Socio-Cultural Marginality: Dalits and Tribes , sociological study

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Abstract

This paper attempts to study how social bindings shape and empower, **marginal**s and **Dalits** (a historically socially **marginalized** group also known as "**untouchables**"). The practice of untouchability and the large number of atrocities inflicted on Dalits continue even today mainly because of hidden prejudices and neglect on the part of officials responsible for the implementation of Special Legislations; i.e. the Protection of Civil Rights Act (PCRA) and the Prevention of Atrocities Act (POA). The Government should make a meaningful intervention in this regard so as to mitigate the sufferings of Dalits due to practice of untouchability and atrocities inflicted upon them and should also treat this matter on a priority basis to ensure that the officials and the civil society at large are sensitized on this issue. In India alone, between 1951 and 1990 around 21.3 million persons were displaced by development projects. Among this number 8.54 million (40 per cent) were tribal or indigenous people and only 2.12 million (24.8 per cent) were resettled (Government of India, 2002: 458). Therefore, there has been created a major rift between the elites and grass root tribal people. The regions inhabited by tribal people are facing wrath of not only economic exploitation but environmental degradation due to excessive extraction of resources.The process of effective rehabilitation for Project affected persons has been in dillydallying phase of implementation. The reform process has affected the indigenous communities of India, particularly their culture, languages and style of life.

*Key words: Neo-liberalism, **Socio-Cultural Marginality,** Tribal Displacement, Tribal Marginalization*

Introduction

The mainstream globalization model of development promotes the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) neglecting the inclusive growth of economy. According to the World Bank, development projects every year involuntarily displace one million people in the developing countries from their land and homes (World Bank, 1994).

Firstly, lower literacy/level of education and the continual discrimination of SC/STs in educational institutions pose a major problem. The government should take a second look at the Education Policy and develop major programmes for strengthening the public education system in villages and cities on a much larger scale than today. There is a necessity to reallocate government resources for education and vocational training. For millions of poor students located in rural areas, the loan schemes do not work. We should develop an affordable, uniform and better quality public educational system up to the university level. Public education system is our strength and needs to be further strengthened. Promotion of such private education systems that creates inequality and hierarchy should be discouraged.

Objective:

This paper intends to explore and analyze the manifestations of social exclusion faced by the **tribal** groups (adivasi), **Dalits**, persons with poverty, inequality, **marginalization** and social exclusion

MEANING OF MARGINALIZED GROUPS AND MARGINALIZATION

The Encyclopedia of Public Health defines marginalized groups as, 'To be marginalized is to be placed in the margins, and thus excluded from the privilege and power found at the center". Latin observes that, "'Marginality' is so thoroughly demeaning, for economic well-being, for human dignity, as well as for physical security. Marginal groups can always be identified by members of dominant society, and will face irrevocable discrimination." These definitions are mentioned in different contexts, and show that marginalization is a slippery and multilayered concept. Marginalization has aspects in sociological, economic, and political debates. Marginalization may manifest itself in forms varying from genocide/ethnic-cleansing and other xenophobic acts/activities at one end of the spectrum, to more basic economic and social hardships at the unitary (individual/family) level.

Of course, the forms of marginalization may vary—generally linked to the level of development of society; culturally, and as (if not more) importantly, with relation to economics. For example, it would generally be true, that there would exist more "marginalized" groups in the Third World", and developing nations, that in the Developed/First-World nations. Indeed, there can be a distinction made, on the basis of the "choice" that one has within this context—those in the Third World who live under impoverished conditions, through no choice of their own (being far removed from the protectionism that exists for people in the First World,) are often left to die due to hunger, disease, and war. One can also add to this various minorities, as well as women… Within the First World, low-income drug addicts stand out as being the most marginalized. This deliberate or chosen marginalization of people carries with it aspects of a so-called "Social Darwinism".

To further clarify the meaning and concept let us discuss certain characteristics of marginalized groups: Usually a minority group has the following characteristics 1) It suffers from discrimination and subordination. 2) They have physical and/or cultural traits that set them apart, and which are disapproved of, by a dominant group. 3) They share a sense of collective identity and common burdens. 4) They have shared social rules about who belongs, and who does not. 5) They have a tendency to marry within the group.

Thus, marginalization is a complex as well as shifting phenomenon linked to social status.

People with disabilities –

People with disabilities have had to battle against centuries of biased assumptions, harmful stereotypes, and irrational fears. The stigmatization of disability resulted in the social and economic marginalization of generations with disabilities, and, like many other oppressed minorities, this has left people with disabilities in a severe state of impoverishment for centuries. The proportion of disabled population in India is about 21.9 million. The percentage of disabled population to the total population is about 2.13 per cent. There are interstate and interregional differences in the disabled population.

The disabled face various types of barriers while seeking access to health and health services. Among those who are disabled women, children and aged are more vulnerable and need attention.

Schedule Castes(Dalits) –

The caste system is a strict hierarchical social system based on underlying notions of purity and pollution. Brahmins are on the top of the hierarchy and Shudras or Dalits constitute the bottom of the hierarchy. The marginalization of Dalits influences all spheres of their life, violating basic human rights such as civil, political, social, economic and cultural rights. A major proportion ofthe lower castes and Dalits are still dependent on others for their livelihood. Dalits does not refer to a caste, but suggests a group who are in a state of oppression, social disability and who are helpless and poor. Literacy rates among Dalits are very low. They have meager purchasing power and have poor housing conditions as well as have low access to resources and entitlements. Structural discrimination against these groups takes place in the form of physical, psychological, emotional and cultural abuse which receives legitimacy from the social structure and the social system. Physical segregation of their settlements is common in the villages forcing them to live in the most unhygienic and inhabitable conditions. All these factors affect their health status, access to healthcare and quality of life. There are high rates of malnutrition reported among the marginalized groups resulting in mortality, morbidity and anemia. Access to and utilization of healthcare among the marginalized groups is influenced by their socio-economic status within the society.

Caste based marginalization is one of the most serious human rights issues in the world today, adversely affecting more than 260 million people mostly reside in India. Caste-based discrimination entails social and economic exclusion, segregation in housing, denial and restrictions of access to public and private services and employment, and enforcement of certain types of jobs on Dalits, resulting in a system of modern day slavery or bonded labour. However, in recent years due to affirmative action and legal protection, the intensity of caste based marginalization is reducing.

4. Scheduled Tribes –

The Scheduled Tribes like the Scheduled Castes face structural discrimination within the Indian society. Unlike the Scheduled Castes, the Scheduled Tribes are a product of marginalization based on ethnicity. In India, the Scheduled Tribes population is around 84.3 million and is considered to be socially and economically disadvantaged. Their percentages in the population and numbers however vary from State to State. They are mainly landless with little control over resources such as land, forest and water. They constitute a large proportion of agricultural laborers, casual laborers, plantation laborers, industrial laborers etc. This has resulted in poverty among them, low levels of education, poor health and reduced access to healthcare services. They belong to the poorest strata of the society and have severe health problems.

Elderly or Aged People –

Ageing is an inevitable and inexorable process in life. In India, the population of the elderly is growing rapidly and is emerging as a serious area of concern for the government and the policy planners. According to data on the age of India's population, in Census 2001, there are a little over 76.6 million people above 60 years, constituting 7.2 per cent of the population. The number of people over 60 years in 1991 was 6.8 per cent of the country's population. The vulnerability among the elderly is not only due to an increased incidence of illness and disability, but also due to their economic dependency upon their spouses, children and other younger family members. According to the 2001 census, 33.1 per cent

of the elderly in India live without their spouses. The widowers among older men form 14.9 per cent as against 50.1 per cent widows among elderly women. Among the elderly (80 years and above), 71.1 per cent of women were widows while widowers formed only 28.9 per cent of men. Lack of economic dependence has an impact on their access to food, clothing and healthcare. Among the basic needs of the elderly, medicine features as the highest unmet need. Healthcare of the elderly is a major concern for the society as ageing is often accompanied by multiple illnesses and physical ailments.

Sexual Minorities –

Another group that faces stigma and discrimination are the sexual minorities. Those identified as gay, lesbian, transgender, bisexual, kothi and hijra; experience various forms of discrimination within the society and the health system. Due to the dominance of heteronomous sexual relations as the only form of normal acceptable relations within the society, individuals who are identified as having same-sex sexual preferences are ridiculed and ostracized by their own family and are left with very limited support structures and networks of community that provide them conditions of care and support. Their needs and concerns are excluded from the various health policies and programs.

MARGINALIZATION IN SCHEDULE TRIBES

Since in this project we have to give special reference to the marginalization of schedule tribes, therefore we are discussing the marginalization of STs in a more elaborative way.

The Scheduled Tribes like the Scheduled Castes face structural discrimination within the Indian society. Unlike the Scheduled Castes, the Scheduled Tribes are a product of marginalization based on ethnicity. There are approximately two hundred million tribal people in the entire globe, which means about four percent of the global population. In India, the Scheduled Tribes population is around 84.3 million and is considered to be socially and economically disadvantaged. Their percentages in the population and numbers however vary from State to State, 50% of the India's tribal population is concentrated in the North-eastern region of the country, who are, geographically and culturally, are at widely different stages of social as well as their economic development is concerned and their problems too differ from area to area within their own groups.

From the historical point of view, they have been subjected to the worst type of societal exploitation. They are mainly landless with little control over resources such as land, forest and water. They constitute a large proportion of agricultural laborers, casual laborers, plantation laborers, industrial laborers etc. This has resulted in poverty among them, low levels of education, poor health and reduced access to healthcare services. They belong to the poorest strata of the society and have severe health problems. They are less likely to afford and get access to healthcare services when required. They are practically deprived from many civic facilities and isolated from modern civilized way of living since so many centuries. The health outcomes among the Scheduled Tribes are very poor even as compared to the Scheduled Castes. The Infant Mortality Rate among Scheduled Castes is 83 per 1000 live births while it is 84.2 per 1000 per live births among the Scheduled   Tribes

Among the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes the most vulnerable are women, children, aged, those living with HIV/AIDS, mental illness and disability. These groups face severe forms of discrimination that denies them access to treatment and prevents them from achieving a better health status. Gender based violence and domestic violence is high

among women in general in India. Girl child and women from the marginalized groups are more vulnerable to violence. The dropout and illiteracy rates among them are high.

Early marriage, trafficking, forced prostitution and other forms of exploitation are also reportedly high among them. In situations of caste conflict, women from marginalized groups face sexual violence from men of upper caste i.e., rape and other forms of mental torture and humiliation.

Nevertheless the Constitution of India has made definite provisions for the welfare and uplift of the tribal people throughout the country. And the greatest challenge that the Government of India has been facing since Independence, till today is the proper provision of social justice to the scheduled tribe population, besides its rigorous effort s in implementing the new policy of tribal development

Shifting cultivation, commonly known by many names in this part of the world as Swidden agriculture, slash and burn agriculture, and Jhum agriculture. Jhum has been described as an agricultural concept which has a unique feature in it the rotation of fields rather than the conventional system of crops i.e. after every two or four years. Moreover, the land is abandoned hence the cultivators were shift now and then to another new field for clearing, leaving the present field for natural reoccupation for its next turn to come. However, the tribal people who are involved in this type of agricultural practice are called as 'Jhumiyas'. Nevertheless 86% of the populations living in the hills are dependent on shifting cultivation. Therefore, 100 of tribal/ethnic, minority population inhabiting the North East hills due to their very intimately connected with the practice of Jhum cultivation since time immemorial. Which not only highlights their traditional lifestyle their cultural beliefs and emotional bindings toward their motherland but also indicates that how homogeneous group they are by nature. Due to the new development in economic sector, the concentration of economic power started taking place in many ways, firstly the resources owned by the community gradually passes into private ownership and secondly, land as a productive asset began to concentrate in fever hands which led to the decrease in the percentage of cultivators and increase of agricultural laborers.

Traditionally, rice being the staple crop grown in the region and almost 70% of the total area used under paddy cultivation customary they are reluctant to go for commercial crops such as HYVFG (High Yielding Variety Food Grains) other than the rice, which fetch them little extra money. However, an attempt was made to analyze the through the FGA's and it was observed that they are reluctant to change because firstly these people are not so ambitious by nature, which make them happy in a hand to mouth earning system, secondly they have a strong(son of the soil) belief to be with nature, closely attached with their place of origin, last but not the least related reason was observe i.e. there is a strong correlated between their lathering attitude and a huge (90 percent) financial assistant received from the Central Government.

Conclusion

The pertinent question therefore is where do the marginalized groups stand today? Though there has been some improvement in certain spheres and despite some positive changes, the standard of living for the marginalized communities has not improved. Therefore, what Minimum needs to be done?

Improved   Access   to   Agricultural   Land-
The reasons for the high incidences of poverty and deprivation among the marginalized social groups are to be found in their continuing lack of access to income-earning capital assets (agricultural land and non-land assets), heavy dependence on wage employment, high unemployment, low education and other factors. Therefore, there is a need to focus on policies to improve the ownership of income-earning capital assets (agriculture land, and non-land assets), employment, human resource & health situation, and prevention of discrimination to ensure fair participation of the marginalized community in the private and the public sectors.

Active   Role   of   the   State   in   Planning-
It is necessary to recognize that for the vast majority of the discriminated groups, State intervention is crucial and necessary. Similarly, the use of economic and social planning as an instrument of planned development is equally necessary. Thus, planned State intervention to ensure fair access and participation in social and economic development in the country is necessary.

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