

Dalits and Social Exclusion: An Overview

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Abstract: No country or society can prosper, without providing equal opportunities to its citizens. But, in our country, some categories of people are kept away from nation building activities, among those categories 'Dalits' stand first. Traditionally, India's caste system assigns individuals a certain hierarchical status and profession, according to Hindu beliefs, there are four principal castes (divided into many sub-castes) and the people who fall outside the caste system is the Dalits. As members of the lowest rank of Indian society, Dalits face discrimination at almost every level, from access to education, availing facilities, to restrictions on where they can live and what jobs they can have. The discrimination against the Dalits is especially significant because of the number of people affected. There are approximately 240 million Dalits in India, constituting over 25 percent of the total population. Dalits have been socially oppressed, culturally subjugated, and politically marginalized, in all way they are socially excluded. Furthermore, Social Exclusion is the combined outcome of deprivation and discrimination, which prevent individuals or groups from participating fully in the economic, social and political life of the society in which they live. Social exclusion is a major development issues in developing countries like India, large number of people are excluded by mainstream society from participating freely in economic, social and political life of the society. Hence this paper explores the social exclusion and discrimination on Dalits, study is solely based on the secondary data.

Keywords: Dalits; Social Exclusion; Discrimination.

1. Introduction

Despite elaborate provisions in the constitution and other laws, it is an unfortunate reality that social injustice and exploitation of scheduled castes and scheduled tribes and other weaker sections persist. There are reports in the press about atrocities against persons belonging to these groups and the frequency with which they occur is a cause for disquiet. The humiliation which per sons belonging to the scheduled castes in general and the Dalits in particular suffer even today, more than half a century after India proclaimed itself to be a republic, is a matter of shame.

-Justice AS ANAND,

NHRC CHAIRPERSON,

FOREWORD TO ATROCITIES REPORT 2004

India is a land of many religions; every religion has contributed in its own way in shaping the life and activities of the people and promoting the culture of India. Majority of people in India are adherent to Hinduism. According to Hindu beliefs, there are four principal castes (divided into many sub-castes) and the people who fall outside the caste system are the *Dalits*.

As members of the lowest rank of Indian society, *Dalits* face discrimination at almost every level, from access to education, availing facilities, to restrictions on where they can live and what jobs they can have. The discrimination against the *Dalits* is especially significant because of the number of people affected. There are approximately 240 million *Dalits* in India, constituting over 25 percent of the total population. *Dalits* have been socially oppressed, culturally subjugated, and politically marginalized, in all way they are socially excluded.

Who is a Dalit?

The term '*Dalit*' has different meanings for different people. The most common use of the term is to define people who

were once known as "untouchables", separated from the rest of society by the caste system.

The word *Dalit* is controversial one; many scholars defined the word in different ways. The word *Dalit* is used for the untouchables, ill-treated and humiliated castes. Then, who is an untouchable? An untouchable is one who is culturally, socially, economically and politically suppressed and exploited in the name of religion. In India, there are approximately 240 million *dalits*, i.e. 25% of the population is *Dalit*. They have different names in different parts of our country. They are called as Holaya, Panchama, Chandala, Samagara, Chammar, Adikamataka, Adidravida and Adijambuva etc...

After independence, the Indian Constitution abolished untouchability and the erstwhile untouchables came to be known as the Scheduled Castes (SCs). A comprehensive "schedule" or list of SCs was drawn up through the Constitution Order 1950 for purposes of targeting in development programs, compensatory policies to amend for prior discrimination, and policies to prevent violence against untouchables. Concomitant to these administrative classifications, several sub-castes within the SC category started using a self-preferred appellation- *Dalits*, or the oppressed people. The term politically united them in a process more empowering than the identification by their individual names, which were, and continue to be associated with ritually impure occupations.

2. Historical Background of Dalits

The caste system finds its origin in functional groupings, called *varnas*, which have their origins in the Aryan society of ancient northern India. In their creation myth, four *varnas* are said to have emanated from the Primeval Being. The Creator's mouth became the *Brahman* priests, his two arms formed the *Rajanya* warriors and kings, his two thighs formed the *Vaishya* landowners and merchants, and from his feet were born the *Shudra* artisans and servants. Later, there developed a so-called "fifth" *varna*: the Untouchables. They

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refer to the impurity and servility of the outcastes, while affirming the dominance and total impunity of Brahmins. Those from the “lowest” castes are told that their place in the caste hierarchy is due to their sins in a past life. Vivid punishments of torture and death are assigned for crimes such as gaining literacy or insulting a member of a dominant caste.

Among the writings of Hindu religious texts, the *Manusmitri* is undoubtedly the most authoritative one, legitimizing **social exclusion** and introducing absolute inequality as the guiding principle of social relations.

Does caste discrimination still exist in India?

- To this day, those from higher castes will not marry Dalits
- To this day, Dalits are the only ones who do the occupations considered degrading in Indian society, such as cleaning human waste, giving news of death and working with leather.
- To this day, most high caste Hindus refuse to eat or drink with Dalits.

What is Social Exclusion?

Since the deprivation of *Dalits* is closely linked with the processes of caste based exclusion and discrimination, we first discuss the concept of social exclusion in general and the caste and untouchability based exclusions and discrimination in particular.

Social Exclusion may be defined as, the combined outcome of deprivation and discrimination, which prevent individuals or groups from participating fully in the economic, social and political life of the society in which they live. Social exclusion is structural, i.e., the result of social processes and institutions rather than individual action.

The term “social exclusion” was originally coined in France in 1974. It has a variety of different definitions based on the historical use of the word,

In French republican tradition, social exclusion was defined as consequences of rupture of bond between society and individual (*De Haan, 1999, 1-2*).

Exclusion in the Anglo-Saxon tradition is defined as denial of full participation in social and economic interaction (*De Haan, 1999, 4*)

In boarder perspective social exclusion has been defined as “The process through which individual or groups are wholly or partially excluded from full participation in the society within which they live (*DE Haan 1999.5*)

In 1980s the concept of social exclusion had become a term for providing an important frame work for thinking out alternative social policy, particularly in relation to the notion of welfare provisions, it become an innovative concept to describe deprivation, this concepts advantage is that it focuses attention on central aspect of deprivation. *Amartyasen* welcomed the social exclusion framework, because of its focus on the “Relational roots of deprivation.

“Social Exclusion” the term is very much used in the field of intellectuals and policy planners worldwide for identifying the gaps for the development of the neglected people and the pertaining country. Social Exclusion is lack of access to resources and consequent inability to utilize them. It is further accentuated by denial of opportunities which enhance access to resources and their utilization. In all Social exclusion is defined as the processes by which individuals and population groups face barriers in relation to their access to public goods, resulting in inequitable social attainments, capabilities, development, justice and dignity outcomes. These barriers may arise from a number of causes, including through social or state neglect, social or state discrimination, tacit or active social or state denial, social or state violence and dispossession, customary practices and cultural norms, and/or by faulty design and implementation of state laws, policies and programmes, or a combination of all of these’. (*India exclusion report*)

Forced exclusion and constant oppression

Today, Dalits make up 25% of the total Indian population, but their control over resources of the country is marginal less than 5%. Close to half of the Dalit population lives under the Poverty Line, and even more (62%) are illiterate. Among the Dalits, most of those engaged in agricultural work are landless or nearly landless agricultural laborers. The average household income for Dalits was of Rs. 17,465 in 1998, just 68% of the national average. Less than 10% of Dalit households can afford safe drinking water, electricity and toilets, which is indicative of their deplorable social condition. Moreover, Dalits are daily victims of the worst crimes and atrocities, far outnumbering other sections of society in that respect as well. The vast majority of these crimes remain unreported due to omnipresent fear, and those that are reported are often ignored by police or end up languishing in the backlogged court system. Between 1992 and 2000, a total of 334,459 cases were registered nationwide with the police as cognizable crimes against SCs. More than 60 years after gaining Independence, India is still very much afflicted by the cancer of the caste system. Dalits remain the most vulnerable, marginalized and brutalized community in the country.

3. Nature and Extent of Social Exclusion and Discrimination on Dalits

Since time immemorial, the impact of Social exclusion has made the Dalits as vulnerable community in society; the process of social exclusion system has made the Dalits dependable on the others so called upper communities.

In the contemporary scenario due to the impact of exclusion of Dalits they are subjected to social, economical and political exclusion. A study of 2006 on untouchables rural in India covering 565 villages in 11 states has revealed the extent to which untouchability and social exclusion is practiced in spite of officially banned by the constitution of India.

In spite of constitutional mandate for social justice various local institutions in India facilitates and practice untouchability. (IDSN)

In Govt. Services	37.8% of the villages <i>Dalits</i> students are made to sit separately in government schools.
	27.6% of the villages <i>Dalits</i> are prevented from entering police stations.
	25.7% of the village <i>Dalits</i> is prevented from entering ration shops.
	33% of the village public health workers refuse to visit <i>Dalits</i> homes.
	14.4% of the village <i>Dalits</i> is not permitted to enter panchayat building.
	12% of the village <i>Dalits</i> is forced to form separate lines at polling booths.
In Market Access	48.4% of the <i>Dalits</i> are denied to access to water sources.
	35% of village <i>Dalits</i> banned from selling produced in local market.
In Work	47% of village milk cooperatives prevent <i>Dalits</i> from selling milk and 25% from buying milk.
	25% of village <i>Dalits</i> 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	37% of the village <i>Dalits</i> workers paid wages from a distance to avoid physical contact.
	64% of <i>Dalits</i> restricted from entering Hindu temples.
In Private Spheres	50% of village <i>Dalits</i> prevented from accessing cremation grounds.
	73% of villages <i>Dalits</i> not permitted to enter non-dalits homes.
	35.8% of <i>Dalits</i> denied entry in to village shops.

(SC/ST Commissions Report, New Delhi)

Crimes against Dalits

27 atrocities against Dalits every day.
13 Dalits murdered every week.
5 Dalits homes burnt every week.
6 Dalits kidnapped or abducted every week.
3 Dalits women raped every day.
11 Dalits beaten every hour and A crime committed against a Dalits every 18 minutes

(Sources: Indian crime statistics)

Dalits in Education

The literacy rate for SCs in 2011 was similarly below the national average, at 66.1 per cent. In 2012–13, the drop in enrolment of SC children from the primary (classes I–V) to upper primary (classes V–VII) level was 54.4 per cent, compared to an overall dropout rate of 51.8 per cent. Accompanying such trends of lower participation in school education among SC children are lower educational achievements. A National Sample Survey Organization (NSSO) Baseline Survey in 2005 in 43 districts in the country found that 58.2 per cent of SC children were able to read and write, compared to 72 per cent of children from non-SC/ ST/Other Backward Classes (OBC) households.

Education Indicators for Major Groups of Excluded Children

	Literacy Rate (%) 2011	Current Attendance Rate Among 5- to 14 -year-olds (%)	Drop in Enrolment from Primary to Upper Primary Level (%)	Out-of-School Rate (%)
Overall	73.0	87.1	51.8	4.28
Dalits	66.1	85.2	54.4	5.96

(Sources: Registrar General of India 2011)

Also, Exclusion Report 2013-14 says that in 2011, 22.6% households of SCs are Asset less.

Availability of Assets+

Dalits	Asset less Households (%) 2011
	22.6

(India Exclusion Report)

+ Asset less households are those which have none of the following assets: radio, transistor, television, computer, telephone, mobile phone, bicycle or motorized vehicle.

From the above numbers and statements, we find that Dalits are excluded in the name of caste system. Exclusion is not just a matter of addressing the practice of untouchability, atrocities, etc... but at large it reveals the loopholes in social justice, democratic society, liberty, equality, etc...

4. Concluding Remarks

Social exclusion and discrimination on *Dalits* is very much important problem in India, which can have the number of evil consequences on the establishment of welfare state. It is therefore very rigorous and honest efforts are necessary for its tackling.

The present study is a little bit attempts to explore the various issues relating to social exclusion and discrimination on *Dalits* of India. This study is solely based on the secondary data, but there is a need for the research studies based on the primary data also. Because such studies reach to the grass root level can provide necessary inputs for the policy making by the policy makers and the government. **Dr. B.R Ambedkar** is one of the makers of modern India who throughout his life fought for the upliftment of the depressed class of the society, with his visionary mission provided a comprehensive framework for development of people in general and Dalits in particular.

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