Conceptualising Social Exclusion: New Rhetoric or Transformative Politics?

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The debate on equality and non-discrimination is certainly not a new one, but the way it is incorporated in that on social exclusion leads to several shifts within the discourse on social justice. The term social exclusion is multidimensional although its western use in a selective way about markets promoting equality separates it from the Indian emphasis on social justice as linked to ending discrimination of dalit groups. The concept of social exclusion is inherently problematic as it faces three major challenges in India: the first relates to the historical discrimination of certain groups and their exclusion; the second is about the political economy of the excluded; and the third questions the way in which equality responses are restricted within the framework of social exclusion.

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In the last decade several works have emerged that focus on how the Indian state should include its disadvantaged citizens to establish a more equal and just society. A great deal has been written on inclusive growth and the need to raise capabilities of a large number of people who face discrimination and marginalisation and are unable to use the opportunities and advantages that have arisen for many of India's urban educated elite. High on the agenda for greater inclusiveness are policies to address disparities in education, health, rural-urban and regional differences in incomes. Until recently international financial institutions, aid-agencies and non-governmental agencies paid little attention to the relationship between social inequality and social exclusion. Nor did early rights treaties, general assembly statements or committee reports appeal to this as a central concern. Research on process of social exclusion broadly presents it as one of the problems along with poverty and unemployment (Haan 2008; Lister 1998).[1] References to social inequalities and social justice now increasingly appear in diverse forums where they are accepted by people of different ideological persuasions. The United Nations commemorated 20 February 2007 as the world day of social justice, and the general assembly recognised

> the need to consolidate the efforts of the international community in poverty eradication and in promoting full employment and decent work, gender equality and access to social well-being and justice for all.[2]

Following definitions drawn from classical western political theory, social justice is mostly interpreted as "poverty alleviation for the working poor", in both the formal and informal sectors, the unemployed and underemployed (Bardhan 2001: 467). Interestingly, most of these writings assume free market systems as actively equalising instruments while making the case for virtues of particular forms of capitalism. A market-based economy embedded in particular kinds of state regulation is viewed as a credible basis for a political system based on social inclusion.

In contrast, in India, ensuring social justice means not only to address poverty, distribution of material goods and social exclusion as it is in western societies, but to remove social discrimination of the ex-untouchables. Social inequality amongst groups is viewed as the result of discrimination perpetuated by institutional structures that over centuries denied a minimal human existence for dalits and other oppressed groups. Therefore principles, categories and arguments on social exclusion developed in the western context have to be cautiously applied to the Indian context.

The idea that reservation policies corrode caste prejudices has been central to the social justice imaginary for several decades. Lapses in constitutional provisions and legal texts to abolish

untouchability, and social and educational policies to overcome disadvantages are believed to limit effect of these public policies. The failure in the implementation of constitutional provisions is apparent in the light of documented evidence issued by the Reports of the National Commission for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (NCSCST).[3] Various reports claim that "untouchability" – the imposition of social disabilities on persons by birth in certain castes – is still practised in many forms throughout the country.[4] These findings corroborate many of the claims made by Marc Galanter (1984: 15) who had assembled such a list in his seminal work more than 25 years ago.

Consequently, a remarkable amount of literature has arisen exposing the discrimination that is prevalent in political institutions and civil society in India. Combining international legal analysis with an exploration of the meaning and origin of caste, scholars have explored remedies human rights law can propose towards the prohibition of caste-based discrimination (Keane 2007). The need for state policies to rectify institutions that exclude, discriminate and isolate groups based on their identities that consequently leads to their deprivation has also been the focus of research (Thorat and Kumar 2008). The spate of judgments relating to complaints of over-inclusion and under-inclusion of beneficiaries of reservations show different approaches adopted by the judiciary as they respond to contestations on specific issues related to merit, creamy layer, promotions and numerical limit of reservations.[5]

During the last decade, the influence of new perspectives drawn from social constructionism has paved the way for challenging the social justice imagery even as other efforts link the goals of social justice more closely with social exclusion (Searle 1995). Two streams of thought now appear in Indian social sciences: some continuously regard discriminatory policies as the principle roots of societal injustice while others have forcefully linked social justice to the eradication of structural and relational sources of poverty. They propose ways to emancipate people from oppressive social arrangements through radical redistributive measures. A further consequence of the shifting boundaries of social justice is a commitment to overcoming discrimination for various kinds of groups. In the Indian context, the concept of social justice has evolved substantially from its original emphasis on removal of caste injustices through reservation policies; it has primarily now become a means to encourage caste, ethnic, gender and cultural diversity, strengthen group identity and recognition and promote the social sector or what would have formerly been regarded as welfare policies.

A parallel development is claims for recognition of group inequalities that have become increasingly salient, at times eclipsing claims for social justice and at times overlapping with it. The unequal incidence of poverty deprivation and inequalities across social groups and communities in the post-liberalisation phase has led to struggles for achieving cultural "recognition" or for "social inclusion" of various groups. This has prompted a variety of responses by government to expand the ambit of "social inclusion": to extend participation in the public realm, public goods and services to religious minorities, women, differently-abled, sexual minorities, etc. These developments raise several questions both at a philosophical and concrete policy level. While the rhetoric of social inclusion by the state reflects these changing definitions the practical implication for applying these principles to public policy for increasingly diverse groups has been daunting. So what are we to make, on the one hand, of that putative tension between, the theme of discrimination in social justice and, on the other, the emphasis on combating inequalities under social inclusion? Can social exclusion's problematic serve to unify and combat the various facets of injustices present in Indian society? What challenges do we see for developing a social justice discourse that focuses primarily on caste discrimination?

Against this backdrop, the paper is restricted to making three major claims. The first is that opportunities widespread in the current neo-liberal phase have led to exclusion of groups in an uneven way; the second is that the term social exclusion is multidimensional although its use in a selective way about markets promoting equality separates it from the Indian emphasis on social justice as linked to discrimination of dalit groups. Third, the concept of social exclusion is inherently a problematic concept as it faces three major challenges in the context of India: the first relates to the historical discrimination of certain groups and their exclusion; the second is about the political economy of the excluded; and the third questions the way in which equality responses are restricted within the framework of social exclusion.[6] I contend that a shift from a model that focuses on caste discrimination to one that focuses on a general protection for excluded groups should not be confused; social exclusion serves many different functions to which questions of constitutional equality bear a strong resemblance but it should be separated from policies to remove unjust status hierarchies that involve the most outright degrading and inhuman practices.

Social Justice in Western Political Theory

Before developing these claims let me clarify some preliminary points. The eruption of the term social exclusion in western social sciences was induced by a millennial mood of introspection in the early 1990s in order to extend the focus beyond poverty to challenge what continued to be obstacles to more progressive social transformations. Its origins were in the theoretical responses by European social and political thinkers, to consequences of industrialisation and dominance of market forces within capitalist societies. Inspired by the liberal model of citizenship, market failures and lack of implementation of rights were seen as causes of social exclusion. This was in marked contrast to the traditional social democratic engagement with poverty and inequality. During later years, it was common to speak of a new social exclusion perspective, which could respond to a more heterogeneous, diverse and complex society. The significance of social exclusion derived both from the way in which it was used in political discourses, policy formation and implementation and from the salience of the term in conceptual debates and empirical investigations being carried out in the social sciences.

While discussion of social exclusion typically began in the 1990s it had deep roots in social justice that arose when entitlements of citizens under welfare state were being framed in the western context. John Rawls' (1973) work on social and distributive

justice was a culmination of several trends since the enlightenment in which the political culture of modernity and liberalism provided grounds for legitimising political authority. His work was significant because it combined the need for combating injustices of inherited social inequalities with the injustices of individual inequalities arising out of class stratification of western societies. In order to elaborate this argument I take a historical look at the deployment of concepts of social justice as three significant moments about how to reverse inequalities in the western world.

The first moment arose with a socialist stream that emerged to protest against injustices of the industrial revolution; it set out to demolish all kinds of legitimate political authority; and it demanded alternative social arrangements based on human dignity and principles of distribution based on need. Through much of the 20th century, social justice was understood as primarily a class phenomenon, and something associated with "exploitation", distribution of income, wealth and private property. Through an era "dominated by the big capitalism versus socialism question" equality was conceived as a "substantially economic affair" (Phillips 2004: 20). The fundamental factor in relation to social inequality centred around social classes or strata usually defined in economic terms. There was agreement that the struggle was against inherited social inequalities that led to exploitation of certain classes excluded from the ownership of means of production. Thus the socialist stream was more concerned with fighting injustices arising out of class society rather than the injustice of individual inequalities, a subject of concern for liberal egalitarians like Rawls in the 1970s.

The second moment was when social justice became historically associated with the demands for extension of citizenship as its larger aim for replacing social reform and defusing demands of working classes and radical groups became clearer (Marshall 2000). Several factors gave rise to popularity of social justice that became the rallying cry of social democratic parties everywhere in early 20th century in Europe. Regulatory principles and social policies were established in many states leading to economic growth and social transformation that broadly converged on a handful of key ideas: rights of trade unions, ownership of public utilities, appropriate measures of taxation and transfer to meet differences in income and wealth, delinking of education and health services from the market criterion of ability to pay (Barry 2008: 5). As a consequence the concept of justice became associated with problems of appropriate distribution of wealth and income. The emphasis placed on these different criteria varied but most adherents of social justice were united in their belief that the concept promoted a positive role for the state.

The third moment was the challenge to existing paradigms of justice. In the late 1970s, inequalities based on race, religion and gender culminated with the movement for equal rights for minorities and with other forms of cultural dissent (Fraser 1997). Although capitalist and welfare economies delivered goods and services that people wanted more efficiently than other systems of production and exchange, it was done at a great cost: universality of citizenship in the sense of inclusion and participation was lacking in content and substance; social rights were inadequate as a component of democratic citizenship; and liberal/individualist view of rights as assimilation were destructive of minority cultures because it ignored their need for special protection.

Due to these rapid changes, it became difficult to produce neat dividing lines between the struggles for social and distributive justice even though social class was a dominant paradigm in research programmes: debates raged between Marxists and Weberian sociologists and US functionalists who emphasised social stratification. A series of developments however led to the decline of the social class paradigm (Wright 1985): the rise of a post-industrial society or an information society which rendered social divisions, inextricably bound up with industrial societies, obsolete; the emergence of social movements, where factors other than class were preeminent; the increase in divisions and identities centred on gender, race, age or sexual orientation not reducible to the worker/capitalist confrontation in the workplace (Laclau and Mouffe 1985).

It is not surprising that given this context, in the initial stages liberal egalitarians like Rawls gave philosophical justifications for the "post war liberal democratic welfare state" (Kymlicka 2002: 88). To limit the market which "penalises people for their unchosen circumstances", a conception of equality emerged that circumscribed the range of acceptable norms; the domain of distributive justice got reduced mainly to distribution of things – income, remuneration, goods and services or about rightful possession (Miller 2001: 14). Recent works on social justice in western political theory continue to use indicators of economic inequalities to define it (Barry 2008: 10). These could be related to government pursuit of taxation and grants-of-aid to achieve social goals or to the impact of economic reforms on fairer distribution to individuals and social classes (McCrudden 2007). In summary, most accounts on social justice emphasise that individuals should have equal access to necessary material goods and social means to lead their lives according to their conceptions of the good.

Group Claims and the Invention of Sub-Politics

I have argued above that in the western tradition, debates on social justice took a new urgency with publication of Rawls' work based on the premise that modern liberal democracies are and will remain characterised by disagreement about notions of the good. His work located distributive issues in the foundations of a welfarist approach although he avoided aggregating information about individual's well-being in order to make an overall assessment of justice.

Despite his rhetorical effort to stay within the liberal tradition, it might be more accurate to understand his effort as a synthesis of liberalism and socialist egalitarianism. As has been well researched, ensuing attempts over the past decades to re-centre the domain of social justice so as to make better use of the two principles proposed by Rawls have culminated in an acute crisis; how do we define the nature of group justice?

In some scholars, this impasse that stemmed from a reluctance to rework some precepts underpinning Rawls', work on communities led to methodological individualism (Sandel 1982). Some liberal theorists located group claims within the superficial celebration of cultural diversity that overlooked structural inequalities (Kymlicka 1989). Clearly in some hands, group inequalities have

been wielded in such a way as to see representation in politics as a solution thereby effacing from the purview of study the very conditions of their absorption (Philips 1998). Young offers the ideal of "differentiated solidarity" as an alternative to the liberal ideals of integration and cultural assimilation as a means of balancing inclusion of groups with the realities of a divided world (Young 1990). Social justice once centred on distribution, now it increasingly gets divided between claims for "redistribution of resources" on the one hand and claims for "cultural recognition" and "democratic inclusion" on the other (Fraser 2009: 8-9). Scholars like Ulrich Beck propose the distinction between politics and sub-politics claiming the latter category signals the arrival of a new notion of political as "structuring and changing of living conditions" in contrast to the conventional view of politics as legitimisation of power (Beck 1997).[7]

Many explanations can be offered for the subsequent change in normative orientations that emphasised social exclusion in western political theory. One of the factors can be traced to the emergence of a global capital market under conditions of neo-liberalism. State firms almost everywhere were privatised as policymakers shifted towards regulation as a means of using the state to influence economic policy. It implied that the state should be rolled back from the social sector; the market should be central in the accumulation process and civil society organisations should claim some kind of autonomy from the state.

The increasing prioritisation to efficiency, markets, and private sector development was accompanied by a rapid decline of redistribution issues and the "social mandate of basic needs" (Clert 1999: 182). It led to a radical shift in "governmentality", the language of the market by that of governance, social justice with that of social exclusion. Even though the dominant concerns of neo-liberalism continued it was now recognised that along with economic growth there was a need for addressing group exclusion in development paradigms.

Thus a possible explanation for the increasing attention being paid to social exclusion, at the expense of social justice, was tied to the problem of accounting for the basis of group instead of individual inequalities in western society. Other possible explanations for the growth of interest in the categories related to groups ranged from the difficulty of rendering their unequal power positions due to individual's location in social stratification. For those practitioners interested in group difference, social justice was truly blunted and lacked consensus, and they were forced to concede that no suitable avenue was immediately available to shape its meanings in the new context of neo-liberalism.

This manoeuvre was far from satisfactory and a number of serious difficulties with the emerging concepts need to be addressed. In our view while social exclusion certainly holds promise there is much to clarify in this shift to new categories and concepts in two important ways.

First, social justice thinking based on distributive issues remained dominant in western political theory albeit in other guises. In this new paradigm "social disadvantage" faced by groups was seen to arise from the weakness of previous development models and due to state intervention. In terms of epistemological shifts, social exclusion discourse marks the return of a broad conceptualisation of social disadvantage under which "vulnerability" and "disadvantage" are believed to be "caused by marginalisation in and exclusion from the socio-economic mainstream and decision-making processes". The interest in the way discrimination occurs more for certain social identities that were socially constructed connected the processes of exclusion to that of injustice. According to Clert while "discrimination makes access more difficult, exclusion prevents access" (1999: 184).

Second, major differences exist within approaches to social exclusion so that an institutional perspective views "social exclusion as a property of society if racial, sexual and other forms of discrimination are present, if the markets through which people earn a livelihood are segmented" (Clert 1999: 188); the people-centred approach is said to focus on command over commodities as a source of welfare and utility. Here the main task is to enhance the freedom of choice of people in terms of achieving value functioning such as being well-nourished, health and literate. In short, focusing on human capabilities.

Social Inclusion as Consensus

Since the 1990s, there were a series of developments that saw the concept of social exclusion as a significant policy theme within the European Union. In those countries that had enjoyed unlimited prosperity since the second world war it was found that parts of the population who had not participated were largely ignored; in societies where rates of immigration were high, making good the values of inclusion and democracy were more than internal policy for they were central to their very survival. In recognising and including such groups would cultivate a widespread sense of belonging. Initially the term was seen as Eurocentric in the way it ignored related debates around poverty and deprivation of social groups and individuals in other countries. Despite this however it gained popularity very rapidly across the globe which induced new thinking into nature of poverty and disadvantage even in India.

Most writings identified three paradigms in different and opposed theories rooted in national political discourses (Silver 1994; Levitas 1998). One of the earliest definitions replaced the concept of poverty by expounding social exclusion and its relation to the "social rights of citizenship...to a basic standard of living and to participation in the major social and occupational opportunities in society" (Room 1993: 14). In Britain, under New Labour, this involved thinking from primarily economic definitions of problems relating to poverty, to definitions drawing upon Marshall's civil, political and social rights (Strobel 1996).[8] Poverty as a lack of material resources, especially disposable income, to participate was distinguished from social exclusion as a more comprehensive formulation, which referred to the dynamic process of being shut out from any of the social, economic, political or cultural systems. The latter formulation was inspired by the concern for strong redistributive measures for the marginal, misfits, associable individuals who needed to be inserted in society (Levitas 1998: 21). The discourse on social exclusion was gradually influenced by the French republican tradition that relied on the notion of social solidarity to overcome social bonds that had ruptured between individuals. The term "underclass" however came from debates in the United States where it was extracted from the intellectual

armoury of the dominant neoconservative tradition of the new Right who were concerned with the poor and welfare recipients in the cities and neighbourhoods.[9] For these reasons, scholars view the concept of social exclusion as an amalgam of liberal Anglo-Saxon concerns with poverty, and a more conservative continental concern with moral integration and social order (Levitas 1998).

To summarise, social exclusion offered a useful framework for analysing the various axes of inequality that affected the economically marginalised, socially disadvantaged and politically powerless in western societies. With increased migratory flows and rise of poor neighbourhoods, traditional hierarchical models of inequality were unable to capture the multifaceted nature of group disadvantage.

Much of the terminology of social exclusion has been recast, in the light of insights drawn from Marxist notions of domination and exploitation and have been generalised to address broadly social structures that prevent human flourishing (Honneth 1995). A discursive shift of focus from individually-based definition of equal opportunities, to a group-based social exclusion raise questions of structural and material definitions of equality. This shift modifies the premise of equality in socialist politics based on the claim that capitalist societies by their nature create class inequalities and conflicting interests: the objective of social inclusion by contrast shifts away from inequalities and conflicts of interests between classes as it proposes solidarity and inclusion as the main objective.[10]

Social Exclusion in the Indian Context

From the above discussion, social exclusion is highly variable in meaning, notably because of its dependence on different theoretical frameworks. Yet, as a multidimensional concept, it has great appeal in India where policies have been used to combat social inequalities which have given rise to multiple theoretical explorations and policy orientations.[11] We need to pick out those perspectives that are relevant for the argument in this paper. It is with this aim in mind that I begin the task of reassessing the critical discourse on social exclusion for we believe that some of these positions have resonance with potential strategies for emancipation; they provide an incisive challenge to current concepts of social justice, while in turn introducing a refutation of traditional structuralism and Marxist orthodoxy in general. It is hoped that through this appraisal the general contours of a trajectory of the conceptual impasse in social justice will be highlighted in western and indigenous social sciences.

As argued earlier, the concept of "social exclusion" is a contested, discursive terrain and has arisen in response to problems of group inequalities in western societies in the last two decades. Questions have arisen about the conceptual clarity of "social exclusion", its theoretical underpinnings or its relevance to the debates on social justice. Many see the social exclusion discourse as part of a broader concern to explore alternatives to mainstream development, anti-poverty approaches and their conceptualisation of social disadvantage. For us the question is to what extent does this concept contribute to our understanding of social justice and inequalities of various groups in India?

In the 1990s, with the advent of new economic policies, financial institutions shifted the focus of the agenda away from redistribution to economic growth. Scholars focused on how liberalisation had impact on different sectors of the economy leading to uneven and imbalanced growth and social exclusion of groups that were not reducible to class (Sen 2004; Thorat 2007; Jogdand et al 2008). They pointed to the low levels of welfare, education, health or employment status of groups as according to Mishra, the effect of the "neo-liberal thrust of globalisation" was to "strengthen market forces and the economic realm at the cost of the institutions of social protection" (Mishra 1999: 32).

The Indian economy, it was increasingly argued, was partly based on traditional occupations and operated on lines of social exclusion and discrimination. "Marginalisation" as a form of social process was strengthened among scheduled castes (SCs), scheduled tribes (STs) and women (Singharoy 2001: 84). Studies showed that while there had a tangible improvement in the overall conditions of the SCs in regard to access to social services they experienced very little change. Reservation or protective discrimination policy improved their access to political power but the state was not able to implement major policies to remove their disadvantaged position. In the last decade, the bestowal of social rights on, and, above all, economic safeguards groups was in keeping with the paradigm shift to "social inclusion". It was also about affording every member of a society the measure of social recognition that made them full citizens.

Many interpretations are offered as an explanation of this change in normative orientations in India but for the sake of my argument I focus on mainly three approaches. Although they are not themselves homogeneous and contain a plurality of viewpoints they do serve as a useful analytical tool for understanding the claims of social exclusion policies: One of the major responses to these developments can be located in a welfarist framework. In Amartya Sen's theoretical analysis, social exclusion is premised on the general idea of poverty as capability deprivation. Being excluded from social relations can sometimes be in itself deprivation (like being homeless or undernourished) and this can be of intrinsic importance since it can directly impoverish a person's life, says Sen, using a broadly Aristotelian perspective (Sen 2004: 5). Second, there are relational deprivations that arise out of exclusion, that limit opportunities for leading a good life, for example of not having access to the credit market that lead to other deprivations. Social exclusion can thus be "constituted a part of capability deprivation as well as instrumentally a cause of diverse capability failures" (Sen 2004: 6). Thus these exclusions can have instrumental importance in as much they can lead to impoverishment of human life through their causal consequences.

Following Sen, Thorat locates the issue of social exclusion within a welfarist framework but instead of confining his analysis to individual indicators of human development, he expands his analysis to poverty of social groups. This is in line with the Indian government's approach that has adopted a group approach in development policy and in affirmative action programmes. In this formulation, the "concept and meaning of caste and ethnicity based exclusion, and its implications for human development of excluded groups" has led to greater polarisation in society (Thorat 2007: 4). Ambedkar's analysis of graded inequality is now taken forward to locate it in the market economy framework in the 1990s to argue that

exclusion in civil and economic spheres is internal to the system, and is a necessary outcome of its governing principles (Thorat and Kumar 2008: 8).

A second line of argument represents social exclusion and inclusion as issues of fundamental importance related to liberal democracy. The liberal democratic state grants certain basic political, economic, social and cultural rights but as Bhalla and Lapeyre (1999: 26) have argued, social exclusion can be interpreted in terms of a denial of the above rights or in terms of incomplete citizenship. Thus the attack against social exclusion is a key element of the struggle for citizenship rights under liberal democracy. Exclusion occurs when "some groups of people for reasons of colour, caste, ethnic identity, religious beliefs" are "systematically denied access to opportunities and resources, which are necessary for their survival and sustenance". Social inclusion, by contrast, is "participatory and empowering", requiring various kinds of "affirmative measure designed to remove discrimination, marginalisation and deprivation" (Bhattacharya et al 2010: 1). Using the liberal democratic framework, Zoya Hasan's study addresses the historical exclusion of Muslims and other disadvantaged groups in public institutions in India and their impact on public policies notably affirmative action (Hasan 2008; Taylor 1998). In terms of politics these studies make the citizenship agenda central.

Leading us away from welfare perspectives, Partha Chatterjee (2006) makes a distinction between exclusions of civil society and political society in the history of welfare states in different parts of the world. According to Chatterjee, postcolonial states deploy governmental technologies to promote the well-being of their populations by classifying people into various groups. But these populations, comprising broadly the rural populations and urban poor – the ex-peasantry, artisans, petty producers – in the informal sector, are not enjoying rights of citizens as the state recognises that it does not "have the means to deliver those benefits to the entire population of the country" (Chatterjee 2006: 40). Instead of being treated as rights-bearing individuals, they are excluded from membership of civil society and institutions of the state; they are viewed as part of political society, a space where "demands of electoral mobilisation, on the one hand, and the logic of welfare distribution on the other", overlapped and came together (ibid: 135). More specifically, liberal electoral democracy becomes the site of political negotiation for transfer of resources from the state to the poor; the excluded people in this analysis negotiate their marginal existence through various illegal arrangements.[12]

It can be argued that these approaches are significant because they transcend the narrowness of earlier poverty approaches and address much broader concerns of equality, democracy and integration under neo-liberal policies. These policies have been accompanied by growing economic inequalities and concentration of ownership of private industry led by a fairly "narrow ruling alliance of the political and economic elite" (Kohli 2006: 1368).[13]

There are some broad areas of agreement in the welfare, liberal democratic and postcolonial perspectives about how social exclusion has affected group inequalities and is therefore vital for developing social policy. First they capture an important dimension of the experience of certain groups of being somehow "set apart" or "locked out" of participation in a connected but global economic context. The concept of social exclusion focuses on production of disadvantage through active dynamics of social interaction, rather than the anonymous processes of impoverishment and marginalisation (Kabeer 2008: 20). Second, in important respects these interpretations are based on an understanding of social exclusion as a set of processes, rather than a single condition; indeed the concept captures those institutions that embody different patterns of rules, norms and asset distributions, which together help to spell out people's membership of different kinds of social groups, shape their identities, and define their interests (Kabeer 2008: 24). All three also adopt forward-looking arguments about social exclusion, that by "exacerbating current inequality between groups, and by contributing to its perpetuation from one generation to the next, it also fosters inter-group conflict" (Thorat and Kumar 2008: 11). For Chatterjee the distinction between corporate and non-corporate capital coincides with the divide between civil society and political society that could have "some ominous consequences" possibly in the form of revolt against the unruliness and corruption of political representation (Chatterjee 2008: 62). However, differences appear as the first two perspectives offer forward-looking arguments regarding social exclusion as necessary to advance greater ends as greater equality, a more diverse society, and to prepare the marginalised to participate as equal citizens in decision-making; Chatterjee sees these policies as entrenching the hold of corporate capital over the domain of civil society (Chatterjee 2008: 62).

Some of the claims are overstated as national governments still hold primary responsibility for social policies. These perspectives do not go far enough in extrapolating the implications of polarisation along the lines of caste, culture, class and gender and thus have to be deepened in relation to the postcolonial and highly stratified societies like ours. They also fail to acknowledge the continuing impact and relevance of prior forms of exclusion especially those associated with welfare-based policies in India. In Naila Kabeer's words, the "intersecting nature of different forms of exclusion and inclusion result in segmentation of society" as the access and exclusion in one institutional domain can be offset or exacerbated by access and exclusion in another (Kabeer 2008: 25). In what follows, I examine three major challenges to interpretations of social exclusion in the Indian context.

De-clustering Disadvantaged Groups

Given a plethora of groups and communities which demand legitimate rights of participation, and resource distribution from the state in India, the demands for justice are now aimed at remedying particularist patterns of disadvantage raising need for greater inclusion in the polity (Kimura and Tanabe 2006).[14] The essence of India's democratic polity is the continual negotiation of its boundaries in which increasing number of groups are demanding that they be added to the ranks of disadvantaged citizens. The main challenge is that any group can claim that it is not being treated equally and claim change in its status and hence the "indeterminacy" of identifying disadvantaged groups remain a major challenge. Now this kind of analysis would concern us with all kinds of groups ranging from those who are displaced, discriminated, health-stricken, or vulnerable. Hence

these perspectives fail to account for the effects of history and for the deep institutional nature of discrimination.

These perspectives implicitly reject a methodological difference in the approach towards inequalities between different groups. We can recall that reservations were justified for the SCs and STs by the Constituent Assembly on the ground that they were historically discriminated and excluded from the mainstream. Adopting backward-looking arguments, the assembly claimed that certain groups historically suffered substantial systemic violation of rights and these victims required some kind of compensation. The policy of reservations were marked by a "difference" approach as the equality of opportunity proposed for different caste groups "depends on the nature of discrimination faced by them and their social, economic and educational conditions" (Thorat and Kumar 2008: 18). After the implementation of Mandal Commission report, reservations were extended to the Other Backward Classes (OBCs). Given their numerical strength the OBCs had captured political power thanks to universal adult franchise. But their entry into higher education, bureaucracy and professions was not proportionate to their population. While it is acknowledged that the OBCs did not suffer from untouchability like the SCs, in the case of non-Hindu communities the lower castes who converted to Christianity and Islam are now viewed as victims of discrimination. Women face exclusion but it varies depending on their class, caste and religious backgrounds. Along with these groups the discriminations faced by semi-nomadic and denotified tribes, sexual minorities and differently-abled persons have to be now addressed. Furthermore, it is found that pervasive discrimination and prejudice against subgroups within disadvantaged groups (dalit women, Christian dalits, muslim women) creates barriers for their enjoyment of rights. This has given rise to changes within groups and their relative standing in a scheme of demanding share in political power. Moreover each of the status dismantling reservation policies relies on the assumption of asymmetry of social groups facing stigma and untouchability.

The Political Economy of the Excluded

According to Chatterjee in the current conditions of economic growth, the possibility of peasants and petty producers making a shift to urban and non-agricultural occupations is unlikely. This process of dispossession without proletarianisation is described as exclusion from the circuits of capital (Sanyal and Bhattacharyya 2009; Bardhan 2009: 33). The major problem with this analysis is that it overlooks the way large sections of those engaged in subsistence and petty production are already integrated with the market. Even if the excluded people do not get directly absorbed by capitalist and corporate growth, they are under the prevailing conditions, part of the informal sector in urban areas. As part of the informal sector, they are very likely to contribute to larger business enterprises which might involve major suppression of facts, safety provisions and legal norms. As illegal squatters they negotiate their marginal existence and are sometimes organised enough to have access to water supply and electricity connections and even ensure some standard of profitability to meet their livelihood needs in the city. In recent years there has been a rapid rise in wage rates for workers in the services sector in metropolitan cities like Delhi (domestic workers, drivers, nurses, etc). Moreover as Pranab Bardhan argues "the middle and upper class members of urban civil society" also participate in a great deal of illegal and unauthorised deals and negotiations with the representatives of the Indian state (Bardhan 2009: 34). Thus there is some basis for difference in what fraction of informal sector workers (self-employed) is outside the circuit of capital, as are refugees, (illegal) migrant workers, children, victims of primitive accumulation. In terms of employment, the informal economy continues to dominate as the new phenomenon that has gained prominence in the post-reform period in the form of casual and subcontracted employment by formal firms looking for labour flexibility (NCEUS 2008).

Recent research in India needs to locate social exclusion in the transformed structures of power and in the "reinvention of India as a market-oriented economy" (Corbridge and Harriss 2004: 162). Since the 1990s, the rapid integration into the world economy and the growth of technological and information based-industries have introduced economic growth along with unemployment and homelessness. Indian government continues to provide special anti-poverty programmes, subsidies, public works and guaranteed employment schemes. In the current neo-liberal framework, one can only endorse Young's argument that "inclusion" rather than "end to domination" is seen as more strategic term to use as

> in existing democracies there is more agreement on the norms of inclusive democracy, than there is agreement on whether social and economic arrangements are just...Accusations of exclusion or marginalisation often send political leaders and movements scrambling to become more inclusive, or at least to appear to be (Young 2000: 36).

Rescuing Equality: Expanding the 'Political'

I have argued that many normative orientations have been gradually transformed as social or economic inequalities have acquired new dimensions. For some time now the influential idea of social justice, seems to have been replaced by the need to be included, one with political effects that are initially ambiguous about the conception of equality. Here it is no longer the elimination of inequality that appears to represent the normative aim but the overcoming of "deprivation"; equal distributions of goods and "non-discrimination" no longer form its central categories, but are dislodged by "vulnerability" or "disadvantage". To study exclusion further would need us to move beyond a narrow definition of politics and the notion of the political as encompassing the social and cultural, issues. What is sought by many of these disadvantaged groups is not merely political equality, equal protection of their laws but a wholesale examination of the distribution of power among individuals and social institutions.

One of the shifts noted is in the way liberal democratic vocabulary of rights, social responsibility and social justice contend with claims of corporate capitalism, entitlements and merit. Professional management as opposed to bureaucratic control is viewed as rational, qualitatively different and better. The major challenge for the state is to act as an intermediary between the demands of neo-liberal economic logic and the demands of social groups which have been hit hardest by the new economic order. While

neo-liberalism accepts the view that citizens are entitled to equal rights, the latter are seen mainly as consumers of services and as active participants in the market. Instead of putting responsibility for collective welfare and social justice on the state, neo-liberalism seeks individual-based solutions, seeking mostly market interventions to many of its problems. From rural poverty, discrimination to destruction of livelihoods and way of life of marginalised communities, the objective is to provide a framework of inclusive growth and not redistribution.

A second shift through social inclusion is that it attempts to separate the egalitarian ideals associated with socialist thought by the use of "inclusion" that promises a fairer society. Alex Callinicos in a brave effort describes his alternative of equality "outside the bounds of common sense" and requiring a "revival in utopian imagination" (Callinicos 2000: 132-33). Like distributive justice, social inclusion is concerned about outcomes in distributive patterns but instead of assessing this in terms of individual inequalities, it addresses the absolute disadvantage of particular groups in society. The objective is to secure a minimum welfare for every citizen who is a member of the unemployed, minorities, and other groups who suffer discrimination. Third, instead of ensuring an equal distribution of resources or opportunities the aim of social inclusion is a forward-looking argument for welfare of the disadvantaged; a perfectionist element in as much elements of well-being include material goods such as food and shelter, but also opportunities to participate in meaningful ways in social life. Fourth, although social inclusion shares with liberal equality a concern with the fair distributive allocations to groups its fundamental objective is to promote policies so that society can be integrated and harmonious. Its aim is to establish conditions and opportunities that induce all citizens to participate in society and to come to value its institutions and potentials.

It is often asked if the opposite of exclusion is integration, an active citizenship that would include a wide array of democratic rights (Byrne 2009). Fifth, whereas the aim of equality of opportunity seeks to put people in a position in which they can access social positions it has also very little redistributive connotation because one can achieve "inclusion" through simple access to basic goods. It also creates confusion as the category of the socially excluded (through discrimination) is different from those suffering from economic poverty: the former are those who are effectively prevented from participating in the benefits of citizenship owing to a combination of factors of which poverty is merely one. Finally, "social integration" as the norm can elide differences and become intolerant towards minorities. Jackson argues that women are not categorically excluded but "integrated in particular ways" that is unjust. She explains "gender identities of women are positive and valued by women, at the same time as they may be devalued in hegemonic ideologies". Similarly many indigenous tribal groups who may be devalued by dominant groups themselves conceive their ways of life according to their values and priorities. Hence it can be a fairly passive, integrationist and conservative concept (Jackson 1999).

Thus, the social exclusion approach embraces many tenets of the earlier social justice concerns with redistribution and inequalities. But the primary objective is social cohesion or social integration and not removal of wider structural inequalities; the moral assumptions about work such as self-respect are ignored but inclusion in relation to paid employment is emphasised. This marginalises those who are not in paid work or are not capable of participating in such work.

Conclusions

The debate on equality and non-discrimination is certainly not a new one, but in terms of the way it is incorporated in the debate on social exclusion leads to several shifts within the discourse on social justice. The social exclusion discourse makes no claim about the structural deficiencies of the capitalism system, as had variants of the social justice discourse. It simply assumes that groups excluded from society through processes and institutions should be now included in them through several kinds of policies. In principle it fails to distinguish the different levels of inequalities faced by groups due to the specific discrimination they have faced in the past.

I have argued that the concept of social exclusion is a radical departure from the underlying principles of the twin streams of social justice in India; it reconfigures "opportunity" by placing the emphasis on high achievement for disadvantaged groups within a market-context of social and educational differentiation. At the same time, it emphasises an anti-poverty strategy focus for the "social inclusion" of the disadvantaged in educational achievement, facilitating participation in paid-work, and, promoting opportunities through entrepreneurship. In this political climate of neo-liberalism characterised by an abandonment of the goals of redistribution of wealth and a refocusing on market-oriented policies that aim at minimal-formal concepts of equality of opportunity, the embracement of the notion of "social inclusion" as a new political goal is limiting. From the above discussion we can conclude that the conception of a more equal society that underpins some of these debates are the ones that retain wide income inequalities and hierarchies based on power and social advantage, but at the same time aspire to social cohesion and social inclusion (identified as integration into the labour market), rather than a more egalitarian society. The principle of non-discrimination eliminates race, caste, religion, and such criteria to mark individuals but programmes and schemes to secure social justice involve recognising such markers of identity. Although government policies encompass all kinds of social activities that determine the shares of goods that people could possibly have, the absence of an explicit conception of social justice in political life has the result that arguments about public policy are made without any attempt to examine their justifications.

The existence of widespread inequalities between groups must be reduced. But this emphasis ignores that justice is about fairness, giving each person their due and more specifically the idea of responsibility and obligation that we owe to each other or those who have been harmed in the past. Thus there is a need to recognise the sources of existing differentials among disadvantaged groups in order to identify the different reasons for which justice is owed to these groups.

One way is to draw attention to the distinction between removal of "historical discrimination" or removal of "disadvantage" imposed by law and custom and "equalisation of life chances"

in the economic domain (Beteille 2002: 132). If social justice is about the treatment of all kinds of inequalities then how do we assess the fairness of certain policies and acts? On a range of economic criteria – poverty, occupational structure, educational attainments there is a clear hierarchy amongst the discriminated and disadvantaged groups, the SCs, STs and OBCs. To what extent can reservation policies challenge the dominance of existing capital formation and market system to call into question the distribution of income and wealth amongst people? Do appropriate measures of taxation and wealth transfer provide support for affirmative action policies? Hence although inequalities can emerge due to different reasons (morally arbitrary choice, desert, social structure) it is arguments within justice discourse that question why these certain kinds of inequalities should not exist.

NOTES

1 See for references to social justice and social exclusion, World Summit for Social Development 1995, p 3. *The Copenhagen Declaration and Programme of Action,* 6-12 March, New York, United Nations Department of Public Information.

2 See statement made by Mr Petr Kaiser, "EU Presidency Statement-United Nations: World Day of Social Justice", 20 February 2009, New York. For details www.europa-eu-un.org/articles/en/article_8518_en.htm.

3 See National Commission for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, Seventh Report, 2001-02 (2004).

4 See *Exclusion and Inclusion of Dalit Community in Education and Health: A Study.* Bhopal: A Jan Sahas Social Development Society and Unicef (2009); *Understanding Untouchability. A Comprehensive Study of Practices and Conditions in 1,589 Villages.* Robert F Kennedy Centre for Justice and Human Rights. Navsarjan and RFK Centre (2010).

5 See *Indira Sawhney vs Union of India,* 1992 (Supp) 3 SCC, 217.

6 See Cohen (2008).

7 For more on the existence of both progress and risk as central to late modernity see Beck (1997).

8 Due to the limited scope of this paper, I do not discuss in further detail the three discourses on social exclusion.

9 The latter attacked welfare benefits that promoted a culture of dependency amongst single mothers, a disproportionate number of whom were black. Since 9/11 negative perceptions of Muslims as a group have been acknowledged and the connection between this and their social exclusion have become a major concern.

10 See more on the discriminatory biometric techniques used by UK passport service and their exclusionary practices.

11 The early planning initiatives led to policies for structural transformation (land reforms), remedial/protective legislation (Minimum Wages Act, Equal Remuneration Act, Child Labour Act) and welfare measures (area/group development, self employment) (Shah 2000: 158).

12 I do not address Partha Chatterjee's more intricate argument regarding governmentalities of rule in postcolonial states.

13 See for adherence to the notion of passive revolution and the nature of class dominance in contemporary times, Chatterjee (2008: 56). He is of the view that the autonomy of the state which was lead to some extent by dominant classes like the bureaucratic managerial class, has weakened. Indeed this class may now have come under the moral political sway of the bourgeoisie.

14 Amartya Sen makes a distinction between active and passive exclusion in which the former occurs when certain groups of people are not given full political status or citizenship; while passive exclusion exists when exclusion comes about without a deliberate attempt for example because of a sluggish economy.

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