Review Article

Caste Based Social Exclusion in India & Strategies to Promote Social Inclusion: A Step Towards a more Inclusive Society

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Received on 29-12-2021

Accepted on 23-01-2022

Abstract

The denial of equal opportunities to a part of population in participating in the political, economic and social functioning of the society imposed by majority of society is termed as 'social exclusion'. In case of India, caste is an important determinant of social exclusion. Caste for an individual is fixed since birth and serves as a vehicle of complex, discriminatory and exclusionary processes. It is argued that all men are born equal but the social reality is that not all men are born equal. Caste along with its practices continues to restrict the means and resources for upward mobility. This paper attempts to study the social exclusion in India on the basis of caste and the strategies for promoting a more inclusive society.

Literacy rates among Dalits in India are only about 24 percent. Even though there are constitutional safeguards for SCs and STs these groups face systematic social exclusion in the form of denial to opportunities like access to land, education and employment.

Social integration or inclusion is seen as a universal human right. It aims to provide equal opportunities irrespective of caste, gender and disability. Caste superiority norms among the administrative service delivery system is one of the biggest challenges towards inclusion of Dalits. For a more inclusive society, institutional reforms are required. Strategies like social auditing, sensitization, conscientization and mobilization, equitable quality education and use of RTI act can be effective. Formation of commissions like Employment Opportunity Commission to ensure the representation of excluded group can also prove to be helpful. Thus, for the overall development of the nation and creation of an inclusive society, it is important to eradicate social exclusion on the basis of caste. This paper aims to include the factors responsible for caste based social exclusion in India, its impact on the human and societal development and what should be the strategies to promote social inclusion.

Keywords: social exclusion, social inclusion, equal opportunities, Dalits, SCs and STs, inclusive society

Introduction

The importance of social inclusion[1] has its roots in French Social Policy[2] dating back to 1970. The concept was theorized in 1990 by Scholars[3]. As per universalist and rights-based approach and interpretation, it has been understood as "including all people on the planet in sustainable and just societies"[4]. This is in fact an approach towards transformation of dominant socio-economic societies which have been replicating the existing poverty, inequality and social exclusion.[5] And this

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transformation will lead to a more sustainable[6] and inclusive society.

'Agenda 2030'[7] aims to combat inequality and like social problems existing in the society that places certain social groups into disadvantage and socially excluded groups. The existence of such groups are challenges towards maintaining a just and egalitarian society[8]. And in such a society democracy people's participation play an active role to ensure an all-inclusive society.

Kabeer[9] (2000) has explained that due to social exclusion certain disadvantaged groups of society are "set apart or locked out of participation in social life".[10] The dimensions on which these groups face exclusion include "livelihood, security, employment, income, property, housing, health, education, skills, and cultural capital, citizenship and legal equality, democratic participation, public goods, family and sociability, humanity and respect etc."[11]

Caste Based Social Exclusion in India

In India, due to the existence of the caste system or varna-jati system there is a division of the society into hereditary groups which are socially exclusive. As a result, these different groups are socio-economically unequal and form a hierarchy of Superior-Subordinate relationships in the Indian Society[12]. Hence in India the caste system still remains the determining factor of political, social and economic life of the people.Caste for an individual is fixed since birth and serves as a vehicle of complex, discriminatory and exclusionary processes[13]. The influence of the Varna System over an individual is much stronger than his/her religion. Even in 2016 a bench of the Supreme Court recorded that it is a "settled law that a person can change his religion and faith but not the caste to which he/she belongs, as caste to which he/shebelongs has linkage to birth[14]. The 2019 recent singular case of Tirupattur woman[15] who got issued 'no caste, no religion' certificate can serve as a step towards social change[16].

Amartya Sen has commented that "where the practice of caste system, determining the status given by accident of birth exists, we can't achieve Sustainable development Goals"[17]. At a time when the country commits itself to the Agenda 2030 and attain the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), such records of violence, disturbances and exclusions have every potential to overpower these commitments. Records of communal violence, disturbances and exclusions based on caste poses serious threat to the country's commitment to the

Agenda 2030 for the attainment of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

Effects of Social Exclusion on the Indian Society

Based on their birth and traditional occupation according to the varna system, Dalits are considered inferior to other upper castes. They face social exclusion,multiple forms of discrimination and violence from the society. Studies have shown that "One out of every six Indians face social exclusion, discrimination, violence and denial of basic human rights and dignity for being born to a Dalit family"[18]. 'Untouchability' is the worst derivative of the varna system. Stalin K.'s[19] award-winning documentary[20] exposes the practice of untouchability which is still a stark reality in many parts of the country. There are findings[21] that reveal "38% of government schools Dalit children are made to sit separately while having mid-day meals"[22] Despite of the constitutional safeguards and polices of Affirmative action, the oppression against the lower castes continues. The sorry state of affairs affecting the development of Dalits questions the role of inclusive democracy in contemporary India.[23] Caste based social exclusion has repercussions on the economic condition of Dalits too.[24] Since the ST community are isolated physically, they remain socially excluded.[25] Findings also show that due the social exclusion the ST community faces economic hardships.[26]

The exclusion from social, political and economic aspects of society often ignites armed rebellion and challenges the peaceful transition under democracy. Instances of crime[27] against the socially excluded group are ever increasing. are used as an exclusionary tactic for turf protection and tomaintain the existing hierarchy in society. Individual because of his membership in a certainsocial group fell prey to Hate crimes[28]

Sharma(2005) claims that the hate crimes are used as an exclusionary tool for maintaining for the existing social hierarchy in society. Many of such crimes are result from the fear of minority groupencroachment from the superior caste group[29]

These excluded groups fail to progress due to the practice of caste system in India and this serves as barriers to social mobility.Societal peace is an important aspect for human and societal development. Communal hatred is often the result of caste-based oppression and it requires immediate elimination if the country has to develop and grow. Amartya Sen[30] has claimed that "caste system in India is anti-national and that all such divisions need to be eliminated if a nation has to progress."[31]

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Strategies to Promote Social Inclusion

There is an urgent need of maintenance of social solidarity[32] among the citizens of India for a wholesome development of our democratic nation. Such policies are required to be framed that takes careof needs, aspirations and discrimination faced bythe excluded groups[33]. The society needs to adapt itself to the democratic polity and undergo a transformation in their thought process not by sacrificing their legitimate socio- economic interests rather by renouncing the derogatory attitude towards the socially excluded members.

Caste superiority norms among the administrative service delivery system is one of the biggest challenges towards inclusion of Dalits. For a more inclusive society, institutional reforms are required. Strategies like social auditing, sensitization, conscientization and mobilization, equitable quality education and use of RTI act can be effective. Formation of commissions like Employment Opportunity Commission to ensure the representation of excluded group can also prove to be helpful. Affirmative action policies and programmes are aimed to devise a method by which backward socially excluded class can climb up the social ladder and achieve positions of power and prestige like other sections of the Indian Society[34].

Thus, for the overall development of the nation and creation of an inclusive society, it is important to eradicate social exclusion on the basis of caste.

Conclusion

Martin Luther King Jr. very rightly argued that, "legislation cannot change the hearts of the people (even though it may restrain the heartless)." His argument applies to Indian scenario also as caste-based discrimination was abolished in the Indian Constitution but despite of the legislation, the principles of hierarchy continue to exist. It's time for us to shift away from the politics of identity and patronage and give way to development of a more inclusive society and social integration or inclusion should be seen as a universal human right without any social impediments

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2. This particular Concept of Social Inclusion and the associated practices can be traced in the new welfare policies introduced from the early 1980s

3. Scholars like Bourdieu and Luhmann conceptualized the idea of social inclusion in a welfare state

4. Gabriele Koehler, Alberto D. Cimadamore, Fadia Kiwan, Pedro Manuel Monreal Gonzalez,'The Politics of Social Inclusion: Bridging Knowledge and Policies towards social Change', <https://gripinequality.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/ISBN1333_x1.pdf>

5. Ibid

6. Sustainable development recognizes that eradicating poverty in all its forms and dimensions, combatting inequality within and among countries, preserving the planet, creating sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth and fostering social inclusion are linked to each other and are interdependent.

7. Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

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11. Supranote 10.

12. Victor S. D'Souza, 'Towards A Cultural Policy in India: Socio – Cultural Policy in India', Vol. 44, No. 2 (1995), pp. 159-167, Sage Publications, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/23619648>

13. Most menial of tasks such as manual scavengers, removers of human waste and dead animals, leather workers, street sweepers, and cobblers are reserved for Dalits

14. Mohammad Sadique v Darbara Singh Guru (2016): Civil Appeal No 4870 of 2015, the Supreme Court of India, Date of Judgment 20 April 2016, <http://judis.nic.in/supremecourt/imgs1.aspx?filename=43580>

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16. <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/tamil-nadu/its-official-tirupattur-womangets-no-caste-no-religion-certificate/article26262132.ece>

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23. Supranote 20.

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