

Social Exclusion and Dalits

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Abstract

Do we live in 21st century? Do we call us modern? Do we have liberated from caste bias and prejudice? Do we accept our own fellow brothers' dalits as human beings? Should they enjoy freedom as their counterparts? Do we abide to our Constitution and Judiciary in real sense? Shall we have overcome rather remove the feelings of ill-treatment, segregation, exclusion towards dalits? The answers of the above questions are 'No'. This is stark naked reality of the present time. Still, we are not accepting, respecting the larger portion of our Indian society, the dalits, the oppressed and most wretched on earth.

Social exclusion, segregation and discrimination are highly prevailed in our society. Man is not judged by his act, duty, ability, calibre, competence but by his caste to which he or she belongs. Even after the passing of 68 years of Independence, the sine qua non social equality and social acceptability is still in vague and utopian. Ours law system, political rhetoric and Constitutional protection have been failed to end atrocities against dalits. Dalit women are raped and murdered brutally, a day to day matter. They are most vulnerable. The upper castes' do not hesitate or be an impure to touch and rape the dalit women. Who cares about Constitution and Dr. Ambedkar's vision?

Dalit and fight for justice and equality which is not acceptable to mainstream politics, rather a rightist wing, and Hindu upper caste society. Educational institutions are not spared from such bias and discrimination towards Dalits. Social exclusion and discrimination towards Dalits are the cruces of our Indian society. They could not access basic amenities, public places even today. Social exclusion, separation, and discrimination towards Dalits prevalent widely are hampering social justice, equality, and freedom. The vision of Dr. Ambedkar is not fulfilled till today.

Keyword : Dalit, Dr. Ambedkar, Indian Constitution

Introduction

Do we live in 21st century? Do we call us modern? Do we have liberated from caste bias and prejudice? Do we accept our own fellow brothers' dalits as human beings? Should they enjoy freedom as their counterparts? Do we abide to our Constitution and Judiciary in real sense? Shall we have overcome rather remove the feelings of ill-treatment, segregation, exclusion towards dalits? The answers of the above questions are 'No'. This is stark naked reality of the present time. Still, we are not accepting, respecting the larger portion of our Indian society, the dalits, the oppressed and most wretched on earth.

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"The State shall promote with special care the educational and economic interests of the weaker section of the people, and in particular, of the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes, and shall protect them from social injustice and all forms of exploitation."

Article 15 ensures the equal rights to all irrespective of caste, creed or colour and no one is denied to use public places and property. Untouchability is prohibited by article 17. But it is still practised in different forms and dalits are obstructed from using public property. The Prevention of Atrocities Act to Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes of 1989 has not proved effective to curb the malign treatment meted out by upper castes towards SCs and STs. So, in 2015 some more provision has been added to check and to put ban on atrocities. Does it prove effective? Why Atrocities Act has to be strengthened again? Even after 25 years lapsed of this Act, again new measures have been added. It shows that we have not serious to the issues of dalits and atrocities towards them. This is our big failure. 'According to a 2010 report by National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) on the Prevention of Atrocities against Scheduled Castes, a crime is committed against a Dalit every 18 minutes. Every day, on average, three Dalit women are raped, two Dalits murdered, and two Dalit houses burnt.' The brilliant PhD scholar, Rohith Vemula hanged himself because of indifferent and intolerant

attitude of the Hyderabad Central University. He was dalit and fight for justice and equality which is not acceptable to mainstream politics, rather rightist wing and Hindu upper caste society. Educational institutions are not spared from such bias and discrimination towards dalits. Social exclusion and discrimination towards dalits is the crux of our Indian society. They could not access to basic amenities, public places even today. Social exclusion, separation and discrimination towards dalits prevalent widely are hampering the social justice, equality and freedom. The vision of Dr. Ambedkar is not fulfilled till today.

Meaning of Social Exclusion

S. Thorat has said: “Social Exclusion” the term is very much use in the field of intellectuals and policy planners worldwide for identifying the gaps for the development of the neglected people and the pertaining country. The causes for exclusion can vary from country to country in different times; reflecting deferent situation such geographically, historically and politically but the results will be the same in the form of lack of people development and the country. As a result of social exclusion, its impacts on the livelihood of the people such as increase in rate of poverty, health, and others. The exclusion is practiced worldwide mostly on the identity of gender, caste, religion, ethnicity, colour, race, nationality, and others. Social exclusion is a process which involves denial of rights and opportunities which the majority enjoy, resulting in the inability of individuals from excluded groups to participate in the basic political, economic and social functioning of the society, thereby causing high human poverty and deprivation among them.’ (Quoted in article of Kadun & Gadkar)

Amartya Sen draws attention to various meanings and dimensions of the concept of social exclusion. He draws a distinction between situations where some people are kept out (or left out), and where some people are included (forcibly) on deeply unfavourable terms. The two situations are described as “unfavourable exclusion” and “unfavourable inclusion.” Sen argues that it is important to distinguish between ‘active exclusion’ -- fostering of exclusion through deliberate policy interventions by the government or by any other wilful agents (to exclude some people from some opportunity), and ‘passive exclusion’, which works through the social process in which there are no deliberate attempts to exclude, but nevertheless may result in exclusion from a set of circumstances.

Social exclusion or social marginalization is social disadvantage and relegation to the fringe of society. It is a term used widely in Europe and was first used in France. It is used across disciplines including education, sociology, psychology, politics and economics. Social exclusion is the process in which individuals or entire communities of people are systematically

blocked from (or denied full access to) various rights, opportunities and resources that are normally available to members of a different group, and which are fundamental to social integration within that particular group (e.g., housing, employment, healthcare, civic engagement, democratic participation, and due process). (Wikipedia)

Caste is the basis of Social Exclusion

First of all who are ‘Oppressed’ and ‘Marginalised’? Who are denied the basic rights, rather constitutional rights? Who are crushed by iron rod? They are Dalits, Adivasis and Weaker Sections of the society. The Varna System, Caste System is the root cause of the Indian Social Order. Among them Dalits are most vulnerable. They are crushed, oppressed and suppressed since thousands years. Till today the situation has not improved. Social exclusion is still continuing. The denial of basic rights, basic amenities to dalits are going on. If someone is challenging, he or she or group are suppressed severely. They do not raise their voices, agonies, pains as well.

Caste is the predominant factor of the Indian society. Each Indian is primarily known by his caste not by merit and competence. As Ambedkar observed, a caste does not exist in a single number, only in plural. Castes exist as a system of endogenous groups that are interlinked with each other in an unequal measure of rights and relations in all walks of life. Castes at the top of the order enjoy more rights at the expense of those located at the bottom. Therefore, the untouchables located at the bottom of the caste hierarchy have much fewer economic and social rights. “The main pillar of Hindu imperialism is its inequality, i.e., dividing human beings into intrinsically inferior and superior. The castes are the bricks in Hindu pyramids and its light house is superiority complex. And its lifeline is so live without doing any human labour.” (Sharma, 347,348) The history of varna system has the legacy of thousand years when Aryan conquerors invaded upon non-Aryan races and these Indian indigenous people had been subdued by them and placed them in a shudras position and subsequently, they were debarred from sharing the religious and social activities of the Indo-Aryans.

Dalits are systematically deprived and segregated. Sukhadeo Thorat is quoting: “In 60% of Rajasthan villages surveyed, dalits are not hired to cook midday meals. In 25% of 555 villages surveyed nation-wide, dalits were paid less wages; in 35% they were not allowed to sell goods at village markets; and in 47% of villages they were not allowed to sell milk to cooperatives. No wonder dalits have lower human development and higher poverty levels.”

The study in 11 States shows the prevalent discrimination and social exclusion. “The question is why dalits and adivasis, categorised as scheduled castes (SCs) and scheduled tribes

(STs), have poor access to resources that directly and indirectly determine the level of income. Why their ownership of agricultural land and non-land capital assets is low compared with non-SC/STs. Why unemployment rates are high compared with non-SC/STs. Why daily wage earnings of SC/STs in non-farm activities are lower compared with non-SC/STs. Why literacy rates and education levels are much lower when compared with non-SC/STs.” (Thorat’s article) This show the SCs/STs is not enjoying the equal rights and healthy treatment like the mainstream community. They are deliberately excluded and discriminated.

The Incidents of Social Exclusion

Rohith Vemula, a dalit research scholar at Hyderabad Central University hanged himself (18th January, 2016) due to social exclusion and discrimination attitude of the educational institution. It has created nationwide uproar against the caste base discrimination which has taken away the precious life of dalit research scholar. Uma Devi, dalit a poetess, scholar, UGC Net pass and awarded PhD degree and taught Tamil literature in college even though she was not selected by Madras University in permanent post. The fellow who selected has not passed ‘Net’ and even non-PhD. This is the absolute discrimination, apathy towards dalits in educational institution and cases of social exclusion.

The incidents that are taking place in day to day showing dalits are not considered human beings and they are obstructed from enjoying the basic rights, amenities as enjoyed by their counterpart. They do not seat in Panchayat office, do not enter in village temples, do not stretch water from public wells, and do not drink tea and snacks like other upper caste people. The study of Ghanshyam Shah in 1996 shows the pathetic condition of dalits of Gujarat. “Open or subtle untouchability is practised at panchayat meetings in 30% of the villages. The seating arrangement in panchayat offices is common for all members, but there is a tacit convention whereby certain seats are marked for SC members. Though tea and snacks are served to everyone, separate plates and cups are reserved for SC members, and they are stored separately. In most village temples, 75% of SCs are not allowed to enter beyond the threshold, though they may worship from a distance. Many villages with large numbers of dalits have constructed temples in their localities to avoid confrontation.” (Quoted in Thorat’s article)

Bhikhabhai Senma, 65, a landless farmer, resident of Lakshmipura-Bhandu village, taluka visanagar in Mehsana, home district of CM Anandiben Patel is not permitted to build a toilet at his home because of the opposition of village dominant upper caste. ‘For over two years, a Dalit family at Lakshmipura-Bhandu village in Mehsana district has been struggling

to build a toilet for itself but can't do so, owing to the alleged opposition to it by some local upper-caste people. With no toilet, the family is forced to defecate in the open, sometimes as far as half a kilometre away from where they live.' (Indian Express, 5/2/2016, p.3) See, the indifferent attitudes of authority that the basic facility a poor dalit family could not access. They could not construct a toilet itself. Bhikhabhai said, "The Chaudharys of the village always try to intimidate his family by using their "influence". They even pick a fight if we try to begin the construction work for toilet. So, now we have dropped the idea since we cannot fight with them. We have approached a number of authorities, including the State Human Rights commission, but nothing has happened." The Chaudharys has made PIL to Gujarat HC to evacuate the entire family house of Bhikhabhai Senma under the pretext of encroachment on gauchar land. This is social exclusion, denial of basic rights.

The three young dalits have been killed in 2012 by police firing at Thangadh town of Surendranagar. Till today, no one is punished and State government is trying to shield accused. RTI activist Kirit Rathod has filed RTI application to get the inquiry report made by Sanjay Prasad, Principal Secretary, Social Justice and Empowerment Department of the Gujarat state. But government is not giving report and saying the report may harm sovereignty and integrity of the country and incite hatred among sections of the society. Kirit Rathod said, "Government is trying to shield accused involved in the killing of dalit youth by not making this inquiry report public. Dalits have always kept their faith in constitution and never resorted to violence." (Times of India, 2/2/2016, p.3) This is stark reality of our Indian society and State government. This show the discrimination towards dalits is prevailed.

Dharmaj (Anand district) known as the "village of NRIs" is in news the reason behind it, is the majority dalits of the village, nearly 250, have left it because of the intimidation of Patidar community. Last year in November, 2015, the district and taluka panchayat election held in which three dalits were contesting from Bahujan Samaj Party. Patidars directed dalits not to cast vote in favour of BSP. Reva Rohit, 77 year old dalit man said: "They (Patel villagers) first abused us with casteist slur. They then beat me and my family, which frightened us and most of our community fled the village. Only 24 of 274 dalit families remained here." The serious matter he expressed is very shocking: "I have never voted in my entire life. Every election, the vote on my behalf. Do we not have rights?" On 29 November, the Patidar community created ruckus at Rohitvas and atrocities inflicted on them. "One man, Purshottam Rohit (65), was beaten as he was going to vote, and the ambulance wasn't allowed to take him for treatment." Dina Rohit, a worker of the NGO Navasrjan, says atrocities on dalits are common here. She said: "They don't speak out as they fear losing daily-wage work on the

tobacco farms of Patels. Even if a dalit farmer has land, he would grow tobacco and that trade is also dominated by Patels. So they fear harassment by way of blocked payments.” (Indian Express, 9/12/2015, p. 4)

In village panchayat, dalits has to suffer social exclusion and discrimination even they have been elected. Kantibahi Chavda, former Sarpanch of Meda Adaraj village of Kadi taluka in Mehsana district elected as Sarpanch. Being a dalit he has to struggle lot to seat on chair of Sarpanch. In open market, dalits has to suffer discrimination and economic blockage. The village milk co-operative society of Khaladi village, Mahudha taluka in Kheda district, is not accepting the milk of dalits (valmiki) and humiliating them. The complaint had sent by registered post and lastly the village society is accepting the milk of dalits. (Abhiyan, 34, 35) The social exclusion, discrimination is not averted the nation would not progress. Untouchability and caste system is the root cause of our decline as a nation and we could not stand united unless it has been eradicated. Dr. Ambedkar said at Mahad Conference, “untouchability is not a simple matter, it is the mother of all our poverty and lowliness and it has brought us to the abject state we are in today... Hindu society must sink unless the untouchability that has become a part of the four-caste system is eradicated.”(Dangle, 231) Today, social exclusion of dalits, oppressed and marginalised still going on even after the 65 years of the implementation of Indian Constitution. It is still practiced in all spheres whether it is political, social, economic, education, health etc. To accept the dalits with candid heart is the prime necessity of the day. We cannot make successful voyage with leaky ship. We must have to celebrate birth anniversary of Dr. Ambedkar with inner change of our heart and to refrain from ill-will, caste slur, discrimination, hegemony and snobbish culture.

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