# Social Exclusion: A Framework For Conceptualizing And Identifying Excluded Groups In India

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***Abstract:***
*Exclusion is an institutionalised and socially, sometime, religiously sanctioned attempt to exclude, segregate or cast out a segment of the population due to their identity such as caste, race, class, gender, religion, age, etc; it is that much more difficult to change. Though the term 'Social exclusion' is recently introduced in India, the term offers a unique, multiple and holistic framework to study the exclusive characteristic features of Indian society under which the majority of population were excluded over the centuries.  In terms of usefulness, the term social exclusion tries to contribute to our understanding and identifying of the nature, causes of social exclusion practices which will eventually enrich the thinking on policy level solution and social action in mitigating social exclusion.  At this backdrop, conceptualizing the usefulness of term 'social exclusion' in Indian context and to identifying socially excluded groups acquires imperative and vital as far as the social sciences researches in India are concerned. This paper attempts to framework the conceptualizing term social exclusion and to identifying socially excluded groups in India.*
***Keywords:*** *Exclusion, Inclusion, Paradigms of Social Exclusion, Multi-dimensionality, conceptualization, Social Groups, Sectoral Groups.*

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## I.      Origin Of The Term Social Exclusion:

The term "social exclusion" is of relatively recent origin. The concept of social exclusion originated in France in 1960s and eventually acquired wider currency in academic milieu across the world to characterize discriminations and disadvantages of marginalized groups. In 1970s, René Lenoir, a French scholar used the term to denote a wide variety of people, not only the poor, but also handicapped, suicidal people, aged, abused children, substance abusers, etc about 10% of the French population. The European Commission used the term since the late 1980s, referring to the problem of long-term unemployment and of unskilled workers and immigrants. Since the 1990s, there were a series of developments that saw the concept of social exclusion as a significant policy there within the European Union (EU). Since 2001, member states of the EU have produced National Action Plans for social inclusion submitted to Brussels (capital of EU) for coordination in a Joint Inclusion Report. Interest in social exclusion has expanded beyond European. International agencies working in less developed countries have found the concept useful for studying the challenges of integration in plural-ethnic societies, caste structures, religious cleavages, and indigenous peoples' rights. UN agencies and international development banks have funded programs to promote social inclusion in the global South.

Thus, political and policy considerations have been as important as sociological and anthropological interests to the development of social exclusion as a subject of study. Today, the term has, however, already made substantial inroads into the discussions and writings on poverty, deprivation and marginalization. There is

a large and rapidly growing literature on the subject. The concept of social exclusion is being an umbrella concept seen as covering a remarkably wide range of social and economic problems. Indeed, the term social exclusion is an essentially contested concept and has accumulated along the way, and to make space for a more explicit focus on power relations, history, social dynamics, and political economy.

In India, the notion of social exclusion along with inclusive policy was introduced by Dr. Sukhadeo Thorat, the former Chairman of University Grants Commission (UGC). Under his auspicious guidance, the Centre for Study of Social Exclusion and Inclusive Policy were established in 34 higher educational institutions across the country to conceptualize; and to understand the nature, processes and forms of exclusion as well as to formulate policy level solution for excluded groups based on the empirical research works.

## II. Defining Social Exclusion:

Social Exclusion refers to the complex processes that deny certain groups full participation in society. Sam Hickey defines social exclusion as "the process through which individuals or groups are wholly or partially excluded from the society in which they live". For Hilary Silver, Social exclusion is a multidimensional process of progressive social rupture, detaching groups and individuals from social relations and institutions and preventing them from full participation in the normal, normatively prescribed activities of the society in which they live. Social exclusion has been defined by the Department of International Development (DFID), Government of United Kingdom 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" Jo Sparkes defines social exclusion is a process of long term non-participation in the economic, civic and social norms that integrate and govern the society in which an individual resides.

## III. Social Exclusion As A Process:

Social exclusion is a process. It is about large sections of the people being put at a disadvantage by formal and informal processes. It can involve the systematic denial of entitlements to resources and services, and the denial of the right to participate on equal terms in social relationships in economic, social, cultural or political arenas. Exclusionary processes can occur at various levels–within and between households, villages, cities, states, and globally. Social exclusion is a rupturing of the social bond. It is a process of declining participation, access, and solidarity. At the societal level, it reflects inadequate social cohesion or integration. At the individual level, it refers to the incapacity to participate in normatively expected social activities and to build meaningful social relations. As Alain Touraine put it, exclusion is an issue of being in or out, rather than up or down. Because exclusion is about broken relationships, there are always two parties to consider: the excluders as well as the excluded.

The notion social exclusion can also be seen as a part of Amartya Sen's capability approach, which is based on the ideas of 'functionings' and 'capabilities'. 'Functionings' are those things that an individual is able to do or be in leading a life, such as having a healthy body, being educated, having self-respect, participating in community life, etc. 'Capabilities' are combinations of various functionings which allow an individual to lead the kind of life he or she values. Social exclusion can thus be seen as a process leading to a state in which it is more difficult for certain individuals and groups to achieve certain 'functionings'. The impossibility to reach a functioning leads to a state of deprivation, and so the 'state' of social exclusion can be defined as a combination of some relevant deprivations.

In economic terms, exclusion from labor markets, credit and other forms of 'capital asset' are the key processes. Socially, exclusion may take the form of discrimination along a number of dimensions – caste, gender, ethnicity, age, sex – which effectively reduces the opportunity for such groups to gain access to social services and limits their participation in society. Political aspects of exclusion include the denial of political rights such as political participation and the right to organize, and also of personal security, the rule of law, freedom of expression and equality of opportunity. More broadly, however, social exclusion is better understood not as a specifically political concept, but as an attempt to "ground the understanding of deprivation firmly in traditions of social science analyses".

There are many mechanisms of social exclusion: extermination, exile, abandonment, ostracism, shaming, marginalization, segregation, discrimination, untouchability, apartheid, slavery etc. Indeed, as social exclusion can be structured around hierarchy, the exclusion of people on the basis of their race, caste or gender, may be viewed by the society excluding them as 'normal'. Moreover, the manifestations of social exclusion vary across countries. In some countries, immigrants or racial minorities are excluded; in others, ethnic or religious minorities. Social exclusion can indeed arise in a variety of ways, and it is important to recognize the versatility of the idea and its reach. Indeed, the language of exclusion is so versatile and adaptable that there may be a temptation to dress up every deprivation as a case of social exclusion.

## IV.    Multi-Dimensionality:

Social exclusion is multidimensional, and can encompass lack of access to employment, legal redress and markets; a lack of political voice; and poor social relationships. Being excluded from social relations can lead to other deprivations as well, thereby further limiting living opportunities. For example, being excluded from the opportunity to be employed or to receive credit may lead to economic impoverishment that may, in turn, lead to other deprivations such as undernourishment or homelessness.  Therefore, it is not enough to examine the issues individually, rather the links between must be explored. However, analysts differ on whether exclusion is always a cumulative process of multiple, interrelated disadvantages. Although most scholars agree that social exclusion is multi-dimensional and has different forms in different social contexts, there is little consensus over what are the most important dimensions of social exclusion. Studies have so far examined the dimensions that are easiest to measure with available data. Certainly, research confirms that exclusion along one dimension may increase the risks of exclusion along other dimensions, but very few people are totally excluded from all social relations at once. There are many more people who are socially excluded in some respects than there are people excluded in all respects. Indeed, it is virtually impossible for human beings to exist totally outside societal influences.

Broadly speaking, there are two dimensions of social exclusion which focus on quite distinct understandings of disadvantage; one is related to lack of resources ('what you have') and the other is identity-based discrimination ('who you are'). There is one other dimension to social exclusion which may not be fully captured by the interplay between economic deprivation and social discrimination, which is the spatial one ("*where you are*"). Spatial disadvantage may lie in the remoteness and isolation of a location as in the case of Dalits and Tribes*,* which makes it physically difficult for its inhabitants to participate in broader socio-economic processes.

More specifically, social exclusion can be viewed as an analytical concept which directs us to the way in which social structures can generate poverty, but which extends beyond explanations of social or material deprivation to include an analysis of the way in which social institutions function and develop. De Haan makes a strong case for the use of social exclusion, stressing that it focuses attention on central aspects of deprivation, is equally relevant to analysis and policies, and directs us to the fact that deprivation is a multi-dimensional phenomenon.

## V.    Paradigms Of Social Exclusion:

Hilary Silver (1994) offers three paradigms of social exclusion, depending in particular on the ways social integration has been conceptualized, and associated with 'theoretical and ideological baggage'. In the *'solidarity paradigm'* which is dominant in France and influenced by the work of Rousseau, exclusion is the rupture of the social bond between the individual and society that is cultural and moral. The poor, unemployed and ethnic minorities are defined as outsiders. A *'specialization paradigm',* dominant in the US, and contested in UK and based on the works of Hobbes is determined by individual liberalism. According to it, individuals are able to move across boundaries of social differentiation and economic divisions of labor, and emphasize the contractual exchange of rights and obligations. In this paradigm, exclusion reflects discrimination, the drawing of group distinctions that denies individuals full access to or participation in exchange or interaction. A *'monopoly paradigm'* is influential in Britain and many Northern European countries and is influenced by Weber's work. This paradigm views the social order as coercive, imposed through hierarchical power relations. Bill Jordan (1996) argues that exclusion arises because particular social groups monopolize the use of public resources.

## VI.    Usefulness Of The Concept:

In terms of usefulness of the idea, we have to scrutinize and examine critically what new insight—if any—is provided by the approach of social exclusion. Does it contribute to our understanding of the nature of social exclusion? Does it help in identifying causes of social exclusion? Does it enrich thinking on policy and social action in mitigating social exclusion? How would our understanding of social exclusion be any different if we were to ignore the literature of social exclusion altogether? How would the policies chosen be effective in mitigating exclusion? These critical issues are central to an appropriate evaluation and assessment (conceptualization) of the idea of social exclusion.

Works on social exclusion from different parts of the world illustrate the variety of forms of exclusion they take as well as the difference between socially excluded groups and categories. Ethnicity, caste and race constitute the most empirically documented examples of group based exclusion in the development literature, although their significance varies by context. In Indian context, however, caste, religion and ethnicity are the most important forms of group identities which have served as a basis of social exclusion. Still in many parts of our country, Dalit, adivasis and subalterns are marginalized and facing highest degree of exploitation (physically, mentally, culturally and socially) which ultimately inhibits them from taking full participation in

the society and as such excluded. Apart from these groups, exclusions based on sex, age, sexual orientation etc. also becoming evident in our present Indian society.

## VII.    Conceptualization Of The Term Social Exclusion:

The idea of social exclusion has conceptual merits and acquires more relevance as far the studying excluded groups/communities in India. However, in terms of usefulness of the idea, we have to conceptualize social exclusion as it contributes to our understanding of the nature of social exclusion. It will also help in identifying causes of social exclusion and may enrich thinking on policy and social action in mitigating social exclusion. Scrutinizing the nature, relevance, and reach of the idea of social exclusion will help the possibility of using the term in contexts other than the French and more generally European conditions in which it has been originally championed. It will help development practitioners to obtain a better understanding and appreciation of the multi-dimensionalities/multiple manifestations of the process of social exclusion. It will stimulate discussion that will help academicians and development practitioners to respond effectively to this exclusion dimension. Thus, conceptualization is important to undertake (1) the conceptual contribution that the idea of social exclusion can make and the constructive role it can play, and (2) the use of social exclusion merely as language and rhetoric. Both can be effective, but conceptual creativity must not be confused with just linguistic extension.

Amartya Sen tries to give the answer concerning the conceptual merits of the notion of social exclusion, and its relevance for developing countries. Sure enough, the exclusionary perspective can be very useful in some contexts. He argues that in its modern form, the notion of "social exclusion" has had a distinctly European indeed specifically French origin. This recognition raises two different types of questions. First, is the European origin, with its cultural specificity, a barrier to the use of the concept elsewhere, including in Asia? Second, does the European, and in particular French, origin give it a conceptual lineage that is worth tracing in assessing the richness of the idea. Regarding whether the idea of social exclusion European in origin can be fruitfully used to understand poverty and deprivation elsewhere, in Asia and Africa in particular, the immediate point to note, according to him, is that the world in which we live is much more unified today, with shared ideas and concerns, and it would be amazing, if socially useful notions developed in Europe would fail to be relevant in Asia just because of their European origin. Indeed, the idea of social exclusion has recently been used to cover a large variety of "exclusions" particularly important in Asia. There is, in fact, a considerable and fast growing literature dealing with one or more of these "exclusions" in Asian countries, such as India, Thailand, Malaysia, Vietnam, the Philippines, and others.

## VIII.    Identifying Excluded Groups/Communities:

Social anthropologists argue that identifying and measuring social exclusion risks essentializing statistical categories into groups. On the other hand, economists argue that gathering and analyzing statistical information relating to social exclusion can help to identify which groups are excluded, identify the forms and levels of exclusion they face, and quantify the impact of exclusion. Statistical information can also draw attention to exclusion, strengthening influencing strategies and creating leverage. Raising the profile and visibility of excluded groups can also be a powerful act in itself. In addition, the collection of multi-dimensional data including not only economic and social, but also political dimensions by group is essential, if policies are to be designed and monitored and aimed at reducing group inequalities and increasing social inclusion. Without such data, it is impossible to know what sort of action is needed, and if action has been taken, whether it is being effective.  However, an important problem remains the availability of disaggregated data across countries and regions. In identifying policy issues of particular relevance in India related to the general literature on social exclusion, it is important to pay attention to the distinct types of exclusions and the different ways in which they can impoverish human lives in India. Proper identification of the research ability and relevance of diverse problems call for a much more comprehensive and detailed investigation. The context of this investigation and analysis is as important as the general task of making good use of the diverse literature on social exclusion. However, identifying the excluded groups/communities are not difficult task since there is plethora of documentations on excluded masses by government agencies, academicians, media and independent researchers etc. Prakash Louis classify the following groups as excluded in India;

1. **Social Groups**: Dalits, Adivasis, Women, Backward Castes, Religious, Ethnic and Linguistic Minorities, Transgenders, People with HIV/AIDS, Differentially-Abled, Aged invalids, and other social 'misfits'.
2. **Sectoral Groups**: Subaltern groups (Marginal farmers, Agricultural labourers, Bonded labourers, Informal and Unorganized sector workers, Manual scavengers etc), Child workers, Sex workers etc.

## IX.    Conclusion:

In terms of usefulness of the term social exclusion, Dalits, adivasis, minorities(religious and sexual), women, elderly, people with HIV/AIDS, differently-abled, small and marginal farmers etc constitute the most

empirically documented excluded groups in India. In Indian context, however, caste, religion and ethnicity are the most important forms of group identities which have served as a basis of social exclusion. Still in many parts of our country, Dalits, adivasis and Subalterns are marginalized and facing highest degree of exploitation (physically, mentally, culturally and socially) which ultimately inhibits them from taking full participation in the society and as such excluded. Apart from these groups, exclusions based on sex, age, sexual orientation etc. also becoming evident in our present Indian society. Scrutinizing the nature, relevance, and reach of the term of social exclusion will help the possibility of using the term in contexts other than the French and more generally European conditions in which it has been originally championed. It will help policy makers to obtain a better understanding and appreciation of the multi-dimensionalities/multiple manifestations of the process of social exclusion in India. It will stimulate discussion that will help academicians and policy makers to respond effectively to this exclusion dimension. Thus, conceptualization of the term and identifying socially excluded groups can play a constructive role in tackling the issues of social exclusion in India.

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