

CASTE AND OTHER FORMS OF SOCIAL EXCLUSION: A SYSTEMATIC LITERATURE REVIEW

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ABSTRACT

The caste system constitutes a social hierarchy and discrimination, notably prominent in South Asia, particularly in India. Within the field of social sciences, there is a consensus regarding the fundamental characteristics of social exclusion, the primary markers that indicate it, and the resulting effects it has on human impoverishment. This paper, through comprehensive literature survey, explores how the institution of caste enables certain groups of people to exclude other groups in terms of access to economic, political and social rights. Moreover, other forms of discrimination, viz. gender, religion, tribe, ethnicity, regional; their channels of discrimination and how they are different from aspect of caste is explored. Finally, this paper sheds light on the class-caste debates and these two forms of discrimination are interlinked.

Keywords: *Caste, Social exclusion, channels of discrimination, social classes*

INTRODUCTION

The caste system is a form of social hierarchy and discrimination that is particularly prevalent in South Asia, especially in India. In his work “Annihilation of Caste”, Dr. Ambedkar expressed the view that democracy is fundamentally a method of collective existence and shared experiential communication. It is fundamentally a mindset characterized by esteem and admiration for other individuals. In his renowned critique of the idea of Hindu Rashtra, Ambedkar stated that regardless of the Hindu perspective, Hinduism poses a significant threat to the principles of freedom, equality, and brotherhood. It is incompatible with democracy (Ambedkar, 1944).

Caste is inherent in the relationships of production and acts as a hindrance to the advancement of productive capabilities, while also serving as a barrier against the revolutionary removal of ruling classes. This age old hierarchical institution has functioned as a tangible force to the extent that it has captivated people’s thoughts. The primary ideological purpose of the contemporary world is to establish, either through force or internalization, a recognition of social hierarchy that is determined by inherited status. Its aim is to deter any revolutionary efforts against the harsh and detestable forms of oppression and degradation that are prevalent in the Indian society at present (Ramachandran & Swaminathan, 2014). Even after 77 years of independence, the practice of untouchability¹ is widely present in Indian villages (Thorat S. , Hindu Social Order and the Human Rights of Dalits, 2004). The documentation of the structure and function of caste as a predominant social order has earned greater visibility in the present

times, it is a major discourse where academics, political and social activists, and journalists amply contribute to.

TABLE 1. OVERVIEW OF THE FORMS IN WHICH UNTOUCHABILITY IS PRACTISED IN RURAL INDIA, BY DEGREE OF PREVALENCE, FROM A SURVEY CONDUCTED IN 2001-02, AND REPORTED IN (SHAH, MANDER, THORAT, DESHPANDE & BAVISKAR, 2006)

More than 50% of villages
Denied entry into non-Dalit houses
Bar against sharing food
Denied entry in places of worship
45-50% of villages
Denied access to water facilities
Denied cremation and burial ground
Not allowed to sell milk in cooperatives
Denied hair cutting services
30-40% of villages
Schools: separate seating
Denied access to irrigation facilities
Separate seating for self-help groups
Cannot sell things in local markets
25-30% of villages
Separate seatings in panchayets
Denied entry into police-stations
Denied entry into shops that are run as part of public distribution system
Forced to stand before 'upper'-caste men
20-25% of villages
Paid lower wages for same work
Ban on festival processions on road
15-20%
Discriminatory treatment in post offices
Denied entry into Primary Health Centres
10-15% of villages
Ban on wearing dark glasses, smoking etc.
Separate lines on polling booths
Less than 10% of villages
Forced to seek marriage blessings from 'upper' castes
Forced to seek 'upper' castes' permission for marriages

Source: Extracted from (Ramachandran & Swaminathan, 2014)

(Thorat S. , 2004) through his comprehensive village studies brings out the actual magnitude of the practice of untouchability and atrocities. These efforts were meant to document direct discrimination; among which the most important was the study of (Shah, Mander, Thorat,

Deshpande, & Baviskar, 2006). The results of their exhaustive survey, conducted over 18 months in 2001, in 565 villages and 11 states of India has been presented in Table 1.

Social Exclusion and Poverty

Within the field of social sciences, there is a consensus regarding the fundamental characteristics of social exclusion, the primary markers that indicate it, and the resulting effects it has on human impoverishment. Social exclusion refers to the state in which an individual is unable to engage in the fundamental political, economic, and social activities of society (Buvinic, 2005). This leads to the exclusion of certain groups from equal chances, due to the application of certain criteria or limits by other groups in society. Social exclusion is characterized by three main attributes. Firstly, it impacts culturally defined groups; secondly, it is ingrained in social relationships, where groups are partially or entirely excluded from complete involvement in the society they reside in. Furthermore, social exclusion has detrimental effects on an individual's rights and access to fundamental necessities essential for a satisfactory quality of life (Sen A. , 2000). The consequences of social exclusion, such as reduced income and increased poverty, are determined by the functioning of society, economy, and politics. This influence reflects in a network of social relationships and the extent to which these relationships promote exclusion and discrimination. The concept of group emphasis in social exclusion acknowledges that individuals are excluded based on inherent characteristics rather than personal accomplishments. These characteristics are beyond an individual's control or accountability (Buvinic, 2005).

(Thorat, Sabharwal, & Thorat, 2014) asserts that in instances of group exclusion, individuals who are part of a specific social or cultural group are excluded solely based on their cultural identification, rather than their individual characteristics or traits. The act of excluding an individual is fundamentally distinct from the act of excluding a group. Both individuals from excluded and non-excluded groups frequently face exclusion from economic and social possibilities due to unique causes that pertain to them personally, rather than being based on their sociocultural group identity. For example, people may be denied unemployment benefits due to insufficient education and skills. Individuals may experience educational exclusion as a result of insufficient qualifications or their inability to afford a costly education. Some individuals may be unable to access input and consumer marketplaces due to insufficient income and purchasing power. Conversely, when it comes to excluding groups, social and cultural identities serve as a basis for exclusion.

The economic discrimination, which leads to a lack of ownership of income, earning assets, employment, and human skills like education, is caused by the discriminatory functioning of different market and non-market activities. Market discrimination is implemented by imposing limitations on market access and/or by selectively including certain individuals or groups. Discrimination can also occur due to disparities in how individuals are treated in both market and non-market transactions. This includes transactions involving agricultural land, as well as other goods and services required for corporate operations. Discrimination can also be observed in employment and credit markets, as well as in educational and healthcare institutions.

Caste, Ethnicity, Religion and Other Forms of Identity: A Tool for Social Exclusion

Social exclusion in India is primarily driven by societal institutions that systematically exclude and discriminate against certain groups based on factors such as caste, race, religion, gender, disability, regional identity, and other similar characteristics, to varying degrees and in various ways.

The institution of caste is directly linked to the social marginalization of Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Other Backward Classes (OBCs). The core characteristic of the system was the establishment of preset and unchanging social and economic rights for each caste, accompanied by limitations on mobility. This resulted in the implied and enforced exclusion of one or more castes from enjoying the civil, economic, and educational privileges that were available to other castes. Exclusion within the realms of civic, educational, and economy is an inherent aspect of the caste system, and a direct result of its governing principles. The fundamental controlling concept of the caste system, however, is not solely inequality, but rather a system of hierarchical inequality, which entails an unequal distribution of rights among different castes. Due to hierarchical inequality in the right to write, every caste (except for the upper castes) experiences varying levels of denial and exclusion. However, not all suffering castes experience the same level of hardship. There is variation in the amount of suffering experienced by different individuals. The loss of rights, is not distributed evenly among different castes groups. As an individual descends the caste ladder, their rights and privileges diminish. Implicitly, the castes positioned at the lowest rung of the social structure, such as the former 'Untouchables', endured the greatest amount of suffering. While the OBCs did not experience the same level of 'untouchability' or social isolation as the SCs, they have historically encountered exclusion in areas such as education, work, and other specific domains.

Low caste converts to Islam, Christianity, Sikhism, and Buddhism, including the Untouchables and OBCs; who also faced various forms of discrimination, as many aspects of the Hindu caste system persisted among these communities. India has acknowledged the challenges faced by erstwhile untouchables who converted to Sikhism and Buddhism, as well as the issues faced by OBCs who converted to Islam. As a result, reservation regulations have been extended selectively to include converts to Sikhism and Buddhism. The issues faced by the erstwhile untouchables who embraced Christianity and Islam remain unresolved. Regarding religious minorities, certain groups, especially Muslims, experience discrimination based on their religious beliefs in various areas, which is seen in their low achievement in terms of human development indicators. Similarly, women experience gender discrimination, which can vary in degree depending on factors such as caste, class, and religious background. Another notable category consists of the Scheduled Tribes (ST), which includes semi-nomadic tribes and denotified tribes. These groups experience both physical and social isolation and are excluded from mainstream society.

Evidently, several segments of Indian society have experienced social isolation in diverse manifestations. The reasoning of these exclusion also differ, as does the type of discrimination. As a result of differences in the types and areas of prejudice, the implications of deprivation and poverty vary due to the different forms and scopes of discrimination. (Thorat, Sabharwal, & Thorat, 2014)

Forms and Channels of Discrimination

The act of excluding persons based on their caste, race, gender, and religion is seen in the hindered ability of discriminated groups to engage in unrestricted and fruitful interactions with others. This also hinders their complete involvement in the economic, social, and political aspects of the community. Lack of full citizenship or the refusal of civil rights (such as freedom of speech, adherence to the law, and access to justice), political rights (the right and ability to participate in political decision-making), and socio-economic rights (such as the right to own property, secure employment, and receive education) are crucial aspects of a life marked by poverty (World Bank, 2006).

In (Thorat & Sabharwal, 2010) study, social exclusion based on caste, race, religion, or gender was examined in terms of its manifestation through both market and non-market channels. They conceptualized social exclusion as the process by which individuals or groups are marginalized or excluded from society due to these factors. Firstly, it is important to address how exclusion creates specific anxieties experienced by various social groups, such as the exclusion of lower castes by the higher castes, tribals by non-tribals, or religious minority by the majority. Certain social groups may be completely excluded from employment, both in the private and public sectors. This exclusion can also extend to the sale and purchase of factors of production, such as agricultural land and non-land capital assets needed for businesses, as well as various services and inputs required in the production process. Additionally, exclusion may occur in the sale and purchase of consumer goods and other related areas. Complete exclusion can also arise in situations involving social necessities, such as education, housing, health services, and other services provided through non-governmental channels (either government or government-approved agencies).

Furthermore, there is a practice of selectively including certain groups while treating excluded groups differently. This is evident through the variation in prices charged or received for goods and services. This includes the cost of inputs and consumer goods, the cost of components of production, such as wages for human labour, the cost of land or rental fees for land, interest on capital, and rental fees for residential houses. This may also encompass the costs or charges imposed by governmental entities for services, such as water, electricity, and other commodities and services.

Moreover, the negative inclusion based on caste and ethnic obligations and duties is manifested mostly through excessive workload, resulting in a loss of personal freedom and leading to a state of bondage or attachment for the concerned individual/group. Additionally, it is also evident in the unequal treatment experienced by individuals at their workplace.

Consequently, there is a practice of excluding individuals from certain employment categories and services based on their previous untouchable or Scheduled Caste (SC) status, particularly if they were involved in occupations considered 'unclean' or 'polluting' such as scavenging, sanitary duties, and leather processing. This refers to an additional form of exclusion or discrimination that individuals from certain castes experience due to their status as Untouchables. Finally, being excluded from participating in decision-making processes in local panchayats, which consequently affects the allocation of funds (Thorat, Sabharwal, & Thorat, 2014).

Class and Caste Debates

One of the primary criticisms against Marxist scholars arises for overlooking the concept of caste, as caste does not align with social class but may hold greater significance than class in explaining the current social structure and dynamics. (Patnaik U. , 1987) acknowledges that the caste system is unquestionably unique to India and shows no signs of diminishing with industrialization. This demonstrates its remarkable ability to endure and adapt. However, it is important to recognize that neither phenomenon can be comprehended independently or separately from an understanding of the fundamental importance of production relationships. To fully comprehend the origin and historical purpose of caste in India, it is imperative to examine its economic foundation. Consequently, the evolution of the caste system over the last couple of thousand years must be intricately linked to the shifts from one method of production to another. D.D. Kosambiⁱⁱⁱ attributed the origins of caste to the Aryan's shift from pastoralism to a food-producing economy during the late-Vedic and post-Vedic periods. This transition occurred alongside the conquest and assimilation of non-Aryan tribes, two of which, the "*dasa*" and "*sudra*", became associated with the broader concept of the Indian helot. Similarly, the exploitative treatment of conquered Slav tribes gave rise to the contemporary meaning of the term 'slave'. The protracted shift towards food production, occurring between around 800 B.C. and A.D. 400, was characterized by a simultaneous shift from tribal organization to a caste system. Kosambi asserts that the caste system, along with the Hindu religion, which reflects the assimilation of tribal culture, as well as the centralized absolute monarchies from the Maurya to the Gupta periods, was necessary due to the material needs of increasing food production in a challenging environment. The ensuing continuous expansion of sub-castes or '*jatis*' and the ongoing growth of the Hindu pantheon of deities demonstrated the evolving specialization of tasks within the established village, together with the ongoing assimilation of tribal influences. The practice of marrying within one's own tribe and sharing meals together, known as tribal endogamy and commensality, has now evolved into caste endogamy and commensality within the new economy centred around food production.

(Patnaik U. , 1987) asserts that the ongoing phenomenon of incorporating indigenous food gatherers into a food producing economy through exploitative means can still be witnessed in the limited number of tribal areas that remain. As food gatherers and shifting cultivators see the destruction of their previous surroundings, they are assimilated into the existing social structure of the community as outcastes, who perform labour for others, or as members of yet another lower sub-caste. (Patnaik, 1987) asserts that the issue of cost remains significant today, but it is fundamentally similar to the continuation and adjustment of hierarchical or ranking systems that originated before capitalism in many other countries undergoing capitalist industrialization. The formal monarchy and peerage in Britain, along with the intricate social hierarchy that helps govern social conduct, are notable characteristics of a country that led the way in capitalist industrialization two centuries ago and is the oldest capitalist nation in the world (Patnaik U. , 1987).

In India, capitalism was introduced as a foreign-concept, and was not well-received. However, the pre-capitalist hierarchical system, known as the caste system, still persists and adapts to new roles. However, the analysis of its nature and functioning cannot be separated from the character of India's economic development path after Independence.

“Any meaningful application of much used sociological concepts such as ‘mobility’ or ‘sanskritization’ must necessarily be circumscribed by an analysis of the extent to which capitalist industrialization is occurring. Caste mobility today is a direct reflection of that spatial and occupational mobility of sections of the work-force which is a characteristic feature of the growth of capitalist production. Conversely, in rural areas with the elements of such capitalist production are initially relatively little developed, traditional caste oppression may be deliberately maintained and utilized in a process of development – as when high-caste capitalist landlord reinforce their economic exploitation of Harijan labourers by using the latter’s Harijan status to browbeat them into a cowed and submissive labour force, thus making organization that much more difficult.” (Patnaik, 1987).

CONCLUSION

Caste is ingrained in production relationships and hinders productivity and the revolutionary elimination of ruling classes. This ancient hierarchical system has attracted people’s thoughts and the modern world’s main ideology is to establish inherited social order through force or internalization. Most of the social scientists agree on the main aspects of social exclusion, its markers, and its effects on human poverty. Social exclusion occurs when a person cannot participate in societies’ political, economic, and social activities. This excludes certain groups from equal chances because other groups use particular criteria or constraints. Three characteristics define social exclusion. First, it affects culturally defined groups; second, it’s rooted in social ties, excluding groups from society. Social exclusion also affects rights and access to basic essentials needed for a good existence. Social, economic, and political factors impact the effects of social exclusion, such as lower income and poverty. This influence shows how social interactions foster exclusion and discrimination.

According to Thorat & Sabharwal (2010), social exclusion based on caste, race, religion, or gender occurs in both market and non-market channels. Due to these circumstances, people are marginalized or excluded from society, which they called social exclusion. First, exclusion causes distinct anxiety for different social groups, such as lower castes by higher castes, tribals by non-tribals, or religious minorities by the majority. Certain social groups may be barred from private and public employment. This exclusion includes the sale and acquisition of production components such agricultural land, non-land capital assets, services, and inputs needed by businesses. Exclusions may also apply to consumer products sales and other areas. Social services including education, housing, health care, and others supplied by non-governmental groups can potentially lead to complete marginalization.

According to Patnaik U. (1987), the caste structure is unique to India and would not disappear with modernization. Its resilience and adaptability are extraordinary. Neither phenomenon can be understood without grasping the fundamental relevance of production connections. She argues, caste remains a major problem, but it is analogous to the maintenance and adjustment of hierarchical or ranking structures that existed before capitalism in many other capitalist industrializing nations. Britain is the oldest capitalist nation in the world and led capitalism industrialization two centuries ago. Its monarchy and peerage and complex social structure influence social behaviour. The foreign concept of capitalism was poorly received in India. The

pre-capitalist caste system survives and adapts to new functions. Its nature and functioning are inextricably linked to India's economic development following Independence.

1. Untouchability is a discriminatory practice rooted in the caste system, where individuals belonging to lower castes, particularly Dalits, are socially ostracized and denied basic rights. This practice involves exclusion from public spaces, denial of services, and degrading treatment, perpetuating severe social and economic inequalities in India and other regions.
2. D.D. Kosambi, *The Culture and Civilization of Ancient India in Historical Outline* (Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1965)

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