

A 'DONOR-DRIVEN' AGENDA

The Idea named 'Social Exclusion'

Abhijit Guha

The idea of social exclusion was born in Western Europe, particularly in France¹ in the seventies to tackle the ever increasing crises of industrial capitalism in the context of a welfare state. The concept was developed also as a reaction to the narrow money and income oriented economic approach to deal with the large group of unemployed people in the industrialized nations of Western Europe who could not participate in the normal activities of the society². Since then, the concept gradually crossed the European borders and reached the developing nations of the world with efforts of the United Nations agencies by the nineties.

Is there any society or country where there is no rule of exclusion? Moreover one should also keep in mind that every rule of exclusion also incorporates a simultaneous rule of inclusion and sometime these exclusions and inclusions play some functional roles as well. Social and cultural ecologists have demonstrated that when a group of people are excluded from using a certain portion of natural resources (a patch of forest for grazing or from killing particular species of plant and animal) it helps in the conservation of nature. Even the continuation of occupational specialization of the Indian caste system (which excluded a particular caste from pursuing the occupation of others) was explained by Nirmal Kumar Bose a mechanism for minimizing competition (Bose 1963). Madhav Gadgil and Kailash Malhotra at a much later period extended Bose's ideas within an ecological framework in explaining the existence of various caste groups in the rural areas of Maharashtra (Gadgil and Malhotra 1983). In a study conducted by Haripada Pradhan, Abhijit Guha and Falguni Chakraborty of the Department of Anthropology, Vidyasagar University, the authors have shown how under the leadership of local communist party some unwritten rules of exclusion and inclusion in the reclamation of unrecorded char land in Nayagram block of the Paschim Medinipur district minimized conflict as well as inequality among the rural cultivators (Pradhan et.al. 1992). Social exclusions are not always as bad as the protagonists of Western liberal democracy conceived.

Be that as it may, the proponents of the conceptual apparatus named 'social exclusion' gives emphasis to exclusion of marginalized groups in societies particularly in the Third World countries. They focus on exclusions of underprivileged groups arising out of society's built-in normative order, e.g. caste based exclusions, gender based exclusions, and exclusions based on race, religion and other primordial elements from the viewpoint of Western liberal thought which champions equality of opportunity for every citizen. But ironically, the theorists of social exclusion rarely venture into exclusions caused by the capitalist system and the globalizing forces. They virtually ignore the exclusion of millions of people caused by :

- (i) technological improvements in the industrial sector which produces record number of unemployment³.
- (ii) development caused displacement causing internal refugees.
- (iii) regional warfare causing homelessness to hundreds of thousands of people.
- (iv) religious fundamentalism which excludes the minorities from enjoying human security, e.g. Muslims in recent Gujarat and Hindu minorities in Bangladesh.
- (v) how the accelerating economic growth rate of a country pushes the majority of the population below the poverty line and excludes them from the market.
- (vi) policy caused exclusions e.g. land acquisition law, which excludes the numerous agricultural workers from receiving any compensation.

But why do they do it? Probably because they do not want to consider the above mentioned large scale, emerging exclusions as 'social' but politico-economic, so should be excluded from their study of 'social exclusion'!

Amartya Sen., Jean Dreze, Amit Bhaduri and Andre Beteille in their older and recent works on policy and development dealt with poverty and inequality well without the concept of 'social exclusion'. The guru of displacement and rehabilitation studies, Michael Cernea, who have written on the causes of impoverishments of millions of project affected persons (PAP), did not need the concept of social exclusion to develop his famous Impoverishment Risk Reconstruction (IRR) model. The reason was simple. Displaced persons are used to be forcibly evicted from their means of production owing to lack of proper rehabilitation laws and policies. Interestingly, these displacements result in social disorganization (not exclusion) and in many cases helped them to reunite in new ways to bargain and protest against the state. The already well established theoretical constructs of social inequality in sociology and loss of entitlement in economics or impoverishment risk reconstruction model in anthropology and sociology can very well tackle society and culture caused as well as well as other kinds of exclusions (policy caused, fundamentalism caused, displacement caused, technology caused etc.) in much more comprehensive and holistic manner (Guha 2007). In an interesting paper written by Ruhi Saith at Oxford University the author observed: "Since it is difficult to apply the 'social exclusion' concept to developing countries in the context of the welfare state and formal employment, attempts to modify and apply it have largely resulted in a repetition and relabelling of poverty studies (broader in scope than monetary poverty) that have already been carried out in developing countries" (Saith 2001).

For one thing the national and international funding agencies are interested in 'social exclusion', just as they were interested in 'Participatory Rural Appraisal' (PRA), 'Good Governance' etc. few years back. It seems that this is basically a 'donor driven' agenda and will continue until the phenomena named 'donor fatigue' takes place. So, one must be careful before importing this Western concept nurtured by the international funding agencies lock-stock-and-barrel to determine indigenous research agenda.

WAY OUT

As for objectives and the ground realities of a diverse country like India the prospects of easy-running seem difficult. Here is an incident of a santal girl being excluded from her community for marrying a non-tribal boy for analysis of social exclusion theorists. According to media report a whole village performed the death rituals of the girl and her parents had to pay Rs 9,000 for the feast in a village in Bankura. The girl and her husband on the other hand now live in another area and are earning their livelihood. The girl said to the correspondent that she wants to live with dignity and she also added that in future her parents would realize their errors! (*The Statesman* 5.03.2008) Undoubtedly, this is a case of exclusion. But can this case be investigated without looking into the politics of the village, the role of the political parties, panchayat leaders and above all the system of social and political stratification that exist in the village? In the same vein, can the horrible custom of witchcraft among the Santals, which excludes the old age women (particularly widows) from enjoying social security, be explained only on the basis of existence and continuation of a traditional custom? Is it not a fact that the custom of witchcraft has its politicoeconomic basis as had been shown by the classical studies on witchcraft done by social anthropologists in Africa? Can caste-based exclusions in India be explained without looking into its relations with class and power? Examples could be multiplied but the message is simple. The conceptual construct of social exclusion as it is being tossed out by the funding agencies cannot do justice to the gigantic number of people thrown out of their livelihood by state's policy, warfare, fundamentalism or inhuman laws which stand in a positive feedback relations with the forces of globalization. So if there are studies on Social exclusion, there lies every reason to incorporate politicoeconomic issues in it. In fact, works have already been done by scholars who demonstrated that inclusion of political economy under the globalizing forces can very well be incorporated in the concept of 'social exclusion'⁴ (Veron 2008).

Notes :

1. Rene Lenoir first used and popularised the term 'social exclusion' in his book *Le Excluis. Un Francais Sur Dix*, (1974) Le Sail, Paris.
2. Julian le Grand at the Centre for Analysis of Social Exclusion, UK defined an individual as socially excluded, if (a) he or she is geographically resident in a society but (b) for reasons beyond his or her control he or she cannot participate in the normal activities of citizens in that society and he or she would like to so participate. Although this definition apparently seems to be very general and broad but the so called 'normal activities' in this definition refers to industrial society where an almost uniform style of life prevails throughout the country. (Saith 2001)
3. In an unpublished paper entitled 'Predatory Growth' circulated by e-mail in February 2008 the noted economist Amit Bhaduri gives an official statistics on India, which reads as follows: '....between 1991 and 2004 employment fell in the organized public sector, and the organized private sector hardly compensated for it. In the corporate sector and in some organized industries productivity growth comes from mechanization and longer hours of work. Edward Luce of *Financial Times* (London) reported that the Jamshedpur steel plant of the Tatas employed 85000 workers in 1991 to produce 1 million tons of steel worth 0.8 million US dollars. In 2005, the production rose to 5 million tons, worth about 5 million US dollars, while employment fell to 44,000 (Bhaduri, 2008).
4. In a unique study (2002) done by Jo Beall of the Development Studies Institute, London School of Economics, the author has shown the difficulties of employing the concept of 'social exclusion' as developed in the context of Western Europe in developing countries. Her fieldwork findings on the municipal sweepers (Churha) in Faisalabad, Pakistan revealed how the so-called socially excluded community clung to their traditional "polluting" job since they were permanent government employees. This group of municipal workers is now losing their jobs in the context of neoliberal economic policies pursued by the government and can be regarded as economically excluded in their own town under the impact of globalization.

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