

Social Exclusion and Inclusion in Indian Society: A Sociological Perspective

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Abstract

Lately there has been a lot of debate and discussion with regard to the phenomenon of social exclusion and social inclusion among social scientists. It is a myth to think of or to create a society either based upon complete social exclusion or inclusion. We should accept the fact that some forms of social exclusion and inclusion will always be there across the societies and in all periods of time. In civil societies the principal which should be entertained or be operative is that the extent of social exclusion or inclusion should be minimized if it cannot be completely eliminated. Sociologically speaking no society can ever be free from the phenomenon of social exclusion and inclusion of one form or other. The ideal should be that every person irrespective of his background in society should have equal access and freedom to grow. Those societies which deliberately or purposefully ignore or exclude some people at the cost of others for no justifiable reasons do a lot of injustice to those who are deprived and excluded. The phenomenon of exclusion and inclusion is a universal phenomenon. What should be included and what should be excluded in a given context or situation for a particular society or group depends upon its social, cultural, political, historical and economic factors. It is not always necessary that exclusion or inclusion is advantageous or good for all or a section of the people or a group. It may be good for one section of society but not for the other sections of society. In view of this the present paper has tried to look upon the concept of social inclusion and social exclusion in the context of Indian society. This paper has also examined various forms of social exclusions and inclusions. The paper concludes with various challenges of social inclusion and exclusion.

Keywords: Social exclusion, social inclusion, Indian society

Introduction

Both these terms "social exclusion and inclusion" are closely interlinked and should be seen one with reference to the other. There is no society in this world which is completely free from the phenomenon of social exclusion and inclusion. The phenomenon of exclusion and inclusion is a universal phenomenon. What should be included and what should be excluded in a given context or situation for a particular society or group depends upon its social, cultural, political, historical and economical factors. It is not always necessary that exclusion or inclusion is advantageous or good for all or a section of the people or a group. It may be good for one section of society but not for the other sections of society. To get a more specific idea about the phenomenon of social exclusion and inclusion, it is important to understand the relevant concepts.

Social exclusion has been defined by the Department of International Development (DFID) as "a process by which certain groups are systematically disadvantaged because they are discriminated against on the basis of their ethnicity, race, religion, sexual orientation, caste, descent, gender, age, disability, HIV status, migrant status or where they live. Discrimination occurs in public institutions, such as the legal system or education and health services, as well as social institutions like the household" (DFID, 2005, Reducing Poverty by Tackling Social Exclusion: A DFID Policy Paper). The concept or the idea of social exclusion first originated in Europe and later it became common in most of the developing societies of the world including India. Francis (2001) locates the strength of social exclusion as a concept in its attempt to capture its institutional and cultural aspects. Thus, social exclusion is an outcome of multiple deprivations due to various factors and reasons and it occurs at various levels and in different forms which affects and prevent the individuals or groups from community participation at different levels.

On the other hand, social inclusion is a process of bringing back all the excluded or deprived groups or individuals at par with the privileged ones. Thus, social inclusion is an effort to change those conditions and situations that leads to social exclusion of certain category of people for various reasons. The process of social inclusion is also concerned with creating amicable conditions for enabling all without discrimination to participate in all the areas where they can contribute like economy, polity, education, development etc. However, it is a myth to think of a society or to create a society exclusively based upon complete equality in which there will be no discriminations of any form or any social exclusion. In all societies and in all periods of time one or other forms of social exclusions has always been witnessed. With committed, concerted and genuine efforts the deprived and marginalized sections of society can be brought into the main stream and the gaps or social distances among and between different sections of the society can be minimized if not completely eliminated.

Various Forms of Social Exclusion in Indian Society

Aasland & Flotten (2000) have considered social exclusion as multidimensional phenomena and have considered several important living condition variables as proxies for social exclusion such as exclusion from formal citizenship rights, exclusion from labour market, exclusion from participation in civil society and exclusion from several social arenas. In view of the above said framework of Aasland & Flotten we can analyze the problem of social exclusion in Indian society and also other developing societies of the world. Some of the manifestations of social exclusion reflected in India are in the forms of caste, gender, ethnicity, poverty, religion, age, etc.

Social Exclusion Based on Caste : Caste is one of the dominant leading factor which is contributing for the social exclusion of one group by other. For long time caste has been an important institutional factor which has sharply divided Indian society into multiple hierarchical and unequal levels. Inequality, discrimination, seclusion, segregation & exclusion are inherently inbuilt in it.

Today in the 21st century we are still facing the problem of caste based discriminations in India. In this context Berreman (1967) has focused on caste system as fundamental structure through which power and privilege are allocated via interdependent social classifications ordered by stratified and ranked divisions of labor. This results in exclusion and discrimination of one caste by other caste on the lines of social mobility, pollution and purity, ascribed status, hereditary occupation & economic privilege etc.

Social Exclusion Based on Gender: "Gender defined roles" are other important factors responsible for the social exclusion of male and female in relation to their duties and responsibilities to be performed. Indian society is a patriarchal or male dominated society where we observe male supremacy over female. This gender based supremacy results in the problem of what we call "gender discrimination or exclusion" in terms of distribution of the resources, power allocation, status, decision making, opportunities, etc. between male and female in the Indian society. Although, gender discrimination is a universal problem however in India the worlds of males and females are so sharply divided where females find it excessively difficult to equate themselves with their counterpart males.

Social Exclusion Based on Age: Change in age based expectations are also contributing to the problem of social exclusion. Today, with changes in the values, ideologies, beliefs, norms, customs, institutions, rituals and traditions in our society we are observing that old age roles have also either modified or changed drastically. Today in Indian society, old age people or senior citizens have lost their respect and power which they used to enjoy in past in traditional joint families or in society at large. With the new emerging family system old age people are excluded in terms of decision making, authority, social involvement etc. In many cases old age people are today considered as a liability by their children or other family members. This exclusion of old people is resulting in their poor health, and other socio-psychological problems. Exclusion and indifferent attitude received from the family members is forcing old age people to work at low wages which further results in physical and mental exploitation and stress for them.

Social Exclusion Based on Distribution of Economic and other Resources: Distribution of economic resources also determines the process and level of social exclusion in our society. The major problems which Indian society in particular and other societies in general are facing are the problems of Poverty, Unemployment and illiteracy. This results in differential or unequal distribution of resources and fruits of development. As a result our society is sharply divided between rich and poor. Large numbers of people in India live below poverty line who are suffering from low income and engaged in low profile jobs. They are for all practical purposes excluded from the mainstream of our society. Poverty is a serious handicap for them to successfully compete and participate in various opportunities available in society. This situation has created a vast gap between what one has and what one doesn't have. This situation has created one section of the society more affluent and other section of the society more deprived and excluded in terms of status, power, prestige, dignity, income etc. In this regard, Sen (2000) argues and focused on examining social exclusion

in relationship to poverty and relates his ideas of social exclusion to capability perspectives on poverty and unemployment. In connection to social exclusion based on economic and other resources one of the important paradigms put forward by Hillary (1994) in relation to understanding of the process of social exclusion in European countries seems to be applicable in understanding social exclusion in the developing countries like India. She has called this paradigm as "Monopoly based on different notions of Social Integration". Due to poverty a good percentage of our population is marginalized and socially secluded from the mainstream of our society. If we examine the history we find that poverty and sharp economic inequalities has been the major causes of social conflict and tensions between different sections of the societies.

Social Exclusion Based on Cultural Differences: "Solidarity Paradigm" as put forward by Hillary (1994) gives us a clear picture of understanding social exclusion based on cultural differences in Indian society in particular and other societies in general. The solidarity paradigm emphasis on strong antecedents in Durkheim sociology, which views society as something external, moral and normative rather grounded in individual, group or class interests. This approach lays heavy emphasis on the way in which cultural and moral boundaries between groups socially construct dualistic categories for ordering the world. Similarly, the concept of Sanskritization and Westernization put forward by Srinivas in 20th century also speaks about the assimilation of one culture into another. Thus changing in the cultural values, norms, beliefs, rituals, customs, food habit, dressing patterns etc. to a great extend has created two different cultures in the Indian society one which is "traditional and local" and other which is "western and universal". As a result of this divide we are facing the problem of the process of social inclusion of many groups into one which represents the mainstream and actively participates in all the areas of our society. 'Ethnocentrism' is another cultural factor which comes in the way of the process of inclusion for those who are excluded on the grounds of different types of ethnicities.

Process of Social Inclusion

Perhaps, Indian society is the only society in the world where one finds enormous varieties and diversities of all types. Although we talk of unity in diversity but in practice or on ground reality we find different scenario. Not a single day passes where we don't come across incidences of dividing or disintegrating our society on different grounds namely ethnicities, language, region, history, caste, religion, poverty, gender, age etc. This is a big challenge for our society and state to counter the forces of divisiveness. We should introduce effective measures and innovative policies whereby we can evolve an effective mechanism of all inclusive or social inclusion. In view of this some of the measures which can prove to be effective towards evolving a policy of social inclusion in our society are as following:

Social Inclusion through Creating Opportunities: Social inclusion is possible through creating ample opportunities in all the sectors which in turn

can generate the source of income and other avenues particularly for those who are socially excluded or deprived.

Social Inclusion through Reservation: India has already adopted the policy of reservation as tool of social inclusion for the marginalized groups into the mainstream. The need of the hour is to ensure the effective implementation of the reservation policy to ensure that the benefit reaches to all those for whom these policies are created.

Social Inclusion through Judicious and Effective Allocation of Resources: Allocation and distribution of the resources should be done on the principle of justice and need which will certainly reduce the problem of social exclusion based on poverty, illiteracy, health services, unemployment etc. Proper allocation of resources will enable excluded sections of our society to come into the mainfold or mainstream of our society.

Social Inclusion through Education: Imparting of the education to all the people from all the sections of the society is another important medium for social inclusion. Education will broaden the mindset of the people and will provide an effective tool for social status and social mobility for all those who are deprived and socially excluded. Education will enable people to use it for their upliftment, growth and progress.

Social Inclusion through Community Participation: Community participation is an important key or measure for achieving goal of social inclusion. We should have various schemes which will provide free and fare opportunities to people from across the classes and castes to come together and operate on common platforms to function together and develop the feeling of oneness and a sense of belongingness. The success of the community participation depends upon the avenues and opportunities available to socially excluded groups who can also meaningfully contribute with others in the community development.

Challenges to the process of Social Exclusion and Social Inclusion

There are serious challenges which Indian society in particular and other societies in general are facing towards the process of social exclusion and social inclusion. Some of these challenges are as follows:

- Clarification issues associated with what should be included and what should be excluded. There is no uniform pattern for defining them as one of the major challenge as to whom we should include in the category of social exclusion and social inclusion.
- There is a lack in the official support in terms of monitoring and implementing various community development programmes. Institutional committed methods for evolving effective policy for social inclusion should be well defined.
- State should enact effective laws and ensure their proper implementation which will ensure better results in the direction of achieving a society based on the principal of all inclusiveness.

Conclusion

The above observations reflect on the phenomenon of social exclusion and inclusion in Indian society in particular and other societies in general. The problem of social exclusion in different forms and magnitudes has been witnessed in all societies and in all periods of time. The criterion for social exclusion varies from time to time and from one society to another society. Excluding certain sections of people is a criminal waste of human resources as they are purposefully and systematically ignored or avoided from participating in the developmental enterprises. In fact, a society which is destined to develop, grow and progress should ensure that all the sections of the society should have irrespective of their background and identities should have equal access and opportunity to contribute and participate meaningfully for society's development. In view of this there is a need for evolving a policy of social inclusion whereby without discriminating one against another, everyone can participate and contribute for the growth, progress and development of society. The state, government, NGO's, legal bodies, voluntary organizations, and various institutions should come forward in evolving an all inclusive policy for the collective and larger good of society. It is high time now we will have to rise above the narrow considerations of caste, religion, ethnicities, regions, gender, age etc. and treat all at par so that everyone has equal access and opportunity to participate and contribute towards the development of our society. Although apparently this may sound to be a difficult proposition however, it is not an impossible task. By exhibiting necessary political will, the policy of social inclusion can certainly be achieved.

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