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A Tale Begun in Other Days

Understanding Caste as Social Exclusion in India

by

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A Tale Begun in Other Days

*Understanding Caste as Social Exclusion in India*¹

Prashant Negi²

Keywords: caste system, understanding social exclusion, status of Dalits, dimensions of disparate access and participation, structural dimensions of social interaction and mobility, internalization of inferiority

ABSTRACT:

Caste has remained a subject of intense academic inquiry. Lately, new discourses have emerged under the thematic of 'social exclusion' that simply extend the scope of academic discussion on caste. This paper assumes that such discourses are relatively less applied to understanding the caste system and for the same attempts to juxtapose thinking on social exclusion to understanding caste in India. Thematically, these methodological issues are dealt with by firstly, presenting a brief background to the concept of social exclusion. Secondly, the paper presents select empirical evidence on caste based discrimination to demonstrate marred 'access' and 'participation'; and finally, it explains the inferences drawn from these (empirical) studies with clarificatory remarks from the theory of social exclusion. The purposes of inquiry, therefore, are to accentuate on the 'relational' and 'constitutive' dynamics of caste-based discrimination; to bring out the 'instrumental' importance of caste-based exclusion; and to undertake and effectual analysis of the typology of exclusion. Also, the 'processes', 'agencies' and 'institutions' underlying caste-based discrimination have been looked into from the perspective of the interaction and mutual reinforcement of different dimensions of disadvantage, which incorporates the 'cultural devaluation' of people and groups and explains how inferiority is internalized. Further, the economic aspects of exclusion; creation of multidimensional disadvantage; and the dynamics of social exclusion in social provisioning are also ascertained.

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

SCs	Scheduled Castes
NCSCST	National Commission on Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes
UN	United Nations
EU	European Union
DFID	Department for International Development
STs	Scheduled Tribes
UK	United Kingdom
UTs	Union Territories
PSUs	Public Sector Undertakings
IMR	Infant Mortality Rate
SRS	Sample Registration Survey
NFHS	National Family Health Survey
CMR	Child Mortality Rate
U-5MR	Under Five Mortality Rate
BMI	Body Mass Index
POA	Prevention of Atrocities
PCR	Protection of Civil Rights
MMS	Mid-Day Meal Scheme
PDS	Public Distribution System
ARI	Acute Respiratory Infection

INTRODUCTION

The Caste System

Presently, the caste system in India, as an endogamous organizational system of the Hindus (constituting more than 80 percent of the population) is based on certain principles, which are ascribed, hereditary, differential, graded and religiously sanctified (Olcott 1944: 648-657).

The caste system divides the society into certain jatis [deriving its legitimacy from the varna system (see exegetical note for a detailed discussion on the varna system)], which are characterized by three highly intertwined principles of segregation, division and hierarchy (Dumont 1998: 21).

The varna system prescribes distinctive behaviour patterns, ritual acts, legal punishments, and moral codes for each varna. In the past, the varna system was often viewed as being representative of the caste system. Currently, the system is seen as an indigenous ideological scheme which merges castes into larger status categories or classifications (Fox 1969: 27-45). Srinivas believes that it is the jati and not the varna which is the effective unit of the caste system (Srinivas 1962: 65). This view is also subscribed by Hutton who believes that the varna names are applied to groupings of jatis (Hutton 1951: 66).

The original purpose of caste was to assign rank, worth and interactional limits to functionally and ritually differentiated endogamous clusters of people (Gould 1963: 427-438).

It is a truism that even in contemporary times, caste remains an extremely viable social institution and appears to be an instance where simultaneously old uses have been retained and have demonstrated considerable adaptability. This has been aptly demonstrated by various studies, especially subaltern studies which have seen an upsurge in the recent times.

The Dalits (the word is often used interchangeably for the SCs, erstwhile untouchables or the Shudras) located at the abyss of the caste pyramid are one of the most subordinated, excluded, and marginalized social groups in India. The nature of their deprivation has been, not only, historical, but simultaneously, multiple in nature (NCSCST Sixth Report 1999-2000 and 2000-2001). Presently, the Dalits constitute close to one-fifths of the Indian population – in 2001 according to the Census of India, they accounted for approximately 17 percent or 167 million – nearly, a half of which are children.

Social exclusion between the castes is ensured through endogamous and socially segregated societal relations, which assign differential economic, social, cultural, and civil rights to people governed by the customary rules of the caste system. The forms of stratification, therefore, take anchorage on the social edifice of the caste system and social exclusion between the castes can be viewed as a ‘system of exclusionary closure’ (Hills et al 2002: 1-2), whereby, forms of interaction, assertions of mobility, and claims of accumulating critical human capacities and capabilities by the Dalits are viewed as diminishing the entrenched or the immutable status of the higher castes. Subordination then is enforced through latent, manifest, open or subtle forms of ostracisms, which find legitimacy from the religious ideologies. These forms of stratification and social exclusion are indicative of the relative disparity of the Dalits in India and are manifest in the selected variables presented in this paper.

This paper focusing on the theoretical formulations of social exclusion contextualizes the same towards understanding caste in India. Conceptually, it also explores whether such an analysis will add any value to the existing discourses on caste.

Implicit here is the notion that some typology of social exclusion must be a ‘constitutive’ component and ‘instrumentally’ a cause of diverse capability failures

and reduced life chances associated with caste-based discrimination. The purposes of inquiry, therefore, are to accentuate on the ‘relational’ dynamics of caste-based discrimination; to bring out the ‘instrumental’ importance of caste-based exclusion; to investigate ‘constitutively relevant relational aspects’ of caste-based discrimination; and to undertake an effectual analysis of the typology of exclusion. Also, the ‘processes’ and ‘agencies’ underlying caste-based discrimination have been looked into from the perspective of the interaction and mutual reinforcement of different dimensions of disadvantage, which incorporates the ‘cultural devaluation’ of people and groups and explains how inferiority is internalized. Further, the economic aspects of exclusion; creation of multidimensional disadvantage; and the dynamics of social exclusion in social provisioning are also ascertained.

Thematically, these methodological issues are dealt with by firstly, presenting a brief background to the concept of social exclusion as articulated in contemporary and historical discourses. Secondly, by presenting empirical evidence on selected variables in order to relatively locate the SCs with other social groups and also to understand the structural dimensions of their disparate ‘access’ and ‘participation’: key dimensions of social interaction and mobility. Finally, inferences from quantitative analysis are explained with clarificatory remarks from the theory of social exclusion.

METHODOLOGICAL INQUIRIES INTO CASTE

The caste equation in India has been studied from diverse academic positions, which present competing cosmological claims regarding caste itself; the structural dimensions of caste discrimination; and in relation to the nature, forms and manifestations of caste-based untouchability and discrimination.

Methodological inquiries, founded on various academic traditions, seem to have vacillated on the veracity of caste in India. Initial inquiries into caste, primarily drawn from the Orientalist tradition, lay emphasis on the textual interpretation of caste as depicting aspects of caste, rituals, purity and pollution and their subsequent amalgamation into social and cultural practices (see the works of Friedrich Max Müller and Henry Thomas Colebrooke). With the usage of the term ‘Orientalism’ itself undergoing change with Said (2003) describing it as a pervasive Western tradition expounded as a prejudiced outsider interpretation of the East shaped by attitudes of European imperialism; the notion of caste too continued to be redefined.

Later around 1881, the British Census Commissioners introduced enumeration methods to quantify caste, thereby undertaking a schema never experienced before. The schema held the macrocosmic belief that the essence of ‘the Indian’ was caste itself and that caste presented itself as an indicator of social, intellectual and occupational mobility. The representation viewed as essentially functional and was thus extended for the ‘optimal’ utilization of people with a belief that to understand the constitutive features of ‘the Indian’ or ‘being Indian’; an understanding of caste was central. Such enumerative efforts have been analyzed by various scholars as an attempt to equate caste to the class system; affirming to the wrongly held view that the caste system was a static system of the Hindu social organization; and also that the Caste Census just did not count, but defined and explained. These Indologists argue that the caste system, in stark contradiction to the class system, is not based on economic and political factors and that for a Hindu, the entire cosmological plane differs significantly: the central concern not being economic ranking, but the ability to regenerate to a higher plane of existence during each successive life. Importantly, the attempt to elucidate and characterize caste constituted a significant shift as by doing so the Census became an active participant in the creation and modification of society.

Structuralism was another method, whereby, Indologists attempted to understand caste. Prominently, Dumont (1974) studied caste under a paradigm, the intrinsic elements of which were ideology and structure, dialectical transformational relationship and comparison and cognitive historical approach. Dumont saw caste as a set of economic, political and kinship relationships sustained by religious values. Hierarchy being intrinsic to the system, Dumont postulated the principle of purity-pollution, which he used to explain why various hierarchical segments within the varna system separate (or maintain ritual distance) from one another. Hereditary groups accordingly were both interconnected and distinguishable by patterns of marriage, contact and consummation, division of labour, and hierarchical gradation of status. This claim, it is now contended, is based on tradition and ideology that posits that castes are separate but interdependent hereditary and occupational groups. This being the case, the structural model is silent on how normatively egalitarian religious structures such as Islam and Christianity in India show the existence of castes (Dalit Muslims: the notions of the Ashraf and the Ajlaf and Dalit Christians) among them. It is also argued that this approach, based on idealism, rationalizes caste to represent mystified notions of relative purity and ritual, the understanding of which has varied across region and age. Further, another theoretical position of the anthropological tradition, the historical particularism, claims that unilinear evolution remains an inadequate model for understanding the diversity of human cultures. Cultural learning, the model contends, is unconscious rather than rational cautioning meticulous collection of ethnographic data before generalizing.

Field-based methods drawing from the anthropological and ethnographical traditions began towards the 1940s. The principle proponents of such methods were Srinivas and Marriott. Srinivas' work is significant as it denoted a marked shift in the manner studies on caste were being attempted by the West and validated new intellectual frameworks for understanding the Hindu society. His notion of caste as a social institution was based on its fluid and dynamic nature and his conceptualization of 'sanskritization', 'dominant caste', 'vertical' (inter-caste) and 'horizontal' (intra-caste) mobility remain pertinent to studies on caste even today. Surprisingly, Srinivas limited his work to locally bound sites, the scope of which clearly goes much beyond the village and its institutions: "Srinivas, while a master of microdata, did not apply macrotheory with regularity" (Wadley 2000: 505). Also, anthropological epistemology of studying the 'other' was sharply contrasted with Srinivas choosing to phenomenologically study his own village and even his own self: "It is my plea...that the movement from studying one's own culture or a niche in it, to studying oneself as an ethnographic field, is a natural one" (Menon 1999). Obviously, since such an exploratory foray was largely inconsistent with the dominant and established traditions of research focusing on objectivity and empiricism, it did draw its fair share of criticism in the form of methods and also raised epistemological questions regarding can one study his own village or himself?

Recently, subaltern studies in India led by a section of Indian academics have been advocating a pan-Indian study on caste based on official statistics. In some aspects this social problem oriented research, characterized by increasing statistic usage by the government for policy purposes (Sachar Commission Report, 2006 and the impending Caste Census could be plausible instances), denotes in all probability a significant shift in studies on caste from a cultural studies tradition to transitions tradition.

Kak (1993) writes that caste has been seen often through the dichotomous categories of reductionist logic, which is not often the case. He further argues that the social structure of India is ideologically fragmented and reflects several symbiotic ideologies balanced by economic and political forces. In his opinion, the ideological diversity of the Indian social structure restricts the system to be described by a single theoretical formulation.

However, it may not always be the case to undertake analysis from the perspective of the caste system being analytically descriptive of or applicable to an entire system especially from a post-modernist perspective. The inherent role of analysis per se reflects cogency and the need to generate knowledge. Contextualized in this regard, the historiography of caste in India provides valuable insights.

Clearly, discourses on caste both in its traditional and modern forms have been a subject of intense academic inquiries. Lately, new forms of discourses have emerged under the rubric of social exclusion, which seemingly extend the scope of academic discussion on caste.

UNDERSTANDING SOCIAL EXCLUSION

At the outset, it must be underscored that the elements of a unified theory of social exclusion are “contested” (Hills et. al. 2002: 1). The term seems to be polysemic, superfluous and ‘context specific’ and therefore, is continually redefined giving rise to its diffused connotations.

It, then, comes as no surprise that there are some who feel that the term social exclusion is merely re-labelling of what used to be called poverty (Barry 2002: 13) or even perhaps locate the term as being ‘in search of a constituency’ (Kabeer 2000: 1). Nevertheless, the fact remains that the concept has tremendous fluidity and application in academic discussions and policy debates and is seen to be encompassing a wide range of topical issues – social, economic, political, as well as cultural. Also, the literature on the subject is growing exponentially and its study, as Sen puts it aptly, “is certainly not for the abstemious” (Sen 2000: 2).

It must also be accentuated here that concepts are not mere translations of abstract thought; they always have a history, both in specific form and in relation to their precursors, and for concepts with political salience, that history is always contested. This is particularly true for social exclusion.

The mid-70s initiated a process of intense economic restructuring within the advanced capitalist democracies (Saith 2001: 3). As a consequence, new social problems emerged that appeared to challenge the very assumptions underlying the Western welfare states. Though, universal social welfare policies did insure against risks predictable from shared life cycle, career patterns and family structures; a standardized life course could no longer be assumed. Such economic and social upheavals ushered in shifts in the ‘moral imagination’ giving us new conceptions of social disadvantage such as ‘new poverty’, ‘underclass’ and ‘social exclusion’ (Silver 1995: 58).

Modern usage of the term ‘social exclusion’ seems to have originated in France, even though it was in the practical context of identifying the excluded for policy purposes. The concept in that regard was first articulated by René Lenoir (1974) who – as Secrétaire Etat a Action Sociale (Secretary for Social Action) of the French (Chirac) government – postulated that ‘Les Exclus’ (the excluded or the outcastes) denote people who were administratively excluded by the state or from social protection. It may be emphasized here that governance in France draws upon the Republican tradition, wherein, prominence is given to the organic and solidaristic nature of society and the idea of the state as mirroring the general will of the nation. Exclusion in that regard denotes the rupture of a social bond (also cultural and moral bond) between the individual and society and is viewed as being subversive.

The following were identified by Lenoir as ‘les exclus’:

“mentally and physically handicapped, suicidal people, aged invalids, abused children, substance abusers, delinquents, single parents, multi-problem households, marginal, asocial persons, and other social misfits”.

Thereupon, the list from which people may be excluded has significantly expanded. Silver (1995: 60) noting “a few of the things that people may be excluded from” spoke about:

“a livelihood; secure, permanent employment; earnings; property, credit, or land; housing; minimal or prevailing consumption levels; education, skills, and cultural capital; the welfare state; citizenship and legal equality; democratic participation; public goods; the nation or the dominant race; family and sociability; humanity, respect, fulfillment and understanding.”

The transferability of the concept of social exclusion is particularly predominant in Silver’s conception. She sufficiently establishes that social exclusion has myriad usages and meanings, which explains the conceptualization of social exclusion in terms of poverty and capability deprivation (Smith, Townsend, Sen and De Hann); social closure (Weber, Parkin and Bourdieu); conceptual spectrums of injustice (Kabeer); the idea of citizenship (Marshall) and the idea of justice (Rawls) to name a few. Given the paucity of space, a discussion on these aspects is beyond the scope of this paper.

Social exclusion, with regards to its extensive usages and meanings requires an extensive semantic definition. This has largely been conceded by multilateral organizations at the forefront of working on exclusion/inclusion such as the UN; the EU; the DFID and the Social Exclusion Task Force³, UK. An EU Commission document states “it is difficult to come up with a simple definition” [of social exclusion] (European Union 1992). In fact, most of these organizations do not even wish to get enmeshed in definitional issues. For them, social exclusion presents itself as an extremely viable idea capable of facilitating multi-dimensional discourse and is extremely application oriented.

Also, sociological theorists suggest that every attempt at establishing a typology is inevitably reductionist, and all the more so in the cases of excluded population groups or those facing exclusion. The factors bringing about exclusion – whether originating in individual, family or socio-economic circumstances – are numerous, fluctuating and interact in such a way that, often they end up reinforcing each other (Silver 1995: 59). That is perhaps a reason why social exclusion is sometimes conceptually disaggregated as ‘social’ and ‘exclusion’; for the simple reason that most forms of exclusion are legitimized or reinforced in a given social setting.

Since the concept is expressed in multiple terms such as poverty, destitution, deprivation, discrimination, dispossession, disaffiliation, multidimensional disadvantage, closure, marginality, inequality, distributive justice etc. then the logical question which emerges is *how to define it?* Perhaps the concept could be defined *colloquially* – so that it is used to define every form of social disadvantage or *analytically* – wherein it is used to analyze social disadvantage (beyond poverty) or perhaps *operationally* – wherein it informs actions by institutional actors or even perhaps *in terms of outcomes and dynamic processes* (see DFID Social Exclusion Review, 2005).

I agree, however, with Silver that social exclusion should be defined *onomasiologically*; that is, defining it with reference to more than one term. For the purposes of this paper, a working definition of social exclusion is borrowed from the DFID (2005: 8-10), more so, because DFID is perhaps the only multilateral organization that officially recognizes caste as a form of social exclusion and also because it’s thinking on social exclusion can be contextualized into the discussion. Accordingly, social exclusion is defined as “a process by which certain groups are

³ The Social Exclusion Task Force is an integral part of the government of UKs initiative on tackling social exclusion. Apart from understanding aspects of social exclusion and providing policy inputs, the Task Force, also constitutes, a Cabinet Minister for Social Exclusion, who reports directly to the Prime Minister.

systematically disadvantaged because they are discriminated against on the basis of their ethnicity, race, religion, sexual orientation, caste, descent, gender, age, disability, HIV status, migrant status or where they live". It further states that "discrimination occurs in public institutions, such as the legal system or education and health services, as well as social institutions like the household".

Consequently, social exclusion is conceptualized, on the one hand, as a *condition or outcome*, and, on the other, as a *dynamic process*. As a *condition or outcome*, social exclusion is a state in which excluded individuals or groups are unable to participate fully in their society. This may result from:

- Their social identity (for instance, race, gender, ethnicity, caste or religion); or
- Social location (for instance, in areas that are remote, stigmatized or suffering from war or conflict).

As a *multidimensional and dynamic process*, social exclusion refers to social relations and organizational barriers that block the attainment of livelihoods, human development and equal citizenship. That being the case, social exclusion is governed by:

- Social and political relations; and
- Access to organizations and institutional sites of power.

Sen (2000: 4-5) further adds that this conception of social exclusion has reasonable similitude' with the works of both Aristotle and Adam Smith. Aristotle theorized that "the richness of human life" was unequivocally linked to "the necessity to first ascertain the function of man", followed by an exploration of "life in the sense of activity". Smith correspondingly spoke about certain "necessaries" to lead non-poverished lives characterizing them as being representative of the "ability to appear in public without shame". Accordingly, sufficient value may be placed upon not being excluded from societal interaction: a conception which is a constitutive feature of social exclusion as a dynamic process.

CATEGORIZING THE SCHEDULED CASTES

Given the interchangeable usage of the terms 'Scheduled Caste' and 'Dalit', it is important to underscore the contexts in which both are used and whether they denote convergence in terms of usage and application. Even though, the former categorization is 'official', the latter remains widely used to denote and refer to the former.

The term 'Scheduled Caste' was first proposed as an official nomenclature by the then provincial Government of Bengal to the Indian Franchise Committee in 1932 instead of the generic term 'Depressed Classes'. Apropos, a schedule was appended to the Government of India Act, 1935 which contained a detailed list of these *classes* (note the emphasis on 'classes' and not castes).

Consequent to the promulgation of the Constitution of India, and unless otherwise specified, the term 'Schedule' implies a schedule to the Constitution and 'Scheduled Castes' denotes such castes, races or tribes or parts of or groups within castes, races, or tribes as are deemed under Article 341 of the Constitution to be the Scheduled Castes for the purposes of the Constitution.

Thereupon, the powers of addendum and amendment to the 'Schedule' were authorized to the President of India vide Part XVI Article 341⁴. The President in effect, after due consultation with the Governor [of the respective State or Union Territory as the case may be], issues orders known as the 'Presidential Orders' to notify, modify and amend statutory lists of SCs in India. Article 341 (1) notifies castes to be categorized as 'Scheduled Castes', while vide Article 341 (2), castes can be either incorporated or disqualified from the category 'Scheduled Castes'.

This, however, relates to the 'official' connotation regarding the nomenclature 'Scheduled Castes' and the provisions delineated under the Constitution of India, whereby certain castes could either be promulgated or withheld on exercise of power designated under Article 341 (1) and (2).

How then are castes included or excluded from the said 'Schedule'? Broadly, this criterion is determined by the relative marginality of a respective caste in terms of its social, economic and educational positioning. Emphasis is placed upon the notion of untouchability as the social practices and customs emanating from it are thought to aggravate backwardness among the respective caste under consideration.

Interestingly, the term untouchability offers no official description though its practice against a respective caste has/is utilized to determine whether such a caste could be demarcated as a 'Scheduled Caste'. Despite the looming silence on its definition, untouchability has been legally abolished under Article 17⁵ of the Constitution. Other important constitutional measures relate to Article 15⁶ which prohibits discrimination on the basis of caste, religion, race, sex or place of birth; the Protection of Civil Rights Act, 1955 (Act Number 22 of 1955), which provides penal punishments for the practice of untouchability; and the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989 (Act Number 33 of 1989) promulgated to prevent the commission of atrocities against the SCs and the STs. In the absence of any legal terminology, untouchability could be regarded as a social concept of ritual distancing articulated in social interactions governed by traditions and customs.

The Government of India Act, 1935 stipulates the criteria for determining the social and economic disadvantage of a given caste based on five core tenets. Firstly, the relative social (low) positioning of the given caste group in the Hindu social structure; secondly, its (inadequate) representation in public services; thirdly, the degree to which it participated in trade, commerce and industry; fourthly, whether it suffered from social and physical isolation from the mainstream communities; and finally, whether a large segment of population among the caste group exhibited marginal educational status.

As a corollary, for an understanding of *who is a 'Scheduled Caste'* consider the following:

- Vide Article 341, a person shall be deemed to be a member of a SC, if she/he belongs to a caste declared as SC, for the area of which she/he is a resident, in an order issued by the President of India under the said Articles;
- Only people professing Hinduism, Sikhism and Buddhism shall be deemed to be members of the SC;
- The progeny of SC parents residing in the same area will be ascribed as belonging to SC;

⁴ For more details see Article 341, Constitution of India.

⁵ For more details see Article 17, Constitution of India.

⁶ For more details see Article 15, Constitution of India.

- In case of migration of a SC person, her/his status as belonging to a SC group will only be applicable in her/his home state and not in the state to which she/he may have migrated;
- Matrimonial relations of a non-scheduled person to a SC person will not accord the former a SC status. However, vice versa shall not apply in case a SC person establishes matrimonial relations with a non-scheduled person; in that case, the SC person will continue to be deemed a SC;
- The progeny of parents, one of whom is deemed to be a non-scheduled shall be accorded the SC status;
- If a SC person converts to religions other than those specified (Hinduism, Sikhism and Buddhism) she/he shall cease to belong to the SC. However, if she/he or her/his descendants re-convert to the specified religion, they can be deemed to be a member of the SC only if they are accepted by that respective caste as one of their own;
- A person duly adopted by a SC, in accordance with the law, customs and usage prevalent for a long period, will belong to the SC; and
- For claims as belonging to the SC, the permanent place of residence at the time of issuing of Presidential Orders declaring his caste as SC will be taken into consideration.

WHO IS A DALIT? UNDERSTANDING THE POLYSEMANTIC NATURE OF THE TERM

Now that sufficient emphasis has been placed upon understanding the context and practices of defining SCs; it is pertinent that a similar analysis is undertaken for the category 'Dalit', so often, used interchangeably and generically to denote the SCs and sometimes even extended to denote the entire spectrum of the marginalized.

Louis (2007: 3-4) while elucidating the historiography of the term 'Dalit', affirms its recent origin and initial articulation by Jyotirao Phule in his reformatory efforts for *dalituthan* (empowerment of the downtrodden). His exposition locates the term in its etymological roots also emphasizes on how it was philosophically expressed and incorporated in public discourses.

The study of historical linguistic change as manifested in individual words suggests that the term has its derivative roots in Sanskrit. Accordingly, the term has two implied meanings; one as a "past passive principle" and the other as a "noun". As a past passive principle of the Sanskrit root *dal*, the term implies to "crack, split, and open etc". *Dalna* connotes to "tearing" or "causing to burst" and the term as a corollary means "split, broken, destroyed, scattered and torn". As a noun (*dala*), the term 'Dalit' adds to itself a positive connotation; an obvious process following splitting is "emergence of" or "unfolding itself" similar to the gradual budding of a flower from a seed (*dala-komala*: a lotus, *dala-kosala*: a jasmine). Louis further argues that the origins of the term can be explained by two consistent processes of: "affirmative action" and "assertion". In terms of the former, the term acknowledges "Yes, we are Dalits; we are crushed and broken people" and in terms of the latter, the term affirms "No we will not allow ourselves to be crushed by you the dominant castes anymore".

The philosophical incorporation of the term 'Dalit' in public discourses emanated in the 1960s when Marathi and the neo-Buddhists traditions increasingly substituted the term 'Dalit' with *harijan* (person of Hari, child of God; coined as a euphemism for the Untouchables by Gandhi) and *achut* (an untouchable person). This was in all probability undertaken to express "resentment, dissent and ambition".

Conjoined with subaltern assertions were the philosophical juxtapositioning of the ideological, social and the political movements of Ambedkar. The term was again in widespread usage by the 1970s when the Dalit Panthers used it to assert their “rights and self-respect”. Though, Louis acknowledges that the term ‘Dalit’ is predominantly used to denote the SCs, he also writes that it includes “all oppressed and exploited sections of the society”.

The term, therefore has two connotations; one to denote the SC identity and the other to imply a collective expression of marginality and exclusion (converging for the purposes of collective consensus, assertion and political mobilization). The latter, in all probability, combines various categories – caste, tribe, gender, language, religion, region etc. – of marginalization and does not represent a monolithic whole in terms of identities and the manner in which these identities are perceived by those owing membership to them and how they are articulated.

Normatively, each category/identity (or for that matter even intra-categories) exhibit norms of association, perception, expression and disadvantage as being distinct from one another. Also, the structural forms of disadvantage faced by such categories differ in terms of their nature, agencies and institutional frameworks. While the notions of hierarchy, unequal and diminishing occupational rights, purity and pollution and untouchability are used to signify exclusion related to caste; the terms of marginalization faced by tribes remain characterized by ethnicity, geography and demography.

Oomen (2011) believes that the term ‘Dalit’ is used either in a very narrow or in a very expansionist connotation. Ideally, he adds, the term should be extended to denote only the SCs as they are the only social group with an additional disability. The question, in essence, is of variance in ontological equality: *What is promised by the term and what is delivered?*

Arguably, since the contexts differ in their entirety, the notion of the ‘Dalit’ possibly cannot articulate a collective consciousness based on individual identities, which are shared merely in terms of each being marginalized. The logical question which then arises is *who is a Dalit?* Even if there is an agreement that the category ‘Dalit’ applies to broken, oppressed or fragmented people; it possibly cannot be understood as one symbolizing a shared identity for reasons mentioned above. Of course, what is shared is disadvantage. But then again, the contexts and forms of disadvantage differ and are relative in terms of ‘access’ and ‘participation’ (key dimensions of exclusion).

PROFILING THE SCHEDULED CASTES

This section drawing from various primary sources provides statistical information regarding select human development indicators of the SCs. The variables chosen are not exhaustive, rather indicative of the relative deprivation of the SCs.

DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE

Actual Total Population

According to the Census of India, 2001, the actual total population of the SCs was 16,66,35,700 (16.20 per cent) million. The same in 1981 and 1991 Census’ stood at 10,47,54,623 (15.75 per cent) and 13,82,23,277 (16.48 per cent) respectively. Evidently, in terms of actual numbers, the SC population grew by a substantial 6,18,81,077 between the years 1981 and 2001.

In 2001, the states with the highest concentration of the SC population were Uttar Pradesh (3,51,48,377), West Bengal (1,84,52,555), Bihar (1,30,48,608) and Andhra Pradesh (1,23,39,496). Conversely, lowest concentration of the SC

population was found in the states of Mizoram (272), Arunachal Pradesh (6,188), Meghalaya (11,139) and Goa (23,791).

Among the UTs, the SCs were highly concentrated in Pondicherry (1,57,771), Chandigarh (1,57,597) and Daman and Diu (4,838). The UT with the lowest SC population was Dadra & Nagar Haveli (4,104) with Andaman and Nicobar Islands and Lakshadweep recording nil SC population⁷.

Percentage Share

In 2001, in terms of percentage distribution, while the highest percentage of the SC population was for the states of Punjab (28.85), Himachal Pradesh (24.72), West Bengal (23.02) and Uttar Pradesh (21.15); the lowest percentages were recorded for Mizoram (0.03 percent), Meghalaya (0.48 percent), and Arunachal Pradesh (0.56 percent).

The highest SC population, in the UTs, was for Chandigarh (17.50 percent), Pondicherry (16.19 percent) and Daman & Diu (3.06 percent), while Dadra & Nagar Haveli recorded 1.86 percent and Andaman & Nicobar Islands and Lakshadweep recorded nil SC population⁸.

Population Density

In 1981, the population density of the SCs was 33 persons per square kilometre, which increased to 45 in 1991 and to 51 in 2001. The STs had the least population density at 16 (1981), 22 (1991) and 26 (2001). The General population exhibited (predictably) the highest population density: 159 (1981), 206 (1991) and 237 (2001) respectively⁹.

In 2001, the states with the highest SC population density were West Bengal (208), Punjab (140), Uttar Pradesh (including Uttaranchal) [125], Haryana and Bihar (including Jharkhand) [93]. Simultaneously, the least population density was accounted for by Mizoram (0.01), Arunachal Pradesh (0.07), Meghalaya (0.50) and Manipur (3)¹⁰.

GENDER DIMENSION

Actual Total Population

As mentioned in the preceding section, the actual total population of the SCs in 2001 was 16,66,35,700 of which 8,60,88,760 were male and 8,05,46,940 female. Corresponding figures for the SC male and female population stood at 5,42,10,594 and 5,05,44,029 (1981) and 7,19,28,960 and 6,62,94,317 (1991) respectively¹¹.

⁷ Union Primary Census Abstract, SC Population, Census of India, 1981 and 1991, Series I, Part (ii). Office of the Registrar General of India, Census of India, 2001, Compact Disk.

⁸ Office of the Registrar General of India, Census of India, 2001, Compact Disk.

⁹ Union Primary Census Abstract, SC Population, Census of India, 1981 and 1991, Series I, Part (ii). Union Primary Census Abstract, ST Population, Census of India, 1981 and 1991, Series I, Part (iii). Union Primary Census Abstract, General Population, Census of India, 1981 and 1991, Series I, Part (i). Office of the Registrar General of India, Census of India, 2001, Compact Disk.

¹⁰ Union Primary Census Abstract, SC Population, Census of India, 1981 and 1991, Series I, Part (ii). Office of the Registrar General of India, Census of India, 2001, Compact Disk.

¹¹ Union Primary Census Abstract, SC Population, Census of India, 1981 and 1991, Series I, Part (ii). Office of the Registrar General of India, Census of India, 2001, Compact Disk.

Percentage Share

In 2001, the percentage share of the SC male and female population to the total SC population was 51.66 and 48.34 per cent respectively. In 1991, the figures stood at 52.04 and 47.96 and in 1981 the corresponding figures were 51.75 and 48.25 per cent in that order¹².

In 2001, the percentage share of the SC male population was highest for the states of Mizoram (77.94 per cent), Arunachal Pradesh (58.02 per cent), Haryana (53.50 per cent) and Meghalaya (53.15 per cent). The situation was more or less similar in 1981 and 1991.

In 2001, the only states wherein the percentage share of the SC females was more than their male counterparts were Kerala (51.18 per cent) and Manipur (50.14 per cent). In Tamil Nadu and Chhattisgarh, the percentage share of the SC females was 49.96 and 49.84 percentage points respectively¹³. Clearly, there were more SC males in India than their female counterparts though in most of the states the ratio of the SC female population was about 47 per cent.

In 2001, the highest percentage share of the SC male and female population to the total population was for the states of Punjab (28.85 per cent), Himachal Pradesh (24.72 per cent), West Bengal (23.02 per cent) and Uttar Pradesh (21.15 per cent). In Punjab, the percentage share of the SC male population to the total population was 15.25 per cent, while that for the SC female population was 13.61 per cent. In Himachal Pradesh, West Bengal and Uttar Pradesh, the percentage share of the SC male population to the total population was 12.56, 11.81 and 11.13 per cent, while the percentage share of the SC female population to the total SC population stood at 12.16, 11.20 and 10.02 per cent respectively¹⁴.

Sex Ratio

In 2001, the sex ratio for the SC population was the highest for Kerala (1,048), Tamil Nadu (999) and Orissa (979). The analysis of the 1981 and 1991 data indicates similar trends. The lowest sex ratio in 2001 was recorded for the North-Eastern states of Mizoram (283), Arunachal Pradesh (724) and Meghalaya (882)¹⁵.

LEVEL OF URBANIZATION*Actual Total Population*

In 2001, the actual population of the urban SCs stood at 33,62,4,822, indicating an increasing trend from both the 1981 (16,75,7,631) and the 1991 (25,87,9,480) Census⁷. In 1981, the major concentration of the SC urban population was in the states of Uttar Pradesh (2,45,3,008), Tamil Nadu (1,79,0,631) and Maharashtra (1,41,3,825)¹⁶, while in 1991, the SC urban population was concentrated in Uttar Pradesh (3,45,3067), Maharashtra (3,20,5,838) and West Bengal (2,47,5,206)¹⁷. In 2001, Uttar Pradesh (including Uttaranchal) [4,59,2,845], Maharashtra (3,78,7,827) and Tamil Nadu (3,54,8,614) had the maximum concentration of the SC urban population¹⁸.

¹² Union Primary Census Abstract, SC Population, Census of India, 1981 and 1991, Series I, Part (ii). Office of the Registrar General of India, Census of India, 2001, Compact Disk.

¹³ Office of the Registrar General of India, Census of India, 2001, Compact Disk.

¹⁴ Office of the Registrar General of India, Census of India, 2001, Compact Disk.

¹⁵ Union Primary Census Abstract, SC Population, Census of India, 1981 and 1991, Series I, Part (ii). Office of the Registrar General of India, Census of India, 2001, Compact Disk.

¹⁶ Union Primary Census Abstract, SC Population, Census of India, 1981, Series I, Part (ii).

¹⁷ Union Primary Census Abstract, SC Population, Census of India, 1991, Series I, Part (ii).

¹⁸ Office of the Registrar General of India, Census of India, 2001, Compact Disk.

Percentage Share

In 2001, the percentage share of the SC urban population to the total population was 20.18 per cent, which increased from 1981 (16 per cent) and 1991 (18.72 per cent)¹⁹. Further, in 2001, the percentage share of the SC urban population to the total population was highest for the states of Mizoram, Manipur and Goa at 76.10, 65.35 and 54.94 percentage points respectively. Conversely, the states with the least percentage share of the SC urban population to the total SC population were Himachal Pradesh (6.60 per cent), Bihar (6.67 per cent) and Orissa (11.56 per cent)²⁰.

In 2001, the percentage share of the SC urban male and female population to the total male and female population was 20.31 and 20.04 percentage points (the all India average did not indicate much disparity, though there were regional variations). The states with a high percentage share of the SC urban male and female population to the total male and female population were Mizoram, Manipur and Goa with the percentage share of the SC males being 70.75, 64.61 and 55.37 and SC females being 95.00, 66.09 and 54.50 respectively²¹.

The states with low percentage share of the SC urban male and female population to the total population were Himachal Pradesh, Bihar and Orissa. In these states, the percentage share of the SC male and female population was even lower than their all India share.

The states, wherein, the percentage share of the SC urban female population was more than their male equivalent were Mizoram, Andhra Pradesh, Kerala and Madhya Pradesh. In these states the percentage share of the SC urban female population stood at 95.00, 17.29, 18.30 and 24.49 percentage points, whereas that of the SC urban male population was 70.75, 17.08, 18.20 and 24.46 per cent respectively. Apparently, except for Mizoram, the disparity in urban SC male and female population for Andhra Pradesh, Kerala and Madhya Pradesh was marginal.

EDUCATIONAL STATUS*Literacy Rate*

From 1961 to 2001, the literacy rates for the SCs have been lower than those for the General castes. In 1961, the literacy rates for the SCs were 10.27 percent compared to 27.91 per cent for the General castes. In 1971, the literacy rates increased for the SCs to 14.67 per cent while those for the General castes increased to 33.80 per cent. In 1981, the literacy rates for the SCs increased substantially to 21.38 per cent compared to 41.30 per cent for the General castes. In 1991, the literacy rates for the SCs demonstrated further increase to 37.41 per cent compared to 57.69 per cent for the General castes. In 2001, the literacy rates for the SCs stood at 54.70 per cent compared to 68.81 per cent for the General castes²².

Literacy Rates by Sex and Place of Residence

In 2001, the total literacy rates for the SC population stood at 54.7 per cent of which the total literacy rates for the SC male and female population were 66.6 and 41.9 per cent respectively indicating a gap of about 24.70 percentage points. Correspondingly, the total literacy rates for the General population were 68.8 per cent with the total literacy rates for the General male and female population being

¹⁹ Union Primary Census Abstract, SC Population, Census of India, 1981 and 1991, Series I, Part (ii). Office of the Registrar General of India, Census of India, 2001, Compact Disk.

²⁰ Office of the Registrar General of India, Census of India, 2001, Compact Disk.

²¹ Office of the Registrar General of India, Census of India, 2001, Compact Disk.

²² Union Primary Census Abstract, SC Population, Census of India, 1961, 1971, 1981 and 1991, Series I, Part (ii). Office of the Registrar General of India, Census of India, 2001, Compact Disk.

78.7 and 58.2 percentage points respectively (indicating a gap of about 20.50 percentage points).

The total literacy rates for the SC (Rural) population stood at 51.2 per cent with the total literacy rates for the SC male (Rural) and SC female (Rural) population being 63.7 and 37.8 percentage points (indicating a gap of about 25.90 per cent). Similarly, the total literacy rates for the General (Rural) population stood at 62.6 percent with the total literacy rates for the General male (Rural) and General female (Rural) population being 74.3 and 50.1 percentage points respectively (indicating a gap of about 24.20 percentage points).

The total literacy rates for the SC (Urban) population stood at 68.1 per cent with the total literacy rates for the SC male (Urban) and SC female (Urban) population being 77.9 and 57.5 percentage points (indicating a gap of about 20.40 per cent). Similarly, the total literacy rates for the General (Urban) population stood at 81.8 percent with the total literacy rates for the General male (Urban) and General female (Urban) population being 87.6 and 75.3 percentage points respectively (indicating a gap of about 12.30 percentage points)²³.

Educational Attainment by Age and Levels

In 2001, the percentage share for the SC population for the age group 7-9 (literate without formal education) was 1.2 per cent; for age group 10-14, it stood at 1.1 per cent; for age group 15-19, it stood at 2.5 per cent; for age group 20-24, it stood at 4.1 per cent; for age group 25+, it stood at 7.00 per cent; and for All age groups, it stood at 4.10 per cent respectively. Correspondingly, the percentage share for the General population for the age group 7-9 (literate without formal education) was 1.18 per cent; for age group 10-14, it stood at 1.1 per cent; for age group 15-19, it stood at 1.5 per cent; for age group 20-24, it stood at 3.25 per cent; for age group 25+, it stood at 4.47 per cent; and for All age groups, it stood at 3.36 per cent respectively. Interestingly, the percentage share of the SC population seems to be higher for almost all age groups.

The percentage share for the SC population for the age group 7-9 (upto primary) was 98.80 per cent; for age group 10-14, it stood at 87.5 per cent; for age group 15-19, it stood at 41 per cent; for age group 20-24, it stood at 37.3 per cent; for age group 25+, it stood at 49.5 per cent; and for All age groups, it stood at 61.2 per cent respectively. Similarly, the percentage share for the General population for the age group 7-9 (upto primary) was 98.81 per cent; for age group 10-14, it stood at 84.07 per cent; for age group 15-19, it stood at 29.95 per cent; for age group 20-24, it stood at 27.2 per cent; for age group 25+, it stood at 36.64 per cent; and for All age groups, it stood at 49.54 per cent respectively. A cursory glance at the comparative data, herein, supports the observation that though the percentage share of the SC population was higher than the General population for almost all age groups implying higher enrolment for the SCs at the primary stages of education; they are somehow unable to complete their formal education due to their structural 'exclusion' from knowledge and education in the traditional Hindu society (Nambisaan 2010: 9-36).

The percentage share for the SC population for the age group 7-9 (middle) was nil; for age group 10-14, it stood at 10.4 per cent; for age group 15-19, it stood at 30.2 per cent; for age group 20-24, it stood at 22.4 per cent; for age group 25+, it stood at 17.2 per cent; and for All age groups, it stood at 16.3 per cent respectively. Similarly, the percentage share for the General population for the age group 7-9 (upto primary) was nil; for age group 10-14, it stood at 14.82 per cent; for age group 15-19, it stood at 28.82 per cent; for age group 20-24, it stood at 18.66 per cent; for age group 25+, it stood at 16.11 per cent; and for All age groups, it stood at 16.21 per cent respectively.

²³ Office of the Registrar General of India, Census of India, 2001, Compact Disk.

The percentage share for the SC population for the age group 7-9 (secondary) was nil; for age group 10-14, it was again nil; for age group 15-19, it stood at 20.8 per cent; for age group 20-24, it stood at 17 per cent; for age group 25+, it stood at 13.5 per cent; and for All age groups, it stood at 10.4 per cent respectively. Similarly, the percentage share for the General population for the age group 7-9 (upto primary) was nil; for age group 10-14, it again stood at nil; for age group 15-19, it stood at 29.07 per cent; for age group 20-24, it stood at 20.09 per cent; for age group 25+, it stood at 18.5 per cent; and for All age groups, it stood at 15.12 per cent respectively. The data clearly indicates the disproportionate access for the SCs relative to the General castes for the secondary level, which is interesting given their (SCs) higher percentage share in both primary and middle levels.

The percentage share for the SC and the General population for the age group 7-9 (higher secondary) was nil; for age group 10-14, again it was nil for both the SCs and the General castes; for age group 15-19, it stood at 5.2 per cent for the SCs and 9.59 per cent for the General castes; for age group 20-24, it stood at 12.5 per cent for the SCs and 17.82 per cent for the General castes; for age group 25+, it stood at 5.9 per cent for the SCs and 9.99 per cent for the General castes; and for All age groups, it stood at 4.5 per cent for the SCs and 7.32 per cent for the General castes respectively.

The percentage share for the SC and the General population for the age group 7-9 (under graduate) was nil; for age group 10-14, again it was nil for both the SCs and the General castes; for age group 15-19, it stood at 0.2 per cent for the SCs and 0.41 per cent for the General castes; for age group 20-24, it stood at 1 per cent for the SCs and 1.49 per cent for the General castes; for age group 25+, it stood at 0.6 per cent for the SCs and 1.24 per cent for the General castes; and for All age groups, it stood at 0.4 per cent for the SCs and 0.8 per cent for the General castes respectively.

The percentage share for the SC and the General population for the age group 7-9 (graduate and above) was nil; for age group 10-14, again it was nil for both the SCs and the General castes; for age group 15-19, again it was nil for both the SCs and the General castes; for age group 20-24, it stood at 5.7 per cent for the SCs and 11.47 per cent for the General castes; for age group 25+, it stood at 6.3 per cent for the SCs and 12.72 per cent for the General castes; and for All age groups, it stood at 3.1 per cent for the SCs and 7.64 per cent for the General castes respectively.

The percentage share for the SC and the General population for the age group 7-9 (all literate and educated) was 68 per cent for the SCs and 73.22 per cent for the General castes; for age group 10-14, it stood at 78.50 per cent for the SCs and 83.86 per cent for the General castes; for age group 15-19, it stood at 73.50 per cent for the SCs and 82.12 per cent the General castes; for age group 20-24, it stood at 63 per cent for the SCs and 77.17 per cent for the General castes; for age group 25+, it stood at 39.60 per cent for the SCs and 62.74 per cent for the General castes; and for All age groups, it stood at 54.70 per cent for the SCs and 68.8 per cent for the General castes respectively²⁴.

PUBLIC SECTOR EMPLOYMENT

Public sector in India comprises of the Central Government Services, the PSUs, the Insurance Sector and the Public Sector Banks. The analysis of the data for public sector employment is particularly important as it spans over four decadal periods and is indicative of a lower concentration of the SCs in decision making jobs and conversely their relatively very high concentration in menial jobs despite constitutionally mandated reservation for them in proportion to their population.

²⁴ Office of the Registrar General of India, Census of India, 2001, Compact Disk.

Government Services – 1965-2003

In 2003, the percentage share of the SCs in public sector employment was 16.52 per cent as compared to 77.01 per cent for the General castes²⁵. Though, the stipulated constitutional quota for the SCs (fixed in proportion to their population) is approximately 16.66 per cent; the data for 2003 indicates a marginal gap. In 2003, in terms of actual numbers 5,40,220 SCs were employed in public sector jobs as against 25,17,780 General castes²⁶. Importantly, the figures indicate that the share of the SCs in public sector employment over the years has been consistently increasing. In 1960, 12.24 per cent of the SCs as compared to 85.74 per cent General castes were employed in the public sector, which in terms of actual numbers translates to 2,28,497 for the SCs and 16,00,528 for the General castes.

In terms of percentage share in public sector employment, the data indicates that in 1965, a mere 1.64 per cent of the SCs were employed in Group A jobs as against 97.59 per cent of the General castes. In Group B category of jobs, the percentage share of the SCs and the General Castes stood at 2.82 and 96.56 per cent respectively. Also, in Group C category of jobs, the percentage share of the SCs stood at 8.88 per cent, while that of the General castes was 89.71 per cent. Further, in Group D category of jobs, the SCs were highly concentrated at 17.75 per cent and the share of the General castes was 78.82 per cent.

In 2003, the percentage share of the SCs in Group A category of jobs increased to 11.93 per cent as against 83.88 per cent for the General castes. In Group B category of jobs, the SCs were 14.32 per cent as compared to 81.36 per cent General castes. In Group C and Group D category of jobs, the percentage share of the SCs was 16.29 and 17.98 per cent, while that of the General castes stood at 77.17 and 75.06 per cent respectively (Thorat et al 2009: 267). Interestingly, the percentage share of the SCs in Group D category of jobs from 1965 till 2003 has been fairly high (even higher than the stipulated constitutional requirements).

In 1965, in terms of actual numbers, 318 SCs were employed in Group A category of jobs as against 18,912 General castes. In Group B category of jobs, 864 SCs were employed as compared to 29,567 General Castes. In Group C category of jobs, 96,114 SCs were employed as against 9,70,905 General Castes. In Group D category of jobs, the actual number of SCs stood at 2,01,073, while that of the General castes was 8,81,330.

In 2003, the actual numbers of the SCs in Group A, B, C and D category of jobs stood at 10,256; 26,040; 3,45,718 and 1,58,206 and those of the General castes stood at 72,089; 1,48,002; 16,37,294 and 6,60,395 respectively²⁷.

Public Sector Undertakings – 1971-2004

In 1971, the percentage share of the SCs in PSUs stood at 7.4 per cent, while that for the General castes was 90.3 per cent. However, in 2004, the percentage share of the SCs increased substantially to 16.0 per cent, while that for the General castes decreased to 76.2 per cent (Thorat et al 2009: 268).

In 1971, in terms of actual numbers 40,640 SCs were employed in the PSUs as compared to 4,94,680 General castes. These figures increased to 2,36,618 and 11,24,990 for the SCs and the General castes respectively in 2004²⁸.

²⁵ Annual Report of the Ministry of Personnel, Public Grievances and Pension, 1985-1986, 1989-1990 and 2004-2005, Government of India, New Delhi.

²⁶ Annual Report of the Ministry of Personnel, Public Grievances and Pension, 1985-1986, 1989-1990 and 2004-2005, Government of India, New Delhi.

²⁷ Annual Report of the Ministry of Personnel, Public Grievances and Pension, 1985-1986, 1989-1990 and 2004-2005 Government of India, New Delhi.

²⁸ Public Enterprises Survey, Annual Report, Volume I, 1978-1979, 1988-1989, 1989-1990, 1990-1991, 1992-1993 and 2000-2005, Ministry of Heavy Industries and Public Enterprises, New Delhi.

In 1971, in Group A category of jobs, the percentage share of the SCs stood at a meagre 0.52 per cent as compared to 99.31 per cent for the General castes. In Group B category of jobs, the percentage share of the SCs was 1.54 per cent against 98.3 per cent for the General castes. In Group C and Group D categories of jobs, the percentage share of the SCs and the General castes stood at 5.49 and 15.96 and 93.22 and 78.09 percentage points respectively.

In 2004, the percentage share of the SCs in Group A, Group B, Group C and Group D categories of jobs was 11.48, 11.72, 17.07 and 18.2 percentage points. Similarly, the percentage share of the General castes stood at 85.06, 82.97, 74.79 and 71.27 percentage points for Group A, Group B, Group C and Group D categories of jobs (Thorat et al 2009: 269).

In 1971, the actual total number of the SCs in Group A category of jobs stood at 163 as compared to 31,095 for the General castes. In Group B category of jobs, the actual number of SCs was 549 as against 35,145 General castes. In Group C and Group D category of jobs, the actual total number stood at 19,302 and 20,626 for the SCs and 3,27,526 and 1,00,914 for the General castes respectively.

In 2004, the actual total numbers for the SCs employed in Group A, Group B, Group C and Group D categories of jobs had increased to 20,006; 19,802; 1,41,357 and 55,453 while those for the General castes stood at 1,48,260; 1,40,206; 6,19,364 and 2,17,160 respectively²⁹.

Public Sector Banks – 1980-2004

In 1978, the percentage share of the SCs to the total employees in Public Sector Banks stood at 10.2 per cent compared to 88.2 per cent of the General castes. In terms of absolute numbers, 55,976 SCs were employed in the Public Sector Banks compared to 4,84,784 General castes. Of the 10.2 per cent SCs, the percentage share of the SCs employed as officers, clerks and sub-staffs was 2.04 (2,238); 10.32 (30,775) and 16.25 (22,963) per cent against 97.79 (10,7,232); 87.86 (2,62,112) and 81.67 (1,15,440) per cent respectively for the general castes.

In 1990, the percentage share of the SCs to the total employees in Public Sector Banks had increased to 14.4 per cent compared to 81.4 per cent for the General castes. In terms of absolute numbers, 1,26,974 SCs were employed in the Public Sector Banks compared to 7,17,921 General castes. Of the 14.4 per cent SCs, the percentage share of the SCs employed as officers, clerks and sub-staffs was 9.18 (21,756); 14.22 (66,584) and 21.84 (38,634) per cent against 88.11 (2,08,869); 81.32 (3,80,851) and 72.48 (1,28,201) per cent respectively for the general castes.

In 2004, the percentage share of the SCs had further increased to 17.6 per cent compared to 76.7 per cent for the General castes. Further, in terms of actual numbers, 1,33,685 SCs and 5,81,910 General castes were employed in the Public Sector Banks. Of the 17.6 per cent SCs, the percentage share of SCs employed as officers, clerks and sub-staffs 14.98 (36,914); 16.16 (58,421) and 25.38 (38,350) per cent against 79.14 (1,95,068); 78.76 (2,84,697) and 67.6 (1,02,145) per cent respectively for the general castes (Thorat et al 2009: 270-272).

Insurance Companies

In 1993, the percentage share of the SCs to total employees in Public Sector Insurance companies stood at 13.9 per cent compared to 81.0 per cent for the General castes. In Group A jobs, 8.59 per cent of the SCs were employed as against 89.42 per cent of the General castes. In Group B jobs, 11.61 per cent of the SCs were employed compared to 84.94 per cent of the General castes. For Group C and Group

²⁹ Public Enterprises Survey, Annual Report, Volume I, 1978-1979, 1988-1989, 1989-1990, 1990-1991, 1992-1993 and 2004-2005, Ministry of Heavy Industries and Public Enterprises, New Delhi.

D category of jobs, the percentage share of the SCs stood at 13.24 and 27.09 per cent and the General castes stood at 81.12 and 65.56 per cent respectively.

In 1993, in terms of absolute numbers, 1,023 SCs and 10,646 General castes were employed in Group A jobs. In Group B category of jobs, 1,898 SCs were employed as against 13,891 General castes. In Group C and Group D category of jobs, 8,910 and, 3,034 SCs were employed as compared to 54,598 and 7,342 General castes.

In 2000, the percentage share of the SCs to total employees had increased to 16.6 per cent against 76.8 per cent for the General castes. In Group A jobs, 14.63 (2,374) per cent of the SCs were employed as against 80.80 (13,108) per cent of the General castes. In Group B jobs, 13.97 (2,721) per cent of the SCs were employed compared to 81.63 (15,897) per cent of the General castes. In Group C category of jobs, the percentage share of the SCs was 16.46 (12,645) per cent compared to 76.20 (58,527) per cent for the General castes and in Group D category of jobs, the percentage share of the SCs stood at 25.96 (2,543) percent against 65.56 (6,421) per cent for the General castes respectively (Thorat et al 2009: 273).

HEALTH STATUS

Infant Mortality Rate

According to SRS Survey, the IMR levels of the SCs (127) were higher than that for the General castes (99) and even the all India averages (104). The situation was more or less similar in the IMR levels for the SCs in NFHS-1 and NFHS-2 surveys with the IMR levels of the SCs being 107 and 83 respectively, while those of the General castes being 82 and 68 and the all India average being 86 and 73 in that order³⁰.

Child Mortality Rate

According to NFHS- 1, the CMR level was estimated as 36 per thousand in India; the rate for the SCs (47) was much higher than that for the General castes (35). Even in NFHS-2, the CMR levels for the SCs (40) were strikingly higher than the estimates for all India (31) and the General castes (25).

Under 5 Mortality Rate

The level of U-5MR estimated by the NFHS-1 was 119 with the levels of the SCs (149) being higher than the General castes (112). Even in NFHS-2, the situation was similar with the U-5MR being estimated at 101 for all India and that for the SCs and the General castes being estimated at 119 and 92 respectively.

Nutritional Status among Women

According to NFHS-2, the percentage of women (aged 15-49) with a BMI of less than 18.5 for India was estimated at 36 indicating that one-thirds of Indian women suffer from chronic energy deficiency. The BMI for the SC women was again higher at 42 that that for the General castes at 33 percentage points respectively.

Also, the NFHS-2 estimated the all India percentage of women (aged 15-49) suffering from moderate to severe anaemia at 17 and that of the SCs and General castes at 19 and 15 percentage points respectively³¹.

Nutritional Status among Children

NFHS-1 estimated the all India percentage of undernourished children (under 3 years of age) at 53 implying that more than a half of the children suffer from chronic

³⁰ See for IMR, CMR and U-5MR, the following surveys: SRS Survey, Office of the Registrar General of India, 1989. NFHS-1, International Institute of Population Sciences, 1995. NFHS-2, International Institute of Population Sciences and ORC Macro, USA, 2000.

³¹ NFHS-2, International Institute of Population Sciences and ORC Macro, USA, 2000.

undernourishment. The instance of undernourishment was poignantly higher for the SCs (58) and even the General castes did not fare too well at 52 percentage points. In NFHS-2, though the all India estimates went down by six percentage points (47), the instance of undernourishment among the SC children was particularly higher at 54 per cent while that for the General castes was recorded at 44 per cent.

NFHS-1 estimated the all India average of stunted children at 52 per cent, with the instance of stunting higher among the SCs (58) than the General castes (51). Even in NFHS-2, the instance of stunting was higher among the SCs (52) than their General caste counterparts (43).

The all India estimates for wasted children according to NFHS-1 were 18 per cent. Though, the estimates for wasted children were marginally less than the all India average for the General castes (17), they were still higher for the SCs at 19 per cent. In NFHS-2, the all India average for stunted children was 16 per cent, with the percentage share of the SCs being equivalent to the national average and that of the General castes being marginally less at 15 per cent.

NFHS-2 recorded that at all India level, more than a half of children (51 per cent) under the age of 6-36 months were suffering from moderate or severe anaemia with the incidence of moderate or severe anaemia among the SC and the General caste children being 56 and 49 percentage points respectively³².

Preventive and Promotive Child Healthcare

According to NFHS-1, the all India average of percentage of children (aged 12-23 months) who received all recommended doses of vaccination was 35 with the percentage share of the SC children being as low as 27 per cent and that of the General caste children being 38 per cent. NFHS-2, however, indicated better figures. The percentage of the SC children who received all recommended doses of vaccination was 40 per cent and that of the General caste children was 45 per cent, while the estimated figure for all India stood at 42 per cent.

NFHS-2 estimated the all India percentage of children (aged 12-23 months) who received Vitamin A supplement at 30 per cent of which 27 per cent of SC and 31 per cent of General caste children received Vitamin A supplements.

In respect of the percentage of children (aged under 3 years) with the instance of diarrhoea being taken to health provider, NFHS-1 estimated the national average at 61 per cent. The averages of both the SC and the General caste children were closer to the national average at 61 and 62 percentage points respectively. However, NFHS-2 recorded high percentages of both the SC (65 per cent) and the General caste (65 per cent) children with instance of diarrhoea being taken to health provider than the national average (63 per cent).

In both, NFHS-1 and NFHS-2, the percentage of children (aged under 3 years) with the instance of ARI being taken to health provider was low for the SC children with the percentage for General caste children being even higher than the national average³³.

Maternal Healthcare

In NFHS-1, the percentage of women who received ante-natal check up among the SC (58 per cent) and the General caste (66 per cent) women was higher than the national average (53 per cent). The trend continued for the General caste (69 per cent) women in NFHS-2, however, the percentage share of the SC women receiving ante-natal check up was marginally low at 62 per cent than the national average at 65 per cent.

³² NFHS-1, International Institute of Population Sciences, 1995. NFHS-2, International Institute of Population Sciences and ORC Macro, USA, 2000.

³³ NFHS-1, International Institute of Population Sciences, 1995. NFHS-2, International Institute of Population Sciences and ORC Macro, USA, 2000.

In NFHS-1, the percentage share of the SC women who delivered in health institutions was 16 (27 per cent in NFHS-2) per cent against 29 per cent (38 per cent in NFHS-2) for the General caste women and a national average of 26 per cent (34 per cent in NFHS-2). The same survey recorded the percentage share of the SC women delivering at public health institutions as 11 per cent (16 per cent in NFHS-2), while similar figures culled for the General caste women stood at 16 per cent (17 per cent in NFHS-2). Also, 25 per cent of SC women (37 per cent in NFHS-2) were assisted by health professionals compared to 38 per cent of the General caste women (47 per cent in NFHS-2)³⁴.

CIVIL RIGHTS AND ATROCITIES

Crime, Violation of Civil Rights and Atrocities

In 2000, a total of 5,197 cases were registered for crime, violations of civil rights and atrocities against the SCs. Further, 6,350 cases were registered under the POA Act; 631 under the PCR Act and 10,440 under other offenses. The incidence of crime against the SCs was highest for Uttar Pradesh. In varying degrees, given the nature of the crime, it was high for Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Bihar and Karnataka³⁵.

From 1999-2001, a total of 28,016 cases of crime, violations of civil rights and atrocities against the SCs were registered. In terms of regional variations, the states of Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh indicated the highest numbers of cases, while Assam, Punjab and Maharashtra recorded the lowest numbers of cases being registered against the SCs³⁶.

In 2002, a total of 526 cases were registered under the PCR Act by the SCs. The incidence was particularly high in Andhra Pradesh (65.21 per cent) and Karnataka (19.20 per cent)³⁷.

In 2001, a total of 30,022 cases were registered by the SCs under the POA Act; the figure decreased to 27,894 in 2002³⁸.

UNDERSTANDING CASTE EXCLUSION

To begin with, explaining caste from the perspective of literature on social exclusion remains a rather impossible proposition if caste itself is not understood in its exclusionary dynamics.

Given this orientation, the paper selected key indicators denoting relative disparity in access and participation for the SCs in India. The variables demonstrate the 'strong' and 'weak' (see the work of Viet-Wilson 1998) and 'broad' and 'narrow' (Mitchell 2000: 55-58) versions of social exclusion and hence, enabled the choice of variables in the first place. Wilson's demarcation indicates *who is doing the exclusion* and accentuates upon *ascertaining solutions for the need to enhance further mainstreaming* of the socially excluded while Mitchell's conception of social

³⁴ NFHS-1, International Institute of Population Sciences, 1995. NFHS-2, International Institute of Population Sciences and ORC Macro, USA, 2000.

³⁵ Crime in India 1999-2001, National Crime Records Bureau, Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India.

³⁶ Crime in India 1999-2001, National Crime Records Bureau, Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India.

³⁷ Annual Report on the Protection of Civil Rights Act, 1955 for the Year 2002 (Twenty Second Report), Government of India, Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment.

³⁸ Annual Report on the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989 for the Year 2002, Government of India, Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment.

exclusion correspond to a focus on *how individuals or groups can be economic, political, social and cultural resources and activities and on economic rooted inequalities in work and income.*

Also, the framework of analysis itself was based upon a number of considerations: clear combination of causes; establishing linkages between causes; facilitating multi-method and plural analysis; accentuating upon different aspects of social exclusion; and undertaking a multi-dimensional analysis of social exclusion (for a detailed exposition on this framework see Hills et al 2002).

Social exclusion, given the context, implies lack of integration and is viewed as a process contributing to the relative marginalization of the SCs based on their caste identity.

This section attempts to understand some of the mechanisms that drive processes of social exclusion, by emphasizing on the interaction and mutual reinforcement of different dimensions of disadvantage. In that context, the theoretical conceptions of social exclusion as delineated by Kabeer (2000 and 2006) and Sen (2000) are particularly useful.

According to Kabeer, these mechanisms are: the cultural devaluation of groups and categories and the internalization of inferiority; the economic dynamics of social exclusion; the intergenerational transmission of poverty; and the dynamics of exclusion in social provisioning.

First, the processes of cultural devaluation are key mechanisms through which the social exclusion of certain groups and categories by other dominant groups is perpetuated as a property of societal structures. These processes draw on beliefs, norms, and values to disparage, stereotype, invisibilise, ridicule, and demean 'despised' groups and categories and thereby, explain and justify the denial of full rights of participation in the economic, social, and political life of that society. While cultural disadvantage maybe primarily associated with despised identities, it is often, accompanied by economic discrimination: such groups are more likely to face difficulties in being employed and conversely, in retaining employment. The highly stratified Hindu social order based on the four-fold *Varna* system internalizes certain philosophical ideals within its religious fold – beliefs in the other world; reincarnation; karma theory etc. on the basis of which it assigns unequal and graded rights to the four *Varna*'s. Interestingly, in the *Varna* system, the rights diminish as one goes down the hierarchy ladder. Also, ritual distancing between the *Varna*'s is maintained by prohibition of inter-dining, marriage, social interaction etc., and also by the notion of 'purity-pollution relations' and 'untouchability'. As a result, the lowest *Varna*'s constitute a 'culturally devalued' category facing immense exclusion based on their social (read caste) identity. Such philosophical beliefs being internalized into religion; justify and uphold the practice of the caste system and simultaneously, provide an exegetical explanation of the peripheral status of the lower *Varna*'s. Such processes can have profound effects on the sense of 'self-worth' and 'sense of agency' of those who are treated in this way and on the terms on which they are able to access the resources and opportunities in different spheres of their society. Such processes of social interaction are based on cultural practices which seem to be internalized on principles of hierarchy and therefore, explanative of the *terms of treatment or the degree of fairness or equity in terms of treatment.*

Second, juxtaposed between the economic and cultural forms of injustice are 'hybrid forms' of injustice, which give rise to 'bivalent collectivities': social groups suffering from both, economic and cultural-valuational disadvantage. Gender, race, caste, ethnicity and religion are instances of bivalent collectivities. Different forms of injustice have their own logic and strategic responses. In case of the disadvantage being economic, disadvantaged groups are likely to mobilize around their interests and to formulate their demands in terms of redistribution (which is largely the case for the category 'poor'). Where disadvantage is largely cultural-valuational, the disadvantaged mobilize around the question of identity and demands are formulated

in terms of recognition (the forms of caste assertion and mobility are an instance of this typology). Where disadvantage is hybrid, mobilization encompasses material interests and social identity and demands are formulated in terms of redistribution and recognition.

Third, the economic dynamics of poverty among excluded groups are mediated by the processes of cultural devaluation mentioned above. Economic conceptualizations of injustice according to Kabeer range from exploitation (that is appropriation of labour), marginalization (that is exclusion from the means of livelihood or confinement to poorly paid, undesirable forms of work) to deprivation (that is being denied an adequate standard of living). Amartya Sen, in this context, feels that though deprivation may be to a large extent incumbent upon income, but it is not the single causative influence on the lives that we lead. If we are essentially interested in the kind of lives people can lead; then the freedom to do so and the means to such freedom becomes essential. The concept of social exclusion thus becomes important as it allows the phenomenon of interest to extend beyond non-participation due to lack of material resources. Its measures not only identify those who lack resources, but simultaneously, also those whose non-participation arises in multiple ways – though discrimination, chronic ill health, cultural identifications, geographical locations, etc. By culturally assigning the excluded groups to low paid and demeaning occupations or by assigning ritual ranks to occupations based upon the notions of purity and pollution; the caste system excludes lowest caste groups from ownership of land and key productive assets and relegates them to various forms of labour and services that are considered menial, degrading, and dirty. Economic exclusion as a corollary is mediated by the higher caste groups. Herein, the notions of ‘favourable exclusion’ and ‘unfavourable inclusion’ as developed by Sen become important: certain categories of occupations such as Group D categories of jobs or scavenging are considered to be polluting; the higher *Varna*’s despite being unemployed would ‘favourably exclude’ themselves from such occupations, while ‘unfavourably including’ the lower *Varna*’s in such occupations. Though, the *Varna* system includes the lower castes, again the ‘*terms*’ of their inclusion and the ‘*fairness of treatment*’ meted to them constitutes the problematique.

Fourth, the ascribed status of excluded groups and occupations is one of the instruments through, which poverty is transmitted over generations. Further, limitations on the prospects of occupational mobility are reinforced by a process of circumscribing parental aspirations. Also, the ascribed status of occupations ensures that the progeny inherits restricted life options. This form of social exclusion has also been explained in greater detail by Hills et al who conceptualize social exclusion in terms ‘past’ and ‘present’ capital. Capital accordingly has been characterized as cultural, physical and human.

Finally, the economic vulnerability of excluded groups is buttressed by biased provisioning of basic services, which could in essence improve their life chances. Concomitant to uneven availability of services runs direct provider discrimination. This aspect has also been unequivocally demonstrated from the studies mentioned in the preceding section.

What emerges from the discussion is that social exclusion invariably occurs as a ‘condition and outcome’ based on the social identity and social location of the SCs. Further, social exclusion also seems to be evident in the marred ‘access’ and ‘participation’ of the SCs in social provisioning and civic amenities. These instances also sufficiently points out that the dynamic nature of exclusion as a ‘process’ is based on variegated social and political relations and also incumbent upon unequal access to organizational and institutional sites of power. Also, the structural contexts of caste based exclusion apparently exhibit themselves as a ‘vicious circle’ and a ‘spiral of disadvantage’ for the SCs – for instance, the MMS and the PDS are implemented in the public sphere as integrative, non-discriminatory, and inclusive schemes and the subsequent lack of access and participation for the SCs in both

these public programs just does not imply caste discrimination, but points out to a much larger process of assessing social provisioning based on unequal social positions resulting in cumulative disadvantage for the SCs. They as a consequence are subjected to the tragedy of chronic hunger, unsecured livelihood, and reduced life chances, besides obviously having to deal with strengthening caste hegemonies. Importantly, the multi-dimensionality of social exclusion is particularly evident. For instance, disadvantaged access to education and right to food has causative implications in accessing other dimensions (for instance, reduced mobility in case of securing employment and thereby, income or even while transacting in accessing health).

Caste, therefore, seems to be a condition of disadvantage, though differing in its dimensions for individuals or groups (as in the case of dominant groups). Caste disadvantage analyzed from the perspective of socio-structuralism indicates the existence of a segmented social structure lacking equity of opportunities or of integration. Systemically, given the lack of integrative opportunities, caste can be viewed as an elaboration of differentiation and the consequent regulation of access and participation. Such a discourse, seemingly an elaboration of the class debate, places the responsibility of being excluded squarely on an individual while negating structural and institutional factors.

It is pertinent, therefore, that such factors are considered actively while ascertaining the exclusionary dynamics of caste.

EXEGETICAL NOTE:

The term *Varna* is derived from the Sanskrit word 'vr̥n', which literally translated, means 'to choose'. It is essential to comprehend that a considerable degree of confusion exists regarding the usage of the term *Varna* in its historical connotation and the context in which it is understood today.

Historically, the society was viewed as an organic whole and the *Varna* system, therein, was a system of 'social integration', which arranged the society into a functional whole taking into consideration the individual's aptitudes (*samskaras*) inherited from past lives. Accordingly, the society was divided into a four-tier *Varna* system comprising of the *Brahmans*, the *Kshatriyas*, the *Vaishyas* and the *Shudras* and individuals were characterized, therein, on the basis of their individual propensities. Such an accommodation was based on the innate nature of man and therefore, it was possible for different members of a single family to have differing occupations or *Varnas*. Pertinently, inclusion was intrinsic to the system as it was an essential prerequisite for the maintenance of a stable social structure. In other words, there are reasons to believe that notion of untouchability or caste-based exclusion did not exist within the purview of such a system.

There are schools of thought, on the other hand, which believe that the *Varna* system, based on functional social hierarchies, had degenerated into the present day caste system, wherein, occupational mobility was hereditary and ascribed. Such schools basically propound that the religious scriptures of the *Hindus* from which the caste system derives its legitimacy were interpolated from time to time to perpetuate the hegemonies of the *Brahmans*. It is also considered that with the degeneration of the system, it essentially became exclusionary in nature and the *Shudras* came to be considered as untouchables.

It is extremely difficult to locate the debate in its historicity, but the religious pronouncements pertaining to the caste system do justify and prescribe the detailed precepts of the caste system as it is practiced today.

For a detailed discussion on the *Varna* system see also *Purusha sukta*, *Rig Veda* 10.90 and Chapters 1 B 2 and 1 B 3 of the *Manusmiriti*.

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