

Reflections on Theories of Social Exclusion And Inequality: A Case from India

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ABSTRACT. Social exclusion exists in all societies irrespective of its economy. People generally misunderstand rising inequality in society with a failure to make economic progress. In slowly growing and stagnant economies, a widening gap between rich and poor does indeed entail an increase in social exclusion. But even in fast-growing economies, social exclusion is possible and quite normal. This is to say that rate of economic growth is not the only factor deciding nature and degree of social exclusion. Given that, social exclusion is usually defined by a combination of factors. It is possible to be a part of a single demographic group only, and to be socially excluded. Nevertheless, a theme common to most, if not all, definitions of social exclusion is that social exclusion is multidimensional. "Social exclusion is about more than income poverty. It is a short-hand term for what can happen when people or areas face a combination of linked problems, such as unemployment, discrimination, poor skills, low incomes, poor housing, high crime and family breakdown. These problems are linked and mutually reinforcing" (SEU, 2004). Most promising theory of equality which fits the concern of social exclusion is the, relational theory. On this theory, what matters is the relation in a society, or to create a society in which there is equal respect, regardless of whether there is any actual material equality of condition. To create such a society, it is required that there be provision of sufficient capabilities that no one is forced to feel ashamed of their condition. Social inclusion, therefore, is about providing sufficient levels of capabilities. This paper discusses about the notion of Social exclusion from different approaches from social science literature and the practical implications are spelt. Normative theory of social exclusion and Amartya sen's capability approach- which is not a theory of justice or equality, but a theory of a society which has high levels of well-being and quality of life- are discussed. To start to tackle the problem of social exclusion effectively, it is important to understand why it had become so pronounced in countries of the world, rich or poor. The causes are different in each country. For example in most western countries, reasons such as the move to high-skill, high-tech industries; and increasing rates of family breakdown may all be the reasons. In This context, social exclusion is explained with a study made on the problems of SC/ST students in accessing higher education in Tamil nadu. In India, social exclusion exists in various forms, caste discrimination being major among them. Major consequences of social exclusion and some possible remedies too are discussed.

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