provision in the caste system to make the members to follow the division without opposing it. The occupation was too pre-determined and the members were not allowed to change their occupation. Predominantly the Brahmins were enjoying the best and untouchables were forced to accept the worst. Hence, the concept of liberty, freedom or democracy was almost missing the Hindu system of society. Even the concept of universal declaration of human right also contradicts with the Hindu system of society. And thus a group of people was denied access to become the full member of the society.⁶

Dalit Movement in India:

Large scale oppression and subjugation on lower caste Hindus by upper caste Hindu was even continued after the independence too. During the decade of 30s those untouchable people were called by the colonial government as oppressed class. During 40s, Mahatma Gandhi also observed that those people were badly treated by the upper caste Hindus of the society. He called them as Harijan, which means son of the God, so that his upper caste followers of do not harass them in the name of their caste. But nothing changed. After the independence of the country some material change observed in the scene. For the first time in the history of India, the untouchables became equal before the law! The Indian Constitution which compiled in between 1947 and 1949, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was



Cover Page



adopted by United Nations. And India adopted the basic principles of human rights in the article 19 in the constitution. The constitution of India termed them as scheduled caste and made provision of positive discrimination called reservation for their rapid upliftment. But it was observed that the atrocities on untouchables hadn't stopped. The parliament enacted an Act called Ant-Utouchability Act in 1955. After 20 years of the Act government re-evaluated it and found that still the civil right of the former untouchables were not protected. They decided to bring another Act to protect the civil right of the former untouchables called "Protection of Civil Right 1975". In the mean time a socio-political and literary movement for the upliftment of former untouchables was started. They identified themselves as suppressed or in Indian language "Dalit". This took the shape of a movement. The rise of political parties like Bahujan Samaj Party in UP is the result of the movement called 'Dalit' movement. The terminology they have used to identify the former untouchable community is not beyond criticism. The literary meaning of the term should include all the suppressed communities like tribal, minorities, women etc. The intellectual who are advocating the movement, it seems that they are not much concern about the facts. The Dalit literary movement started from Kanada literature was also a remarkable development as far as the Dalits are concerned.⁷

Present Scenario of Dalits in India:

Even after the enactment of SC/ST (Prevention of Atrocities) Act 1989, the scenario has not changed so much. The documentary "India Untouched" by Stalin K has shown the plight of Dalits in present India. Most shocking part is that people after getting higher education too they do not change their behavior towards the Dalits.⁸ The said documentary has shown that the student in Jawaharlal Nehru University also has to face caste discrimination. The untouchables who converted to other religion like Islam and Christianity to escape from the vicious cycle of caste discrimination are still treated badly in their new religion as well. Caste based discrimination is still continuing in full swing. The Dalit children being forced to clean the toilet of the school or giving them separate food during mid-day-meal are everyday business in India present India. A few months ago a Dalit youth was killed by the alleged upper caste Hindus in Tamil Nadu for marrying a upper caste Hindu girl. The incident also triggered violence and the perpetrator set Dalit village into fire. The inhuman practice like Devadasi is still continuing in some part of the country.⁹



Cover Page



Conclusion:

This is very pathetic to note that after getting modern education also people couldn't come out from the vicious cycle of caste system. There are instances that the Dalits also accept the caste system without any resistance. On the other hand organised forces like RSS, BHP, etc are always trying to maintain the status quo. Role of the state is something very pathetic. Today while preparing this paper, I got a news item that a tehsildar in Madhya Pradesh demanded a photo clicked with the dead animal from the Dalits to get the scholarship. I also followed the Manual Scavenging Prohibition Bill 2013. The Gujarat government is saying that there are no manual scavengers in the state, whereas the activists are fighting for their right in state as well. So, this is the status of the affair. Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru rightly said, only legislature can't solve the deep-rooted social problems alone. We all need to work for a casteless society.

Reference:

1. Beall, J. & Piron L.H. (2004) DFID Social Exclusion Review, London School of Economics, London, p.78
2. Gatade, S. (2013) Get Clicked with Dead Animals for Wards' Scholarship <http://kafila.org/2013/09/28/get-clicked-with-dead-animals-for-wards-scholarship-dalits-told-ht-special/> Last Retrieved on 28/9/13
3. Pai, S. (2007) Dalit Questions and Political Response, Economic and Political Weekly, New Delhi, p.67
4. Thorat, S. (2007) Hindu Social System and Human Rights of Dalits, Critical Quest, New Delhi, p.106
5. Sen, A. (2007) Social Exclusion: Concept Application and Scrutiny, Critical Quest, New Delhi, p.45
6. Sugden, J. (2013) Where Virginity is for Sale Wall Street Journal <http://blogs.wsj.com/indiarealtime/2013/04/05/where-virginity-is-for-sale-in-india/> Last retrieved on 28/09/13
7. Caste Based Discrimination in India (2012), Asian Human Rights Commission. <http://www.humanrights.asia/news/urgent-appeals/AHRC-UAC-091-2012> Last retrieved on 28/09/13



Cover Page



8. Dalit youth Ilavarasan found dead (2013) The Hindu
<http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/tamil-nadu/dalit-youth-ilavarasan-found-dead/article4881007.ece> Last retrieved on 28/09/13
9. Manual Scavenging Bill (2013) Daily Bhaskar <http://daily.bhaskar.com/article/GUJ-AHD-manual-scavenging-bill-activists-claim-it-is-a-cheerless-move-4369843-NOR.html> Last retrieved on 28/09/13