

Research Article

Inclusive Growth Policy and Consequential Inequality- Among the Scheduled Caste: A Study of the Namasudras in a Frontier Region of Assam, India

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ABSTRACT

The term affirmative action and inclusive growth though antonym but inseparable with the term social exclusion in a modern nation state. But the two processes may not be antonym to each other. People may oscillate in two dimensional processes. They may move towards inclusion in one aspect or towards the exclusion in other or towards the state of total rupture. Affirmative actions itself might be exclusionary in nature. Affirmative actions which are adopted to integrate the excluded people in many times turns in to opposite direction are termed as 'adverse incorporation' or 'differential inclusion' (Silver, 2011).The problem is not seldom in India. In Indian society many inclusive policies causes differential inclusion or adverse incorporation. For instance the poor as social assistance recipients are excluded as means of reinforcing work ethics among the majority. Materials and Method: Purposive random sample of 100 respondents one from each house hold have been collected all most equally from rural and urban areas. Villages like Suprakandi, Brojendra Nagar of South Karimganj block, Koilaghat area of Dullabcherra, Baruala and Nalarpar of Ramkrishna Nagar development block etc Where Namasudra communities are concentrated. And for urban area only Karimganj town have been selected. A schedule containing 30 variables is used as a tool to collect interview of respondents. Data have been analysed with the help of SPSS package.

Keywords: Affirmative action, differential inclusion' untouchability, privileges, exclusion.

INTRODUCTION

The term affirmative action and inclusive growth though antonym but inseparable with the term social exclusion in a modern nation state. In each and every society particular groups are deprived from enjoying certain civil liberties which are emancipated by their privileged counterpart. Deprivation derives from multiple sources: economic resources, social position, racial, gender relationship and so on. However, in modern nation, state is obliged to emancipate the mass from all disabilities. Many affirmative policies embark for people in general and excluded group in particular who have historically experienced exclusion. The term exclusion has become a part of vocabulary in France, other countries of Europe as well as third world to designate wide range of socio-economic problems. It emphasizes very strongly on social factors such as housing, health, employment and education. The official French definition of the concept means 'exclusion as rupture of social bonds'. More broadly 'the process through which individuals or groups are wholly or partially excluded from full participation in the society within which they live' (Hann and Kabeer, 2008). In French vocabulary exclusion is defined as opposite of social integration, mirroring the perceived importance of being part of society, of being 'included'. (Silver, 1994 quoted in *ibid* 2008). But the two processes may not be antonym to each other. People may oscillate in two dimensional processes. They may move towards inclusion in one aspect or towards the exclusion in other or towards the state of total rupture. Affirmative actions themselves might be exclusionary in nature. Affirmative actions which are adopted to integrate the excluded people many times turns into opposite direction are termed as 'adverse incorporation' or 'differential inclusion' (Silver, 2011). The problem is common in India. In Indian society, many inclusive policies cause differential inclusion or adverse incorporation. For instance, among the majority, the poor as social assistance recipients are excluded as means of reinforcing work ethics.

In Amartya Sen's perception, social exclusion refers to failure of capability deprivation. An individual or group loses social relational connection and the sources of such situation could be poverty, ill health, addiction to drugs or natural calamity. The capability deprivation leads to social exclusion and inclusion reverses the process. In the exclusion one gets disconnected from social relations. There are two elements in social relations: constitutive and instrumental importance. When one fails to relate with others it is constitutive relevance of social exclusion which leads further impoverishment through casual consequences. In the form of social exclusion of 'instrumental importance', exclusion in itself, is not impoverishing, but can lead to further impoverishment of human life. Sen further suggests distinction between active and passive exclusion. There can be direct

exclusion which is an active exclusion as in case of refugees deprived of the facilities of the native. In some other cases, the exclusion comes through not deliberate attempts but through a process as in case of increased poverty due to sluggish economy (Sen, 1998).

From this perspective, exclusion based on caste in India is examined. The fundamental and vital exclusion in Indian society is caste-based exclusion. It is central to other types of exclusion. Caste is both constitutive and instrumental. It emphasises on the contractual rights and obligations (constitutive). But the fourfold Varna system discriminates the untouchable from the rights of a human life with minimum dignity. And hence make the caste system as an instrument to immerse the untouchables' in the vicious circle of poverty as well as all sorts of agony. Again, exclusion of untouchables can also be referred as active because untouchability is religiously sanctioned and socially approved. Caste is a unique feature of Indian society. It organises the Hindu social system in such a way that it barred all rights of a vast segments of people belongs to lower strata in the name of pollution and purity. Caste system is structured around hierarchical division of fourfold Varnas. The untouchables who are outside the fourfold Varna system are symbolised as ritually inferior which is socially approved and religiously sanctioned. They are systematically excluded from all types of civil and cultural rights. Occupationally, they are linked with impure occupation. In civil and cultural sphere, traditionally their access was denied in public spaces like temple, streets, and schools. Even their shadow was polluting the upper caste people. However, such repressive practice of untouchability was discarded by the British Government and pioneer of social reconstruction. Even removal of untouchability was prioritized by the British Government who started to instigate many ameliorative programmes. Owing to confiscate the untouchability and endowed with all types privileges they are given new-fangled recognition as SC (schedule caste).

In post-independence phase, the process is further strengthened by providing constitutional safeguards. Article 46 of the Indian Constitution makes provision to promote the socio-economic interest of SC. And articles 15(4) and 16(4) of the Indian constitution provide facilities for reservation of backward classes in educational institution and public employment. The national commission for SC and ST (schedule tribes) has been set up as mandatory to safeguards the interest of SC and ST. But a large section of them are victims of discrepancy. Many studies reports disparity in human development between SC\ST and non-SC\ST continues as of today (Thorat and Senapati, 2007). Although sociological studies focused on upward social mobility of SC through sanskritisation and westernisation (Srinivas, 1966). Sociologists like Dumont (1970) and Kothari (1970a, 1970b) have also found social mobility at different levels. But as regard as studies

conducted to assess the extent of development of SC Forester (1974) focused on the bottom line position of SC at the level of poverty, social status, health, life expectancy, education and literacy too. Singh and Malik (1989) also observe the poor implementation of scheme of SC. Thus, the paper aims to study positive discrimination and unequal inclusion of Namasudra, an untouchable caste in Bengalee community. Though there are many aspects of exclusion but it will concentrate on education and occupational aspects only.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Purposive random sample of 100 respondents one from each household have been collected all most equally from rural and urban areas. Villages like Suprakandi, Brojendra Nagar of South Karimganj block, Koilaghat area of Dullabcherra, Baruala and Nalarpar of Ramkrishna Nagar development block, etc. where Namasudra communities are concentrated. And for urban area only Karimganj town have been selected. A schedule containing 30 variables is used as a tool to collect interview of respondents. Data have been analysed with the help of SPSS package.

The Namasudra is an untouchable caste in Bengal lived in the marshy trackts. The Chandal had very low ritual rank and were subject to several social disabilities and ostracism. Upper caste avoids all sorts of social contact with them. They were even refused to derive the services of barber, washer man and even some times scavengers too, which embraced them to convert into Islamism. Through progressive evolution of occupation they emerged as settled peasant community from boatmen and fishermen, by taking the advantages of land reclamation Act in the 19th century. In the area where they tilled the soil, the land was already occupied by upper caste Hindus which enforce them to uphold their subordinate class position. Lower ritual rank was coincided with the lower class rank in agrarian relation too.

According to 1911 census, 75–80 percent of them lived on agriculture; but 95.71 percent of them are share cropper having no tenancy rights (Sharma). Although the land reclamation act of Bengal had transformed them into traditional peasant. But in the fundamental class dichotomy of ‘rent-giver’ and ‘rent-receiver’ had more or less horizontal caste hierarchy. In Karimganj district, the Namasudras are indigenus inhabitant. Their main source of income is agricultural activities. Only 5 percent of them are either small farmer or marginal farmer. And 95 percent of them either land less labour or share cropper. As Karimganj was a part of undivided Bengal, Namasudras of these localities also came under the influence social mobility and sanskritisation that happened in Bengal. They adopted Vaishnavism and proclaim superior status.

Education

Education in Indian tradition is limited to elite section only. Large segments of lower caste people remained uneducated as only Brahmin and Kshatriyas are sanctioned to be educated by caste system. The Indian social system suffers from the inflexibilities of a rigid caste system. For centuries, caste had been a determining factor in education, work and employment. Shah rightly points out, 'higher education is still mainly open to the higher castes.' (Shah 1960) Large sections of the population belonging to the lower castes were denied education and also access to high income yielding and power imparting occupations. Hence, in India, caste has been the determinant of class positions resulting in acute inequality in the distribution of wealth and incomes. (Mehta and Kapoor 1998) The acquisition of educational qualifications has come to the fore as the prosperous sections of the dominant castes (Srinivas, 1987)

This inequality contributes to illustrate lower level of educational index in the country. Since expansion of education is a pre-requisite to development of nation, secularisation of education have been prioritised by architect of nation building. Promises have been made to vitiate traditional system and stretch education to apiece irrespective of caste and other barriers. Education is considered as one of the important instruments to haul people out of their poverty. It is considered to be fundamental instrument for expansion of basic capabilities by Sen (Sen). Instead of looking as orthodox way of poverty, he justified education as crucial inputs on following grounds: Firstly, it is instrumental to get a job and social respect; secondly, more active and informed political participation; and thirdly, it provides intellectual enhancement and personal growth of bring to the individual. He further argues spreading of education amongst the poorest section of society has been found to be beneficial even amongst the poorest section of society. Citing the example of Kerala experiment he states, 'Life expectancy in Kerala has not only been the highest among the states in India but is more when compared with the corresponding states'. In post-independence Indian education system has been restructured. In order to make education accessible to all, new plans and policies have been formulated to scale up the number of enrollment in schools, minimising drop outs and increasing literacy through adult education, opening night schools and so on. Providing scholarships, free supply of books and uniforms are some incentives for the poor family to reduce burden of expenditure on schooling. The country has made tremendous progress since last 66 year of independence. But still educational scenario in India is characterised by widespread disparity. The data states that respondents of rural areas are lagging behind from that of urban counterpart. The positive sign in this aspect is that while all India trend of SC level is 54.69 percent according to 2001 census as against 65 percent of general

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Table 1: Education of the respondents

Education	Rural	Urban	Total (percentage in parenthesis)
Illiterate	4 (8.0)	–	4 (4.0)
Primary/secondary	30 (60.0)	15 (30.0)	45 (15.0)
HSLC	13 (26.0)	20 (40.0)	33 (33.0)
Graduate	3 (6.0)	10 (20.0)	13 (13.0)
Postgraduate	–	2 (4.00)	2 (2.0)
Technical	–	3 (6.0)	3 (3.0)
Total	50 (100.0)	50 (100.0)	100 (100.0)

population. But in the study it is found that only 96 percent of them are literate. In comparison to four or five decades ago the situation is optimistic. In urban areas no respondents are found to be illiterate. But as the level of education increases number of respondents tends to diminish. The highest number of respondents is either primary or secondary educated both the localities. In urban areas it is at least matric level while in rural areas it is lesser than that. Out of 100 respondents only 13 respondents are found to be graduate or pursuing graduation, of these 10 of them hail from urban areas. None of the respondents from rural areas are either post-graduate or technically qualified. Even in urban areas they are marginal in number, but in context of upper caste. Thus, from the data it is clear that the level of literacy has been increased but in case of higher education it is not up to the expectation. The state has come across 67 year of independence, and subsequent to independence many inclusive policies on education were promised to enhance people's participation in education. Over the years, besides reservation facility, economic assistance in the form of scholarship, free coaching etc. have been provided. But still SC people's participation in education is not as equal as other caste. Further the present study also it is also bringing to fore that people of rural areas are lagging behind than that of urban areas. Reasons are many. Marginal group in this district are submerged in poverty. Earning is prior to education. To them primary or middle school level of education is sufficient. Further, the expenditure incurred for education is not affordable to them. Although in state sponsored school amount of fee is very meager but the expenditure to purchase books, copies and other amenities like tuition are too high to be bear by this poor people. Nevertheless, there is provision of post-matric scholarship for the student belongs to BPL (below poverty line). Those, whose monthly family income is less than 44,500 per annum, i.e. those whose monthly family income is even 4000 and above are not entitle to be consider as BPL. The amount of scholarship is not

substantial enough to meet the requirement of education. Additionally, infrastructure related access is another factor that keeps them away in access to higher education. In rural areas colleges are far away from their habitat. The colleges are not accessible on foot. Additionally communication bottleneck is a major problem in rural areas of the district. Whatever poor facilities are there poor people are not in a position to bear the expenditure of transportation. Cultural capital is also a negative factor in this regard. Most of the SC students are either first generation educated. As a result they are neither motivated nor helped by the family to generate aspiration of higher education as it is in upper caste.

Occupation

Occupational segregation or division of labour is the fundamental principle on which caste system is organised. Status of each caste is manifested in terms of occupational role it performs. Hindu theological notions of karma (duty) and dharma (moral code) have contributed greatly in strengthening the idea of hierarchical division of labour. In Hindu social system, the untouchables or SC are considered as polluted as they perform all demeaning occupations. However, in course of time with resurgence of anticipation for upward social mobility they try to relinquish the traditional occupation and started fit into place in other occupation. Sanskritisation, westernization and modernisation are the processes to provide in roads for upward social mobility. In post-independence period the process is further accelerated by some of state intervention which introduced many untouchability removal acts. Reservation in education and occupation provided by the constitution of India has also enhanced the scope of occupational mobility. But the setback is that near 30 of dalits are engaged in low skilled casual jobs in comparison to 8 percent general category. Reasons are largely landlessness as 19 percent schedule castes are land less labour against 35 percent of general caste are farmer in rural areas. Dalits are also less likely than other group to have their own business enterprise particularly in urban areas. A similar pattern is evident from distribution of occupation. Dalit workers are more likely in blue collar jobs in agriculture and allied industries in construction. Only 2 percent of SC in primary age working individual are in high pay in professional or technical occupation comparison to 8 percent general population. Even in private sector, traditional pattern is replicated that more than 60 percent of sweeper in central government are likely to undertake ritually unclean and manual work (Das and Dutta, 2007).

Data depicts that people in rural areas contributes least in service sector. This depicts least impact of reservation policy in such areas in comparison to urban areas. On the other hand, in urban areas people are economically well off than the people of rural areas. Only 50 are engaged in government job and more than 30 of

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A Study of the Namasudras in a Frontier Region of Assam, India

Table 2: Occupation of the respondents

Occupation	Rural	Urban	Total (percentage in parenthesis)
Service	3 (6.0)	25 (50.0)	28 (28.0)
Private sector	7 (14.0)	15 (30.0)	22 (22.0)
Agriculture	15 (30.0)	–	15 (15.0)
Bamboo work	17 (34.0)	–	17 (17.0)
Business	17 (34.0)	10 (20.0)	17 (17.0)
Both agriculture and business	1 (2.0)	–	1 (1.0)
Total	50 (100.0)	50 (100.0)	100 (100.0)

them are in private service. Those who are serving in private sector they might not have engaged by virtue of their caste identity. None but hardly a few of the respondents from both the localities are doing white-collar jobs. Those a hand full are doing such none of them belong to rural areas. Amongst the businessmen none of them are established merchant. In both the areas they are either vendor (vegetable, sugar etc.) or small shopkeeper. Data presents, only a third of ruralites and none of urbanites are pursuing agricultural activities. Agriculture is known to be the predominant source of occupation in rural India. Additionally, the Namasudra communities have tradition of practicing agriculture. But data states that such practice is no longer predominant in the realm of occupation. Reasons are many. Firstly, in Assam people who possess agricultural major segments of them are either small farmer or marginal farmer. Big farmers are scanty in numbers. Since amount of land possessed by small and marginal are not sufficient to eradicate poverty and provide economic sufficiency. Secondly, standard of agricultural activity is very low. Farmers are accustomed to produce *khari* crops only. Green revolution which took place in late 1960s in Punjab and UP a fraction of it is beyond the reach of farmer in Assam. Inadequate irrigation facilities, use of traditional tools of production and lack of other technologies causes low productivity. Thus, to avoid poverty people have no option but to aspire for job to lead an economically prosperous life. Above all production cost of agriculture such as seeds, bullock carts or power tiller and other tools may require more expenditure. Rather it is easier to them to have subsidised rate of rice at BPL card. Subsidised rice is not sufficient to eradicate poverty and enable them to continue study or start any business or self-employment process. Rather, often they compel to drop out the study. Additionally, Assam in general and the valley in particular lacks industries or other areas of employment. So boys hardly completed teen age are compelled to move to other part of the country such as Bangalore, Hyderabad,

and Goa and even in neighbouring states like Meghalaya and Mizoram. They are either working as security guard or wage labour. Further Bamboo work for domestic use is traditionally known to ascribe to this community. But in the era of market economy this type of work does not put for familial sufficiency. In this way they are excluded from their traditional occupation. In urban areas none of the respondents are doing agricultural activity. Out 50 respondents 40 of them in urban area are pursuing jobs either Government or private. This indicates all of them have moved towards upward mobility. In preceding generations their parent might have been doing service and migrated from rural vicinity to give better educational facilities to their wards. Who have their agricultural land at rural areas are either kept fallen or cultivated by share cropper or any other members of the family. Thus, the paper throws light on the following aspects:

First, inclusive policy of the state is asymmetrically distributed. It is favouring to those who are already economically included. Hence only a small section the SC in general and Namasudras in particular are availing benefits. Second, there is a special gap between ruralites and urbanites. Ruralites are more excluded and urban respondents are economically better off. Third, inclusive policies are not sufficient to eradicate the deprivation of disadvantage properly. Fourth, inclusive policies are not properly formulated which consequent into further deprivation. For instance, effort to improve agricultural activity would be more beneficial instead of distributing subsidised rice. It is not caste-based exclusion rather class-based exclusion which is predominant. Cultural deprivation (untouchability), which is agony of SC in other part of the country, does not prevail in equal extent in this locality. Caste system is more liberal. It is poverty which is the cause of misery. But economic exclusion is considered to be preponderant over cultural exclusion, yet role of culture in influencing deprivation cannot be overruled. As it already mentioned in traditional class dichotomy they were placed at lower rung. Either they were marginal farmer or land less labour. This class position is handed down from generation to generation. And a kind of psychological inertia prevails among them. They accept poverty as allotted to them since they are lower caste people. Thus in order to improve the situation following steps can be taken of:

- (i) To enhance the subsidies in education particularly in higher education.
- (ii) Instead of distributing subsidised rice subsidies in agriculture should be increased.
- (iii) There can be motivational scheme to make the farmer enthusiastic in agricultural practice.
- (iv) Such as provision of award for best farming. In this regard information technology can be deployed.

Inclusive Growth Policy and Consequential Inequality- Among the Scheduled Caste:
A Study of the Namasudras in a Frontier Region of Assam, India

- (v) Unruly practices must be stopped. Transformative remedies for injustice should be adopted. Since ruralites are more disadvantaged there should be special inclusive policy targeting the rural people. Not affirmative policy by caste identity.

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