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Interlinking Discrimination, Poverty and Social Exclusion of Scheduled Castes in Rural India: A Literature Review

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Abstract

This paper is an attempt to examine various aspects of the caste-based discrimination practiced against the Scheduled Castes or Dalits in rural areas. It also investigates the practice in the forms of denial of social, cultural, civil, political and economic rights of the SCs, leading to their poverty and social exclusion from their participation therein. The paper is descriptive and analytical in design, based on secondary sources of data. The study is carried out with the help of review of available literature on these interrelated institutional phenomena, which have played crucial role(s) in the life chances of the Scheduled Castes.

Key words: Discrimination, Poverty, Rural India, Scheduled Castes, Social Exclusion

Introduction

All societies in the world are stratified and the Indian society is no exception to this. Being composed of numerous castes, tribes, ethnic and religious communities, with their varying cultural and religious practices, the Indian society is stratified primarily along different belief systems, customs, religions, etc. In India, the Hindu social system is rigidly stratified and divided into numerous castes and sub-castes. This division is constructed on the foundation of hierarchy and graded inequality. Since the Hindu caste system is embedded with numerous castes and sub-castes, numbering in several thousands, each one is placed in the superior and inferior orders in the hierarchy(ies) created on the perception of purity and pollution which is invariably supported by the economic and political power or authority. Not only that, but the members of each caste discriminate those of the other caste in terms of the commensal relations for social interaction and relations of both sacred or religious and even secular in nature. Hence, social stratification and hierarchy give rise to inequality, discrimination, injustice and
exclusion in the extreme form. The uniqueness of discrimination practiced in the caste system can be seen as based on the pursuits of occupations which are clearly categorised as ‘clean’ and ‘unclean’. The clean occupations like carrying out poojas (religious services), teaching, and even owning and cultivation of land relish elevated status and prestige, and are considered as superior, while menial occupations like sweeping, tanning and making shoes, washing clothes, and also cutting hair, etc. are deliberated as unclean and polluting ones; therefore, they are assigned precisely lower and degraded status. The association of sizable section of population with latter type of occupations, since the earlier time, has occasioned into the practice of observing physical and social distance resulting into practice of untouchability against them. Thus, such sections of population, regarded as low castes in the caste hierarchy, have always depended on the upper castes for their survival. Moreover, they did not at all have the right to hold property and acquire education in the past. Subsequently, they suffer from numerous socio-cultural and economic disabilities and ignominies till day. These castes, legally called as Scheduled Castes (SCs), constitute substantial portion (nearly 18 per cent) of India’s total population.

Since the SCs in Indian society were deprived of convinced fundamental rights from the earliest times, they have continued to be socially, educationally and economically backward even today. Because of the basic disparities concerning the SCs and other castes and communities, the Constitution of India recognises the worth of having distinctive and extraordinary provisions to reduce their discrimination, poverty, and to include them in almost all spheres of life. Unfortunately, there is still continuation of their exclusion from the various avenues.

This present study looks at this issues in descriptive and analytical perspective with the help of literature review to focus on the conceptual framework for studying various aspects of caste-based discrimination practiced in terms of denial of rights intended for the SCs, leading to their poverty and further causing social exclusion of them in the form of lack of earning assets and income, access to social development and the benefits of other amenities in rural areas in the country.

Conceptual explanations with review of literature
The discrimination, poverty and social exclusion together or their inter-linkages have not yet been studied in social sciences, though a few studies have attempted to do so but not in a very precise manner (Thorat, 2004). This may be so as the discrimination, and that too in the Hindu caste system and not that prevailing among the inter-religious communities, has fallen precisely in the domain of sociology and social anthropology. Similarly, poverty has extensively been studied by the economist. Since the term exclusion or social exclusion is of a recent coinage, it has sparsely been studied by a few sociologists, economists and political scientists in their specific disciplinary frameworks. Nevertheless, in sociology and social anthropology, studies, discussing caste system in India, have either sparsely or fully analysed the various forms of discrimination of SCs in both rural and in urban regions. So also is the case of poverty of the general population and in particular of the SCs and their social exclusion practised both directly and indirectly. These studies have enquired into the relationship among the three, i.e., how one is both cause and effect of the other and vice versa (Ambewadikar, 2012). We shall briefly review below the available studies on these interrelated institutional phenomena, which have played crucial role(s) in the life chances of the SCs both in past and play even today.

**Discrimination in hierarchical society**

To understand the caste-based discrimination in India, Sharma (1974) has analysed stratification and inequality in India, both in present and past times, in the theoretical, structural and processual aspects, besides considering the varna, caste, family and individual as units of social ranking. The nature and forms of social inequality among the SCs have also been discussed in the rural-agrarian and the urban-industrial contexts. However, according to Fuller (1997), there are diverse and changing understandings of caste and inequality. He articulates that the solution is not to ignore India’s contemporary relations with its past.

Thus to reflect on Indian society, it is divided into a number of hierarchically arranged strata, i.e., groupings, which have assumed numerous historical and cultural variations. In the Hindu society, it is clear that the primary unit is caste. So, the rights and privileges (or dearth of them) of individual are due to their membership of a particular caste. It means that the caste ranking is based on superiority and inferiority, i.e., graded inequality (Ambedkar, 1987a). This has reduced the opportunities, especially privileges and rights as it goes down in the hierarchy of ranking placed in caste system. In caste system the social, cultural,
civil, political and economic rights of every individual caste are secured. The unacceptability of fixed rights as regulatory mechanism which is provided through social arrangements, social interactions and social relations leads to social ostracism through socio-economic penalties. Therefore, ‘the untouchables located at the bottom of the caste hierarchy have much less economic and social rights’ (Ambedkar, 1987b). These untouchables were denied right to hold property and acquire education in the ancient times. Consequently, these communities have suffered from numerous socio-cultural and economic disabilities till day. Thus, the caste system implicates the nullification of equality and freedom, and also basic human rights mainly of the SCs. This is more sharply felt in the rural areas since the peculiar characteristics of caste system are still alive in practical sense and could be observed through naked eyes, though there is no doubt that caste system works in a subtle manner in urban areas also (Ambewadikar, 2016).

In rural areas, the traditional arrangement is very strong and the intensity of their social exclusion is also high; but as in the urban and metropolitan centres the pattern of social intercourse is somewhat secular and enforced by the lifestyles, their social exclusion is minute and qualified ones. They are included with qualified exclusion in social, cultural, political, educational, civil, and employment and economic spheres. In the work sphere, a large majority of them are employed as wage labour, safai karmcharies, and in other degraded and menial jobs to fulfil the purpose of dominant castes and classes in urban areas. In an urban context it was been analysed that SCs were still facing ritual, social and economic disabilities while examining the kind and degree of social mobility among Scheduled Castes (Patwardhan, 1974). The studies in the context of economic reform show that there is wide scale misutilisation of funds meant for development of the SCs in urban areas (Rao and Babu, 1994). Further, it is seen that the existence of vulnerability which has political lineages and caste-based schemes might lead to inflame caste-war or communal tensions rather than creating equalities in the deprived areas of the urban space (Kumar, et. al., 2009).

**Village: structure and change**

The plights of villages can be expressed in the words of Ambedkar who says that, ‘The Indian village is not a single social unit’. Ambedkar further says that, ‘I. The population of the village is divided into i. touchables and ii. Untouchables. II. The touchables form the major community and the untouchables, a minor community. III. The touchables live inside the village and the untouchables live outside the
village in separate quarters. IV. Economically, the touchables form a strong and powerful community, while the untouchables are a poor and dependent community. V. Socially, the touchables occupy the position of a ruling race, while the untouchables occupy the position of a subject race of hereditary bondsman’ (1989, 20-21).

Ram (2008a) also has situated the institution of untouchability and the untouchables in the caste system, specifically in south India. More precisely, he has explained the existing social structure, change and mobility of the Scheduled Castes. It is a fact that both the caste system and untouchability are found to be rigid in the rural areas, compared to urban areas. But now, some changes are taking place in villages also. Today, the structure of villages has further changed with alteration in the relationship amongst the SCs and non-SCs. In villages, discrimination is practiced in variation which is ascribed by non-SCs to SCs. This variation is for poor SCs who face discrimination in a crude form and well-off SCs face discrimination in somewhat subtle form. According to Marriott (1955), these changes, for the untouchables or depressed castes groups, are seen in the form of their fight with the upper and landowning castes. These are also due to some modifications in the interdependency of the castes and in their tendency to find common causes in their economic or political interests. Beteille (1965) says there is change happening in village structure with in terms of caste and class system for power dynamics. However, outside the common causes and interests, members of the dominant castes in villages generally abuse, beat and grossly underpay the non-dominant castes, including untouchables (Srinivas, 1987). Mendelsohn and Vicziany (1998) say that ‘the untouchables or Scheduled Castes in villages are among the very bottom elements of Indian society in both status and economic terms’. They are socially discriminated and are deprived of traditionally owning land, active political participation, entering into trade and business, and particularly, education. They suffer from subordination, discrimination and poverty in relation to public policy and the role of the State. As the various related policies are half-heartedly implemented and are not much effective, the huge majority of them again remain undeveloped. Ram (2008b) also has discussed the nature and forms of social discrimination of Dalits in different regions of India. He has explained their assertions and movements in the existing socio-economic and political arrangement.

State policy for the SCs
Because of the continued fundamental disparities between the SCs and non-SCs, the Constitution of India recognises the necessity for distinctive and extraordinary provisions related to the protection of SCs as stated earlier. The Reservation or Positive Discrimination is carried out as corrective and ameliorative measures (policies, programmes, laws, rules) for removing the cumulative disadvantage of socially, educationally and economically disadvantaged SCs, and bringing them at par with rest of the population. This positive discrimination has been initiated to provide the opportunities in social, cultural, civil, economic and political spheres which were denied to them for centuries. But these positive measures are unable to fully emancipate the SCs from the legacy of their historical background. The caste occupation with the considerable amount of degradation, has become their identity, which usually remains with them even if they change their occupations (or even religion). Hence, economic opportunities remain stagnant for the SCs and are unable to bring them out of their poverty.

There are various constitutional provisions to overcome inequality, discrimination and poverty of the SCs. These provisions have been implemented through the two fold-strategies or measures, namely (a) anti-discriminatory or protective measures, and (b) developmental and empowering measures. Such policies vis-à-vis measures or interventions are legal enforcement of anti-discrimination laws, reservations or preferential measures in education, employment and political participation through membership in lower Legislative Assembly, Parliament and local political bodies. In addition, measures have also been adopted to ensure food security, housing, civic amenities, etc, which come as part of more than anti-poverty programmes (Thorat, 2004). Constitutional and legislative mechanisms have adequately been provided and laws enacted. More specifically, the constitutional and legislative mechanisms to reduce discrimination against the SCs are the Protection of Civil Rights Act, 1976 (Amended version of the Untouchability Offences Act 1955), the Bonded Labour (Abolition) Act, 1976, the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989, the Employment of Manual Scavengers and Construction of Dry Latrines (Prohibition) Act, 1993 and the various land reform Acts. Right to Equality includes the Abolition of Untouchability (Article 17), according to which ‘Untouchability’ is legally abolished and its practice in any form is forbidden. The enforcement of any disability arising out of ‘Untouchability’ shall be an offence punishable in accordance with law. Right against exploitation includes promotion of educational and economic interests of Scheduled Castes, and states that ‘the State shall promote with special care the educational and economic interests of the
weaker sections of the people, of the Scheduled Castes, and shall protect them from social injustice and all forms of exploitation’.

But it is not enough to set up a structure for justice and equality, there is a critical prerequisite to formulate and essentially activate the extraordinary measures to uplift their status. Although the Government has adopted a hypothetically potential mechanism known as Scheduled Caste Sub Plan (SCSP), earlier called as Special Component Plan for the economic empowerment of the SCs (Government of India, 1999-2000 & 2000-2001). Besides, it has initiated a number of poverty reduction programmes (PRP) like Public Distribution System (PDS), Small Farmers Development Programme (SFDP), Marginal Farmers and Agricultural Labourers Programme (MFALP), National Rural Employment Programme, Rural Landless Employment Guarantee Programme, Employment Assurance Scheme, and Accelerated Rural Water Supply Programme. The government has also adopted a scheme called Mahatma Gandhi Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme for the eradication of poverty of the Scheduled castes. The Jawahar Rojgar Yojna (JRY) and Integrated Rural Development Programme (IRDP) have recently been renamed as Jawahar Gram Samridhi Yojana (JGSY) and Swaranjayanti Gram Swarozgar Yojana (SGSY). These programmes assist the marginal and small farmers, agricultural labourers and artisans of the SCs, besides others, with funds in minor irrigation, livestock purchases and alike, through the grants and loans provided by the government at the subsidised interest rates. The Panchayat, a village level statutory organisation, has also been made directly responsible for implementing the poverty reduction programme (PRP) (Ambewadikar, 2012).

As mentioned above, the government has also attempted to evolve the schemes to improve the access of the SCs to the public distribution of food, civic amenities like housing, drinking water, sanitation, electricity and approach road. Because the settlements of the SCs in rural areas are mostly separate out, often the civic amenities have unsuccessful to arrive to their localities. Further, a special assistance is, therefore, given to the state (Under the Special Central Assistance of the Special Component Plan for the SCs) to guarantee the delivery of these amenities to the SCs.

Needless to say the problems faced by the SC women would have occupied a special place in the government programmes. But in every programme linked to economic empowerment, educational development, etc., special focus on the SC
women is not adequately given. Through several ‘credit-based subsidy projects’, self-help groups, education projects, projects to reduce malnutrition, etc. are specifically designed and implemented for the SC women. Despite the constitutional provisions and development schemes, the socio-economic status of the SCs in general and their women in particular has not yet improved. This is due to the deep embedded social structure and its manifestation in most human interactions (Jain, 1981 and Sakshi Human Rights Watch, 2000). ‘The possibility of poor SC females continuing to surpass the barriers of poverty, discrimination and patriarchal structures are also needed to be addressed to make the scheme incentive oriented’ (George and Naseem, 2010).

**Ramification of the state policy**

In the economic spheres, in spite of the policies, the SCs are marginal especially in the economic sphere, compared to the non-SCs in rural India. According to Shah (2001), a vast majority of the SCs are have-nots, i.e., landless agricultural labourers, small and marginal farmers and artisans. Problems of the SCs in villages are socio-cultural and economic. The reasons behind their being landless are given by Nanchariah (2000) who says that ‘the high percentage of their landlessness could be due to their weak resource position and also the discriminatory working of the land market, which reduces their access to purchase and leasing of agricultural land’. Thorat (2004) also substantiates this point by saying that the landless SCs are allowed to work for undesirable and low-paying jobs. Even the labour market has discriminatory working for the SC workers, producing low employment rate and low wage earning. He says that the SC households generally are in less-remunerative occupations like agricultural labour. It has also been said that there is no occupational mobility as there is lack of job choice for the SC individuals.

**Educational Facilities**

The low occupational status and low wages leading to poverty among the SCs are to be considered the main impediment of their educational attainment. The National Commission for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, through its Reports for 1999-2000 and 2000-2001, has tried to comprehend the SCs’ educational status. It affirms that ‘they are deprived and discriminated in educational field, causing their high drop-out rate. The SCs’ drop-out rate during 1990-91 was as high as 49.35 per cent at the primary level, 67.77 per cent at the middle level, and 77.65 per cent at the secondary level’. This was largely the case
in rural areas. The other reason for drop-out is the location of schools. Jeebanlata Salam (2004) says that ‘the schools, in many areas, are situated in localities inhabited by dominant castes, which are hostile to students belonging to the lower castes. Members of the high-ranked castes groups and the dominant actors of villages often see education for the working and labouring castes as a waste and also a threat to them’. Further, ‘This denial is linked to the popular perception that members of the low ranked castes are incapable of being educated. If they are educated, they pose a threat to the village hierarchies and power relations’. Apart from these, the other discriminatory behaviour also causes problems in their receiving education. The differential treatment by teachers, peer groups and as well as by the society criticise them to low self-esteem, severely affecting their performance in school and causing them to drop-out in large numbers. For the poor SC students, the Mid-Day Meal is an incentive to attend the schools. But Thorat and Lee (2005b) say that ‘there are reports of massive scale exclusion and discriminatory treatment in operation of the Mid-Day Meal in schools’. This concludes that the SC children, attending lower levels of schooling, remain at greater risk of being poor. Further there is non-allocation of funds by the state to the Scheduled Castes Special plan in the proportion required for the development of the SCs (National Commission of Scheduled Castes, 2004-05).

Health Security

In the health sphere also, the SCs are having low access to the nutritional and health services, provided by the state or even otherwise, due to their poverty, illiteracy and low educational level and discriminatory practices. The National Family Health Survey (NFHS) has also found that ‘there is significant difference between the Scheduled Caste children and non-Scheduled Castes / Scheduled Tribes children in the infant mortality, child mortality and under-five mortality rates’. According to NFHS-2 India (1998-99), ‘more than three-fourth of the SCs children are anaemic, and about half of them suffer from malnutrition and under nutrition’. ‘Higher deficiency of nutrition and higher percentage of anemia women and children in SC families than general population indicates lower health status of SCs’ (National Commission of Scheduled Castes, 2010-11 and 2011-12). It is revealed that 56 per cent of the SC women are anaemic. Rege (1995) also has stated that the plight of the SC women in rural areas is more of concern regarding their higher health problems because 80 per cent of them are engaged as agricultural labourers. Further, discrimination in all other spheres is due to the fact that untouchability is not the fast fading remnant of our ‘feudal’ past or
contemporary reality (Shah, 2006). For instance, discrimination is also encounter by the SCs in their right to public services like food security, housing schemes, public water supply, post-office services, participation in the village political institutions (village Panchayat), etc. This is so as they are socially oppressed and economically marginalised (Jogdand, 2000).

Now-a-days, the SCs are protesting in villages against their discrimination or rights violation, etc. Since the state machinery like police, judiciary, hospital, etc. is administered by non-SCs, the various government provisions meant for them are less effective. Report of National Commission of Scheduled Castes (2015-16) states that ‘efforts should be made to achieve the assigned target and not spend the SCSP funds on general schemes like road construction, rural telephone connections, electrification as it is done in many states and union territory. The state should give priorities to schemes which provide basic minimum services like primary education, health, drinking water, nutrition, rural housing, electrification and linked roads for SCs villages’. But discrimination against the SCs still continues, in one form or the other, causing their inability to participate effectively in the various functioning of the society. Now, discrimination in villages is visualised in public as well as private spheres of life against the SCs in their accesses to infrastructure and services, social security and protection, public safety, etc. Discrimination against the SCs or scheduled castes, as mentioned above, leads to their cultural and economic exploitation. Thus, they remain socially and economically marginalised. This marginality has further created the trap of poverty for them.

**Poverty of Scheduled Castes**

Thus, it is seen that the SCs are poor and are trapped. The second term to be conceptualised in the present study is poverty. Poverty in general is said to exist when a person or group of people in a particular society cannot attain a minimum level of living and well-being. The ‘minimum’ is dependent upon the prevailing standards of living in the society. As stated earlier, according to Sen (1985), poverty means the absence or deprivation of one or more capabilities that are needed to achieve minimal functioning in society in which one lives. He elaborates on it and reveals that ‘being poor is to be hungry, lacking shelter and clothing, being sick and not cared for, and remaining illiterate and not schooled’. It is therefore, seen that for the SCs it is a creation of livelihood systems, the socio-political and economic system that shape their life chances. The additional
description of poverty by Mehta and Shah (2001) is also appropriate for the SCs. According to them, ‘poverty is the sum total of a multiplicity of factors that include not just income and calorie intake, but also access to land and credit, nutrition, health and longevity, literacy and education, drinking water and sanitation, and other infrastructural facilities’. This situation of pronounced deprivation in the well-being of the SCs is seen for generations together (Thorat, 2004).

If we analyse poverty of the SCs in the context of caste system, it is clear that the upper castes have, since earlier times, subjugated and dominated the SCs, especially in the rural areas, due to their caste-based superiority. Hence, caste has created considerable amount of prejudice and discrimination against the SCs, resulting into their engagement with the occupations that have been rated lower or lowest in the occupational hierarchy, payment of low wages and even unemployment. As a result, a large majority of the SCs even today remain economically poor and face the acute poverty.

The high magnitude of poverty is suffered by the SCs due to majority of them being employed as labour, with low wages, the high rate of them being under-employed and even terms of their employment being most unfavourable, leading to low income among them. This is also reflected in ‘the proportion of persons falling below a critical minimum level of consumption expenditure, what is called the poverty line. In 1999-2000, about 35.43 per cent of SC persons were below the poverty line in rural areas, compared to 21 per cent among non SCs/STs. The nature of their poverty is chronic, inter-generational, and is severely reflected in hunger and even starvation’ (Thorat, 2004).

More precisely, Ambewadikar (in Joshi, 1986 and also Ram, 1988b) argued in his article that ‘the several development schemes like Intensive Agricultural Development Programme (IADP), Drought Prone Area Development (DPAP), Crash Scheme for Rural Employment (CSRE), Small Farmers’ Development Agency (SFDA), Integrated Rural Development Programme (IRDP), etc. have not benefited much to the SCs or Dalits’. Kamble (1982) also has suggested that ‘the Scheduled Castes are economically poor and socially oppressed, and; hence, cannot avail freely the benefits of constitutional provisions made for them due to their economic dependence on Non-Scheduled Castes’ (Ramotra, 2008). ‘These, in turn, lead to a lack of social and political effectiveness of the SCs. By these criteria, the SCs are also overwhelmingly poor people’ (Mendelsohn, and
Vicziany, 1989). Finally, fixing the responsibility of the poor economic condition of the SCs in rural areas, Bimla Thakur (1991) has ascertained that ‘the nexus between the village leaders and corrupt administration was responsible for denial of benefits of anti-poverty programmes to the genuine poor. No doubt, there is corruption at the grass-root level due to which the benefits of the social welfare programmes do not reach the poor strata of the society’ (Ramotra, 2008). These might not cause directly the perennial poverty among them, which gives rise to certain culture of practice.

Thus, it is clear that poverty or economic poverty among the SCs is linked with their culture and social sphere. Social poverty is reflected in the form of timid and subordinated social interactions and relations with the higher or dominant castes or classes of people, low esteemed pattern of behaviour, poor access to education especially the higher and technical as well as professional one, poor health status, lack of access to proper housing, means of communications, etc. All this may broadly be attributed to their economic poverty. Similarly, cultural poverty or poverty of culture means a culture which is placed at the low in a hierarchy of cultures of different classes, ethnic or religious groups and communities, different regions, etc. in a given society. Generally, such culture(s) is not taken note of, or ridiculed and easily dismissed by the dominant culture or by the elite articulation in their cultural discourse. In the case of SCs in India, their specific behaviour becomes part of their culture which, in other similar situation, has been termed by Oscar Lewis as ‘culture of poverty’ (Lewis, 1959). Culture of poverty among the SCs may perhaps be attributed to their powerful past history, which is dominated presently by their contemporaries that narrows down their choice further. Not only that but their specific behaviour is the reaction to the lack of economic opportunities to them, causing lack of their active participation in the contemporary socio-economic processes. It may also be regarded as a symptom of the existing social and structural inequality in spite of various policies and programmes, formulated as per the constitutional provisions, to reduce their discrimination and poverty, as stated earlier. However, as there is continuation of social inequality in almost all spheres of their life, the poor SCs are socially excluded from improving their chances in one sphere or the other.

**Social exclusion of Scheduled Castes**

The last issue examined in this study is of social exclusion. Here, we shall briefly look at some of the available studies dealing with the various dimensions of social
exclusion. The term ‘social exclusion’ originated some quarter century ago, though its contents very much existed in the past, and got reflected in the study of the poor and the marginalised people of the world. Social exclusion implies the exclusion of individuals, groups or communities from participating in certain significant functions or activities in society. René Lenoir (1974) is the initiator of studying social exclusion, as he has used the term to identify the excluded people who happened to be ‘mentally and physically handicapped, people with suicidal tendency, aged persons unable to effectively perform any productive role, abused children and abusers, delinquents, single parents, multi-problem households, marginals, asocial persons and other social ‘misfits’ in France’ (referred in Sen, 2004). De Haan (1997) explains social exclusion in terms of ‘the denial of equal opportunities imposed by certain groups of society upon others’. This leads to their inability ‘to participate in the basic social, civil, political, economic and cultural functioning of the society’. Similarly, Silver (1994) has identified that the people may be excluded from ‘earning their livelihood, secure permanent employment, property, credit, land, housing, minimal or prevailing consumption levels, education, skills and cultural capital,…etc.’ Yet, at the analytical level, Sen (2004) clarifies social exclusion by distinguishing the ‘constitutive relevance’ of exclusion from that of ‘instrumental importance’. He also differentiates between ‘unfavourable exclusion’ and ‘unfavourable inclusion’ and ‘active and passive exclusion’.

Further, Gore and Figueiredo (1997) explain, at the wider plank, exclusion from participation in the functioning of a society. In their words, it is the ‘loss of rights associated with work… and with their long-term unemployment and breakdown of social ties and disaffiliation.’ In other words, social exclusion takes away forcefully rights of the excluded people at various levels, which results into the lack of their knowledge and participation in the various activities. However, the term social exclusion was conceptualised, nearly three decades ago, in the industrialised societies of the west and it may not be the same for many of the developing societies. For that reason, it is questionable whether the same can unqualifyingly be applied in developing societies as well. In this regards, Atkinson (1998) clarifies that ‘in the industrialised societies, the concept of ‘social exclusion’ is related to the welfare State where the formal employment is quite advanced technologically. But in the developing societies, the concept is related to the ‘basic capabilities’, risk aversion, vulnerability and sustainable livelihood’. He says further that ‘the people are considered ‘excluded’ in such societies not just because they do not have a current job or income, but because
they have few prospects for the future’. Thus, it is clear that one cannot look at social exclusion of certain individuals or groups in isolation, but in their circumstances in relation to rest of the people in a society in which they live. The ‘relativeness’ is, hence, an element to comprehend the concept of social exclusion.

More so, Burgess and Stern (1991) are of the view that applying the concept of social exclusion in the developing societies appears to be practically not feasible because of the lack of a well-formed welfare State, although a number of individuals or groups may be treated as ‘socially excluded’ on the basis of their exclusion from social security measures in whatever forms these are available there. That means, the people who do not achieve certain minimal standards of facilities related to health, food and nutrition, and education could, thus, be considered ‘socially excluded’. In their conceded opinion, the coverage of the existing social security is very low. The State support for the infirm and disabled people is negligible, the educational support is limited and does not usually extend beyond primary school, the State pensions cover a minority and the subsidised health care is spread very thinly and haphazardly. So, many people in the developing societies are socially excluded. But the study of Burgess and Stern does not look into the root-cause of social exclusion of certain groups and communities as such from their active participation in certain social and cultural practices and traditions existing in the developing societies.

The need to modify the concept or conceptual understanding of social exclusion in the Indian context is emphasised by Rodgers, Gore and Figueiredo (1995). More precisely, they have dealt with the conceptual issues in terms of relationship among social exclusion, basic needs of people and their deprivation. They have synthesised the ideas in relation to social design to reduce social disadvantage of the people in India. Further, Appasamy and others (1996) have examined social exclusion as disaggregated location (urban and rural), gender, age, income level, asset-base, religion and caste. In fact, he has concentrated on the dimensions of health, education, housing, water supply, sanitation and social security. He has also mentioned about the percentages of people with no access or inadequate access to each of these avenues, which are their human rights. He says that social exclusion is to be defined in terms of exclusion from a few basic welfare rights. But the question remains as to how to overcome the social exclusion of the deprived people. In this regard, Percy-Smith (2000) provides a context by discussing policy responses for social inclusion of the socially excluded groups.
and communities to overcome their social exclusion. Here, the dimensions of social exclusion are related to labour market, poverty, education and training, health, housing, access to services, political participation and the poor access to the urban resources. For policy formulation on recession of social exclusion, Abrams and others (2005) have drawn attention to social psychology theory and research on social exclusion and inclusion. The rationale provided by them is to understand inclusion and exclusion at different levels by involving different types of processes provided in social psychology.

The need of social partner like ‘State’, alongwith the intervention of ‘the community’, for overcoming social exclusion of the deprived people is stated by Byrne (1999). According to him, there is a possibility of social agency to be evolved at the level of the individuals or households which can initiate social action to change the life course. Hills (2002) also has made an attempt to formulate the effective social inclusion policies by understanding and analysing social exclusion. In the same vein, Raquel Sosa Elizaga (2002) states that ‘the responsible action of the State and society is must to achieve equality, equity and tolerance in diversity as the foundations for a higher social construction’. In the case of SCs, Shah (2001) says that they are deprived of the power that would have ensured them the physical strength and security, self-respect and dignity, and economic independence and equal opportunity in all activities.

Like, it is seen that unemployment and unequal treatment in wage payment, unfair terms of work and inadequate access to income earning assets created inequality for SC resulting into high incidence of chronic poverty. Further it is revealed in many studies that the SCs people face discrimination, marginalisation and social exclusion in the public domain governed by the state (Thorat and Senapati, 2007) and also in the most dynamic modern private sector of the Indian economy (Thorat, el al, 2009).

‘There are incidences of the food and nutritional deficiency which is injurious to SCs people and disproportionately to women and children because in the male dominated society, male get traditional preference for food. This also causes malnourishment and starvation deaths amongst the SCs. To mention, the health index indicated an overall improvement for SCs but by a low margin’ (Thorat and Venkatesan, 2005a). This margin further creates social exclusion.
‘Benefits from the public health system have also been uneven across different segments of the society, particularly health benefits not received in an equitable manner, for SCs which is reflected in higher values of Infant Mortality Rate’ (Purohit, 2014). ‘Health services are only a part of the solution, it is food security, education, and housing conditions, including household and environmental sanitation are areas that need to be strengthened alongwith participatory development, strong public commitment, huge resources, and political will’ (Baraik and Kulkarni, 2006).

‘Adequate housing is not just the mere provision of four walls and a roof but also access to basic services such as water, sanitation, clean fuel, electricity, healthcare, education and livelihood, all of which are essential for ensuring dignified life, personal growth and social well-being in a productive society’ (Rizvi, 2011). The national policy guiding the water and sanitation sector in India in the eighth five year plan (1992-1997) emphasised that ‘safe drinking water and basic sanitation are vital human needs for health and efficiency’ and acknowledge that ‘death and disease, particularly of children,… and the drudgery of women are directly attributable to the lack these essential’, particularly in villages. The ninth and tenth plan also broadly followed the directions set by the eighth plan (Purohit, 2014). But it is found that SCs live in crumbling house in higher percentage than Non-SC/ST’s household in urban areas. This indicator of inhabitations forces the community to be in exclusive.

This situation clearly suggests ‘the challenge of school retention of children from vulnerable communities like SCs. The high magnitude of never enrolled, out-of-school children and high school dropout is because of chronic poverty. Educational deprivation of them is because of their historical socio-economic deprivations. The lower participation of SCs in higher education than the national average pulls the country backward’ (Planning Commission Report 2008 and 2013). So State should make efforts to create an atmosphere for higher education for SCs so that there is adequate inclusion of them.

**Conclusion**

The combine economic reform with the social reform for increasing capability towards solving the problems of SCs has made a very meager change in the society. This is seen in terms of nature and forms occupation or livelihood, employment rates, education or literacy rates and poverty rates including health
and education services and denial of security and protection. There is a betrayal of the promises of social policy and created only delusions of security since planning of India has problem of economic, social, political, administrative and international in nature. The approach of State in dealing with social policy must also take into account self-respect and opportunities for development of their capacity, social mobility and change. But it is observed that social policies are unable to encompass the complex social reality and are therefore unable to bridge the gap between policy and practice.

It is revealed in this work that social exclusion, discrimination and poverty of the SCs in the villages have been inter-related, in which their poverty has been an outcome of discrimination practiced against them, particularly in the economic sphere. So, discrimination has also resulted in their deprivation or exclusion from their participation in various other spheres of life. Similarly, both discrimination and poverty together have caused their exclusion from participation in community life as well as their access to public facilities and social development.

From the above literature review, some insights are drawn for understanding the concept of discrimination and its relation with poverty and social exclusion, particularly in the context of Indian society in general and among the SCs in particular. Some of the literature reviewed above are about the causes and consequences of social exclusion, indicating the difficulty in challenging social exclusion compared to poverty, because it has the shades of discrimination. Such literature would certainly facilitate researcher, to analyse the concepts of and the relationship among discrimination, poverty and social exclusion for the Scheduled Castes in rural India.
REFERENCES:


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