

The concept of Social Exclusion: A dalit critique

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Exclusion in its multiple and cumulative forms has been in existence since the dawn of human civilization. Several concepts and phrases have emerged at different stages to describe the intensity and degree of deprivation, disadvantage, marginalization, oppression and the like. But the idea of the Social Exclusion in a most refined fashion is of very recent origin in the development discourse and literature. Like many social concepts, social exclusion also has evaded a neat definition. At a time when its application is rapidly expanding and it is seen as panacea for all problems some significant questions are coming up that call for an urgent attention. The questions include: How is Social Exclusion different from the indigenous understanding of deprivation? What is new with social exclusion? Why has it appeared all of a sudden in the development discourse? What are the constraints for its application in India? What is the strength of the concept to address issues based descent such as caste and ethnicity? In view of these questions a critical attempt has been made in this paper to explore the effects of the idea of social exclusion for Dalits in India.

Social Exclusion is a new model to understand and address the human suffering in its manifold. It came as a response to the challenges posed by the post war policy driven socio-economic crisis in France. Rene Lenoir, the secretary of state for Social Action in the 1970s, who is credited with coining of the term ‘Social Exclusion’ had included around ten categories of sufferers as socially excluded population who fell out of the social security net. The excluded *–les exclus–* came to be regarded as the Pariahs of the nation in France (Paul-Marie de la Gorce, quoted by Hillary Silver, 1994). There is a problem in comparing the *les exclus* with the Pariahs of India which is discussed in the later part of this essay. The French government attempted to address social exclusion by emphasizing on the economic benefits to the excluded through a scheme called ‘minimum income for Social Integration’ (Silver, 2004). It indicates that a variety of social problems in France have been prompted by the economic crises that have been expected to be addressed by a minimum income support.

This approach hardly throws light on the process through which people gets marginalized and excluded in different walks of life. As such finding out a permanent solution to a social problem could hardly be covered by this approach. Rather it focuses only on supplying the goods and services to the exclude than to make them stand on their own.

Social Exclusion takes a top-down approach which implies less involvement of the effected in resolving their own problems. When the community participation in the development discourse is assuming new heights this kind of an approach is likely to reduce people's participation in the development process by making them dependents permanently.

The time in which the idea of social exclusion has surfaced gives rise to several apprehensions given the rapid expansion of the neo-liberal ideology. It has been an established fact that the neo-liberal policies advanced by the globalization process resulted in an uneven development across the world. Several protest movements have become a regular phenomenon in some or other part of the world. It appears that the identity movements that have been unleashed by the liberalization policies become counterproductive for the neo-liberal agenda in terms articulating their demands in an organized manner. Now governments across the board had been hard pressed to respond to these demands .It is here that the idea of social exclusion emerges to fit into the context. When Social exclusion means different things for different people what is the necessity to import and super impose it on the indigenous concepts and ideas that render the same meaning and implications as done by social exclusion?

Discrimination and deprivation is an age old socially approved practice against dalits in India. It is not for poverty and low income or any economic reasons, but for religious customs and traditional practices, dalits are treated as sub-human beings. They are untouchables and some of them are even unseeable castes and their social status is fixed permanently as it is birth based, irrespective of their economic status. The Hindu religious scriptures sanctify the practice of discrimination and untouchability and it is so deeply ingrained in the minds that even when some dalit assume a very higher political position through affirmative scheme his/her untouchability will not go-if not in physically it will remain in psychological terms.

Dalit struggle, essentially, is not an economic fight but a self-respect movement. Their struggle is to earn them an environment where they could be treated as equal human beings by the caste Hindu society of which they constitute around twenty percent of its total population. It is not an easy task for them. Realizing the impossibility of change in the Hindu mind set in terms of o accepting dalits as equal citizens. Ambedkar, advocated the them to convert into other religions. Given the magnitude and severity of the problem superficial touches and poverty alleviation programmes could not bring about any change in the social conditions of dalits. It needs a radical social transformation where dalits should be accepted as equal citizens.

When seen in this backdrop the concept of Social exclusion is primarily concerned with an end *position* rather than with the *process* that leads to such a position .It means, when applied the

concept of social exclusion, dalit will be considered as victims and some scheme will be launched for their welfare. In such a social set up to what extent this concept can meet the ends of the Dalit respect? When the concept of social exclusion is employed to address the dalit question it obviously points to policy solution in terms of providing dalits with some benefits and concessions on a continuous basis rather than finding out a permanent solution by focusing on the process that leads to eradication of their problems like untouchability, discrimination.

The dalit struggle involve a grassroots approach unlike the social exclusion that advocate the top-down approach. The danger with the top-down approach is that always the state tries to pacify the real aspirations of people in one way or the other instead of addressing them. Since the ruling castes are the upper castes in India which treats dalits as untouchables, their top down approach would either maintain status quo or reinforce the caste system. Caste is a psychological disorder where an upper caste person could not see a lower caste person in his life size but in a miniature.

We do not have any track record of where social exclusion has been used creatively to address a structural social problems like that of caste or untouchability.

Since the Dalit marginalization is seen as a small part of the umbrella idea of social exclusion there is always a lurking danger that the Dalit question may get marginalized. This apart the phrase social exclusion is inadequate to express the severity of the multiple oppressions of stigma and discrimination; as much as the notion and the term *Dalit* brings out. Moreover the term Exclusion is tagged with Inclusion, which is regressive in nature and smacks of charity rather than their empowerment.

Dalits are not comfortable and rather skeptical about with the idea of social exclusion being applied to understand and address their conditions. They have valid reasons for it. As the concept of social exclusion was applied as panacea, in response to different types of marginalization by giving financial assistance it is in question as to the same can be applied for the dalit exclusion. It is because the origin of the idea of dalit itself has a different history from the foundations of social exclusion. Dalit encompasses marginalization as a process as well as an end, where as social exclusion remains silent about the process. In fact process of exclusion needs to be addressed to find a permanent solution for any issue. Dalit emphasizes more on the process of marginalization in order to find out a permanent solution to their question. The social exclusion approach focuses on giving a fish to the needy and the dalit approach emphases on teaching her to catch a fish.

The term dalit has originated as part of the assertion of the ex-untouchable castes and as such it has a history of struggle. It was an assertion for social recognition and human dignity denied to them by the tradition and religious customs. Thus the dalit question is concerned primarily with self-respect. The social exclusion approach doesn't focus on social equality and self-respect to which dalit attach utmost significance.

The term dalit has a direct reference to the injustice done to them by the so called upper castes. It also reminds the limits of other against their traditional authority over dalits. The term dalit is chosen one against the derogatory ascribed nomenclature such as harijan, pancham, achut and so on. It also refer to the magnitude of punishment for deniel of equal rights to dalits. Application of the concept of social exclusion would evade all these historical facts.

As far as the phrase dalit is concerned it heralds dalit citizenship rights and their share in the resources of state. It demands their share in the education, employment, and political positions. Social exclusion applied in the western societies doesn't refer to these aspects. Therefore dalits are quite skeptical about the application of the concept of social exclusion to address their issues. They think that the concept of social exclusion may hide their real issues and further help the upper castes in oppressing them. Dalits further suspect that the legal protections given to them by the constitution and different laws may render gradually insignificant with the social exclusion approach.

Thus dalits have several doubts in applying the concept of social exclusion to their conditions . They find the new concept as confusing and misleading the world to shelter their oppressors . They also argue that it is no way better and inclusive than their assertive expression of dalit. They also argue that the constitutional nomenclature, i.e scheduled castes is much better.

Reference:

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