

Dalits in the frame of Exclusion and Inclusion

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Abstract

The term social exclusion has been a popular concept in the contemporary scholarship and largely in the domain of sociological and in the studies related to poverty and discrimination. The prominence of the concept of exclusion and inclusion is undoubted due to primary focus in understanding the processes of exclusion not only in finding ways of participation in everyday life but also the way state as a mechanism functions. If French academia attempted to examine social exclusion for the abused, alcoholic, destitute women then the context becomes obvious to be examined but the moment the context changed, there is demand to examine the new context. For instance India as a nation state faces various forms of challenges that has always hindered the process of inclusion in every walk of socio-economic spheres. This paper attempts to examine the case of Dalits in a pocket of the state of Jharkhand where the process of urbanization has not only helped to establish the identity and occupation of Dalits' more prominently but also new forms of discrimination in a modern city gets established. Social exclusion is the term used to describe what happens when people or areas are excluded from essential services or every day aspects of life that most of us take for granted. Socially excluded people or places can become trapped in a cycle of related problems such as unemployment, poor skills, low incomes, poverty, poor housing, high crime, bad health and family breakdown. The paper does examines such process of exclusion is visible and observed in several new and smart cities with a blurring death of the old forms of discrimination in the life of peoples living at the margin of the society.

Keywords: *Exclusion, Discrimination, Inclusion, Dalits, Occupation*

Introduction

Caste is perhaps the oldest form of social stratification in India. Sanctified by religious texts and solidified through norms of inter-marriage and inter-dining, the caste system essentially orders different groups in the Hindu Indian society into an occupation-based hierarchy. The Brahmans and Kshatriyas at the top undertake relatively “purer” tasks (teaching and ruling respectively). They are followed by the Vaishyas (traders) and at the bottom the Shudras and the erstwhile untouchables who engage in demeaning and stigmatized occupations (scavenging or dealing in bodily waste, for instance). In functional terms, thousands of jatis or sub-castes are the operative units.

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.

The situation of Dalits has undergone dramatic transformation over time. Compensatory policies like reservations in public education and employment and protective legislation like the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989 have aided this process; and a history of protest movements has amplified the voice of Dalits. Some argue that economic growth and processes such as migration have transformed caste by providing new opportunities for Dalits to move away from their traditional, ritually impure occupations (Prasad 2008, 2009a, 2009b). But these changes come across more strongly in micro level evidence and do not add up to a consistent national picture. In national level data, the outcomes for Dalits remain poorer than those for other social groups (with the exception of the Scheduled Tribes (STs)).

While caste has had significant implications for poverty and other welfare outcomes, this note focuses on two arenas—education and the labor market. This is because education and occupation both had ritual significance in that they were the preserve of upper castes. Dalits were usually illiterate, landless and were meant to serve in “impure” occupations passed down through generations. Our analysis based on the National Sample Survey (NSS) data suggests that there has been expansion in education among Dalits, but not at the same pace as among the upper castes. In the two decades after 1983, Dalit men registered a 39 percentage point improvement in post primary attainment. But this was still lower than the growth registered by non SC/ST men (56 percentage points). Similarly, Dalit women showed a 21 percentage point improvement in post primary attainment between 1983 and 2004–05—lower than the 38 percentage point improvement registered by their upper caste counterparts over the same period. Moreover, dropout rates were high. The 11th Five Year Plan indicates that about 74 percent of Dalit boys and 71 percent of Dalit girls dropped out of school between grades 1 and 10 (Government of India 2008).

Micro studies continue to document discrimination against SC students. Even today discrimination against SC students by teachers and by upper caste parents is common in some parts of the country (Nambissan, 2010). Dalit children are particularly excluded in situations involving the sharing of food and water and prayers i.e. areas otherwise considered permeable to “pollution” by lower castes. Further, given a history of prejudicial treatment, there is also a high likelihood of Dalit students internalizing a strong expectation of failure. Experimental studies confirm the importance of such belief systems. For instance, using controlled experiments with students in a village in Uttar Pradesh, Hoff and Pandey (2004) find that SC students perform poorly in schools if their caste is made salient. This suggests that there are factors beyond the demand and supply of education which militate against the success of Dalit students.

In the labor market, Dalits remain largely in casual labour. We look at labor force participation rates (in self-employment, in regular jobs and in casual work) separately for

men and women in rural and urban areas and find that overall Dalits are slightly more likely to participate in the labor force than non SC/ STs. Dalit disadvantage really plays out in the kind of work Dalit men and women do when employed. Historically, Dalits have remained landless and while some states in India have implemented land reforms after independence this has not been the norm. This has meant a preponderance of Dalits in casual labor. From the NSS we find that, in 2004–05, over 41 percent of Dalit men and 20 percent of Dalit women were engaged in casual labor as opposed to 19 percent of non SC/ST men and 8 percent of non SC/ST women. Moreover, the decline from 1983 had been miniscule, when about 44 percent of SC men and 27 percent of SC women had been employed as casual labor.

What about salaried jobs and non-farm self-employment? Despite the fact the Dalit women's labor force participation rates are much higher than those of their non SC/ST counterparts. But women in India are generally excluded from regular jobs and from non-farm enterprises, with only about 3 and 5 percent women being employed in the two types of employment respectively. Given these small proportions, there is little scope for variation and Dalit women are not significantly more disadvantaged.

In spite of the benefits of public sector employment, Dalit men still lag behind non SC/STs in regular Dalit men: Greater likelihood of Casual Labor in rural areas, lower likelihood of self-employment in urban areas. The salaried work and not many "graduate" out of casual labor in self-employment either. Compared with about 17 percent of non SC/ST men, a little more than 13 percent of SC men were regular salaried workers in 2004–05. Also, not many Dalit men had moved to non-farm self-employment, as would have been expected during India's period of rapid growth. While the proportion of Dalit men in non-farm enterprises increased slightly from 11 to 15.6 percent between 1983 and 2004–05, the shift was modest, at best. In comparison, the proportion of non SC/ST men in the non-farm sector rose from 16.4 to 24 percent over the same period. This disparity is reflected in our multivariate analysis as well. Controlling for a number of household and individual characteristics and place of residence, we find that Dalit men are 4 percent less likely in rural areas and 10 percent less likely in urban areas to be self-employed in the non-farm sector than non SC/ST men (see figure 1).

What makes for such few Dalit entrepreneurs? Micro studies across India suggest that Dalits are still slotted into their traditional occupations, which are manually based and really a form of low level wage employment (Thorat, 2007). Those who do think of moving into self employed ventures fail to do so out of fear of social pressure and potential loss of sub-caste networks that serve as sources of mutual insurance (Munshi and Rosenzweig, 2005, 2006). Second, to circumvent their disadvantages in building networks across social groups, Dalits tend to strengthen their internal bonds and use these for economic purposes (Loury, 1999).

The recent India Human Development Survey (2010) reports that only 12 percent of Dalit households had access to two or three contacts in the formal sector in 2005 compared with 26 percent among forward caste households (Desai et al 2010). Dalits also lack access to credit, markets and raw materials. This means that, even among the Dalits who are self-employed, a

majority remain in low-end manual trades (e.g. street vending) that do not require much capital or raw material to start up. The few that try out something new are limited by their initial conditions. As Jodhka and Gautam in their background paper on Dalit entrepreneurship for the Social Exclusion report sum up: “Despite several positive changes, caste continues to play a role in the urban economy, and for the Dalit entrepreneurs (studied) it was almost always negative. Dalits lacked economic resources, but even when they had economic resources, they were crippled by a lack of social resources” (Jodhka and Gautam, 2008: 25).

Wage differentials between Dalits and others are a testimony to their continued disadvantage in the labor market. The wage distribution among salaried Dalit workers may be similar to that of general caste workers at the bottom and middle quantiles, but differences appear at the top quantiles (figure 2). Decompositions of the wage differential reveal that 59 percent of the earnings gap may be accounted for by discrimination i.e. differences in returns to endowments like education rather than in the endowments, e.g. the education level itself. Wage inequalities may also be explained by the fact that, even in the public sector, Dalits are concentrated in low-end jobs. In 2006, almost 60 percent of the sweepers in central government ministries were SCs. Das and Dutta (2008) in a background paper for the Social Exclusion report call this horizontal segregation “glass walls”. And there are glass ceilings as well, which make Dalit workers obtaining high-status, better paid jobs difficult. Education is considered a panacea to poor labor market outcomes and overall it has positive effects for all men. How much does it help? We find that, on average, returns to education seem to be lower among Dalit men than among others. In fact, education appears to disadvantage Dalit men in rural areas.

This anomaly perhaps reflects three things: first, that all men with education in a rural, primarily agricultural context are penalized; second, that Dalit men feel these effects more if they have post-primary education; and third, that growth of jobs in rural areas has not kept pace with the increase in the supply of educated Dalit men. In urban areas, education increases the likelihood of participating in the labor force for all men, but the effects among Dalit men are not statistically significant. Here, there are several studies to suggest discrimination, particularly in hiring by the private sector (Deshpande and Newman, 2007). It would nevertheless be naïve to dismiss the changes in caste dynamics, more so over the past two decades. Economic opportunities today are very different from those at any other time and the expanding economic status of many Dalits in the wake of migration and increased urbanization has helped break down to an extent old caste norms, and has strengthened Dalit confidence and collective self-esteem. In fieldwork conducted for the Social Exclusion report, Surinder Jodhka, professor at Jawaharlal Nehru University, returned to two Haryana villages after nearly 20 years and found that by and large Dalit families no longer engaged in traditional caste occupations. Instead, they went out of the village to work and expressed dissent against the traditional caste order by refusing to work as attached laborers to their erstwhile patrons. As one respondent from a backward caste in a Haryana village told Jodhka (2008, 26): “No one (backward caste) cares for anyone simply because he thinks he is a chaudhary (dominant caste). Chaudharies, if they are, they must be in their homes. We do not care.” Kapur et al (2010) reports similar shifts in Uttar Pradesh.

Attendant to the economic changes, social movements asserting the power of Dalits have swept some states and have given Dalits a sense of political voice and agency. The most visible transformations have been in the political arena, first with movements around Dalit identity and dignity and later with Dalit parties winning state elections. While Maharashtra and the southern states were early pioneers, by the end of the 20th century social protests had gathered strength in the Hindi belt as well. These movements along with electoral wins for Dalit parties (such as in Uttar Pradesh) have enabled the establishment of a political identity for Dalits to an extent that no other excluded group has been able to replicate. In sum, we find that despite localized changes, there have been modest changes for Dalits in the aggregate. The space for mobility has probably been limited largely due to the initial conditions for Dalits (for instance their lack of assets, poor access to markets and social networks and so on). Yet caste is far from the immutable frame that Weber (1958) seemed to suggest it was. It has, in fact, evolved and mutated in different ways and is reflective of changing economic opportunities and the new idioms of self-assertion that Dalits have gathered over time. The story is more complex and by no means are we seeing the annihilation of caste, as Ambedkar (1936) had exhorted Indians to achieve. Remnants of the system remain, as evidenced in the manner in which the education and labor market operate for the Dalits in India.

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