

## **Conceptualising Social Exclusion and Social Inclusion**

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*The terms ‘social exclusion’ and ‘social inclusion’ originated in Europe in response to the crises of the welfare state and the fear of social disintegration caused by social and economic crises, but now these two terms are most widely used in recent years by politicians, social scientists and the public as well, all over world including India. There are significant differences in the way the concepts of social exclusion and social inclusion have been defined across the globe, reflecting intellectual and political traditions and national discourses. Therefore the aim of this paper would be to conceptualise the concepts of social exclusion and social inclusion by taking into account the various debates and discourses going on at various academic and non-academic forums.*

**[Key Words:** Social Exclusion, Social Inclusion, Social Welfare and Economic]

### **Introduction**

Social Exclusion and Social Inclusion are the concepts that have been increasingly entered the policy discourse in recent years. These concepts have been originated in Europe in response to the crises of the welfare state and the fear of social disintegration caused by social and economic crises, but now these two terms are most widely used in recent years by politicians, social scientists and the public as well, all over world including India. The UK Government is committed to reducing social exclusion and has established a new department, the Social Exclusion Unit (SEU), to develop policy proposals. Likewise the European Union has agree to tackle the issue of social exclusion through the development of national plans of actions, and has been identified a set of statistical indicators for measuring social inclusion. Also, there has been a substantial investment in research, examining a relationship between social exclusion and social inclusion.

### **Social Exclusion**

It is generally accepted that the term social exclusion originated in France in the early 1970s from the writings of Rene Lenoir (1974). It was used first to describe various categories of people (the mentally and physically disabled, the aged, abused children, single parents, marginal, asocial persons,

'misfits' and so on comprising ten per cent of the French population) who were excluded from the employment based social security system. The term was continually redefined to encompass new problems and social groups. It was used in the 1980s to refer to various types of social disadvantage related to social problems arising from economic crises and crises of the welfare state—long term unemployment, ghettoisation, growing instability of social bonds including among family members, in neighbourhoods, trade unions etc. but also of the lack of integration of immigrants, especially Muslims. Exclusion was seen as the result of the rupture of social and symbolic bonds between individual and society and the failure of the state, reflecting the French emphasis on the organic and solidaristic nature of society (e.g. Durkheim). Social policy was directed towards 'insertion' or integration of the excluded to ensure social cohesion or social solidarity (Silver 1994; de Haan 1998). The concept views social ills not as clearly delimited social problems, but as part of the most fundamental social relation—that of belonging or not belonging to one's society (Woodward and Kohli 2001). The rupture of the social bond can take many forms: abandonment, segregation, assistance, marginalization, and discrimination (Ravaud and Stiker 2001).

As the European usage of social exclusion has intensified, it has become a guiding concept in a wide range of research on deprivation and inequalities. Its emphasis on social relationships, participation, and customary way of life distance the concept from the tradition of work on poverty which focuses more on financial well-being, consumption, and income adequacy (Room 1995). The term gradually spread over Europe and in 1989 the European Commission passed a resolution to fight 'social exclusion' and foster 'integration'. In a short time this term replaced, or at least threatened to displace as the dominant concept, poverty in development and social policy discourse in Europe. The term then, fostered no doubt by international agencies such as ILO, UNDP, World Bank and DFID, spread to Asia, Latin America and Africa, with very different social, economic and political conditions, where it competes for discursive dominance, with the more established terms such as poverty, relative deprivation, social disadvantage and the like. Social exclusion moved on to the political agenda in Europe in the 1990s. The conceptual development of social exclusion draws from two leading social policy traditions, that of the social catholic concern for social ties in the community and within the family. With respect to social exclusion Silver has commented that the term "is so evocative, ambiguous, multidimensional, and elastic that it can be defined in many different ways" (Silver 1994:536). Therefore, it is not only ambiguous and contested but polysemic and vague too. Definitions range from little more than a re-naming of poverty (Burchardt et al. 1999:228) to more broad based concepts based on a lack of, or inability to participate in society.

Despite their differences, the definitions of social exclusion have characteristics in common, which separate it from other concepts (e.g. poverty). Social exclusion has been defined by the Department of International

Development (DFID) as “a process by which certain groups are systematically disadvantaged because they are discriminated against on the basis of their ethnicity, race, religion, sexual orientation, caste, descent, gender, age, disability, HIV status, migrant status or where they live. Discrimination occurs in public institutions, such as the legal system or education and health services, as well as social institutions like the household” (DFID 2005:3). This definition is similar to the one used in the international institute for labour studies (IILS)/UNDP project (Gore and Figueiredo 1997), except that it adds further features such as objective and subjective aspect of social exclusion, individual disadvantage and exclusion as an attribute of societies. Social exclusion is manifested “in recurrent patterns of social relationships in which individuals and groups are denied access to the goods, services, activities, and resources which are generally associated with citizenship” (Gore and Figueiredo 1997 as cited in Jackson 1999:127-28). According to England’s Social Exclusion Unit (SEU), “social exclusion is ‘a shorthand for what can happen when people or areas suffer from a combination of linked problems such as unemployment, poor skills, low incomes, poor housing, high crime environments, bad health and family breakdown” (SEU 1997:2).

Some definitions emphasize exclusion from full participation in community or society as an essential element of social exclusion, while others emphasize other elements such as citizenship and social rights. One definition, for example, defines social exclusion as “the process through which individuals or groups are wholly or partially excluded from full participation in the society in which they live” (European Foundation 1995:4 as cited in de Haan and Maxwell 1998:2). Another definition that of a European commission report uses T.H. Marshall’s notion of social citizenship, emphasizing rights: “here we define social exclusion first and foremost in relation to the social rights of citizens” (Room et al. 1992:14 as cited in Silver 1994:566). This view is elaborated by Bhalla and Lapeyre (1997:415) who comment that “the European Commission emphasizes the idea that each citizen has the right to a certain basic standard of living and a right to participate in the major social and occupational institutions of the society – employment, housing, health care, education and so on. Social exclusion occurs when citizens suffer from disadvantage and are unable to secure these social rights”. Commins (2004:60) reveals that the term social exclusion and the processes it embodies have enabled us to understand the multi-dimensional nature of disadvantage. The conceptualisation of social exclusion has assisted analysis of the “dynamic processes by which conditions of disadvantage come about... in wider economic and social contexts”, as opposed to the application of a static set of indicators such as income poverty measures. Levitas *et al.*, (2007:25) contends that “social exclusion is a complex and multidimensional process. It involves the lack of or denial of resources, rights, goods and services, and the inability to participate in the normal relationships and activities, available to the majority of people in a society, whether in economic, social, cultural or political arenas. It

affects both the quality of life of individuals and the equity and cohesion of society as a whole". Levitas has also drawn parallels between social exclusion and Durkheim's notions of social division, social cohesion, and the maintenance of these through the division of labor (Levitas 1996:5-20). Another definition is offered by Madanipour *et al.* (1998:22), "social exclusion is defined as a multi-dimensional process, in which various forms of exclusion are combined: participation in decision making and political processes, access to employment and material resources, and integration into common cultural processes. When combined, they create acute forms of exclusion that find a spatial manifestation in particular neighbourhoods". Naila Kabeer's definition (2000:91) combines emphasis on participation in the life of society with institutional analysis (rules of the game), which defines access to resources and membership of groups and 'recognition' or identity of groups. Arjan de Haan (1999:12-13) summarised, especially from development and social policy perspectives, the characteristics of social exclusion are: (a) social exclusion is defined as the opposite to social integration, which reflects the perceived importance of being part of society, being integrated; (b) it is a multi-dimensional concept. It refers to exclusion (deprivation) in the economic, social and political sphere. It goes beyond analysis of resource allocation mechanisms, and includes power relations, agency, culture and social identity; (c) social exclusion can refer to a state or situation, but it often refers to processes, to the mechanisms by which people are excluded. The focus is on the institutions that enable and constrain human interaction.

Some authors discuss not just exclusion in general, but different types of exclusion. Sen (2000:14-15) differentiates between exclusion in terms of 'constitutive relevance' and 'instrumental importance' as two ways in which social exclusion can lead to capability deprivation. For example, being excluded in the sense of not being able to take part in the life of a community can directly impoverish a person's life; it is a loss on its own, in addition to whatever further deprivation it may directly generate. An example of instrumental importance is not having access to using the credit market, which by itself may not be of inherent importance but can, through causal linkages, lead to other deprivations such as income poverty. He has also distinguished between 'active' and 'passive' exclusion. Active exclusion is the result of deliberate policy or laws, as for example, when immigrants or refugees are not given political status, resulting in many kinds of deprivations and social exclusions. Passive exclusion occurs through social process in which there is no deliberate attempt to exclude, as in the case of poverty that is generated by sluggish economy and not a consequence of any deliberate policy or law. Amartya Sen also drawn distinction between the situation where some people are being kept out (or at least left out), and where some people are being included (may even be forcibly included) - at greatly unfavourable terms; and describing these two situations as 'unfavourable exclusion' and 'unfavourable inclusion', 'unfavourable

inclusion', with unequal treatment, may have the same adverse effects as 'unfavourable exclusion'.

Rodgers (1995:46-7) visualized exclusion which include, 'exclusion from goods and services', 'labour market exclusions', 'exclusions from land' and 'exclusion from security'. Arguing for a distinction between social exclusion and poverty, Saunders (2007:8) describes three dimensions of social exclusion: disengagement (lack of participation), service exclusion (lack of access to key services), and economic exclusion (lack of access to economic resources). Kabeer (2000:4), drawing on the work of Fraser (1997) makes a distinction between primarily economic and primarily cultural forms of injustice or disadvantage. There is also a hybrid form, of injustice which gives rise to 'bivalent collectivises', that is groups which face both economic and cultural disadvantages, such as the Dalits, ethnic groups, Muslims, and so on. Young (2000:53-55) differentiates between external and internal political exclusion. External exclusions are the "many ways that individuals and groups that ought to be included are purposely or inadvertently left out of foray for discussion and decision making." Internal exclusion concerns ways that "people lack effective opportunity to influence the thinking of others even when they have access to the foray and procedures of decision-making."

### **Social Inclusion**

The concept of social inclusion has not been as well discussed or theorised as the concept of social exclusion. Social inclusion doctrines have tended to circumvent pre-existing, conflict-based discourses on social exclusion. For example, while many pessimism ridden perspectives on social exclusion generally evolved from theorists and advocate son the political left (primarily in response to late twentieth century policy shifts to neo-conservatism), social inclusion developed as a more optimistic discourse (Askonas 2000; Teague 1995). Subsequently, social inclusion found its place in concomitance to liberal and neo-liberal based ideologies that did not wholly discount progressive or moderately progressive social agendas. Saloojee (2001:3) suggests that social inclusion is perhaps an even more compelling idea than traditional liberal-based axioms because of its relative utility as both a normative ideal and transformative tool. He further says that social inclusion forces us to go beyond the realm of formal equality and into the realm of substantive equality which is characterised by discrimination, exclusion and inequality. The term social inclusion is multidimensional and not easily defined. It includes a variety of concepts such as 'participation', 'community', 'social capital', and 'social cohesion', all of which have broad definitions. As such a comprehensive definition of social inclusion is difficult to articulate. Friendly and Lero (2002) have stated social inclusion is a process and an outcome. When social inclusion is attempted it becomes a process and as it is achieved it becomes an outcome. The process is essential in achieving the outcome. Process elements of social inclusion include policies, opportunities and attitudes (Roehrer Institute 2003). The Laidlaw Foundation identified five critical dimensions of social

inclusion: “valued recognition, human development, involvement and engagement, proximity and material well-being” (Frierler and Zarnke 2007). The social inclusion is a “complex and challenging concept that cannot be reduced to only one dimension or meaning” (Gilbert 2003:3). Bates and Davis (2004:195-207) have defined social inclusion as; ensuring people with disabilities have full and fair access to activities, social roles and relationships alongside non-disabled citizens. They state that as well as social inclusion, the notion of social capital must also be considered to develop services and increase life opportunities for their service users. European Foundation on other hand has another definition, “social exclusion is defined as the opposite of social integration, mirroring the perceived importance of being part of society, of being included”(European Foundation 1995:4 as cited in de Haan 2000:26). This view is also implied in the DFID/World Bank definition of social inclusion. In order to measure social inclusion; indicators of social inclusion are required. There is no consensus on what these indicators are and so there does not appear to be definitive measure of social inclusion. Hanvey (2003:9) states, “Social inclusion is a complex concept that cannot be reduced to only one measurement”, whereas Jenkin and Wilson (2009) have concluded that inclusion is a broad concept and therefore will mean different things to each person. The dualistic or binary logic between ‘social exclusion’ and ‘social inclusion’ has been criticised by several authors on various grounds. For example O’Reilly (2005:80-88) argues that the language of inclusion and exclusion implies a binary logic, that one is either included or excluded. People are included or excluded in relation to some variable. The question of inclusion, therefore, is best conceptualised as assort of sliding scale rather than a binary function, so that inclusion and exclusion are the extreme poles of a continuum of relations of inclusion/exclusion. Jackson (1999) argues that there can be simultaneous exclusion and inclusion, that is individuals and groups can be excluded in one domain and included in another. The intersecting nature of different forms of exclusion and inclusion results in the segmentations of society, and in clusters of advantage and disadvantage, rather than in a simple dichotomy between inclusion and exclusion. There are various ways in which these segments can be characterized, such as in terms of privileged inclusion, secondary inclusion, adverse incorporation or problematic inclusion, self-exclusion and hard-core exclusion (Kabeer 2000).

From all the above debate and discussions, the question still exist that whether these terms ‘social exclusion’ and ‘social inclusion’ and especially social exclusion, add value, as the economists would say, to the concepts of poverty, relative deprivation and disadvantage (Sen2000; Kabeer 2000; de Haan 1998; Room 1999; Saith 2001); about the scope or range of social phenomena that these concepts cover; whether the concepts are applicable to the so called Southern countries (Kabeer 2000; Saith 2001; de Haan and Maxwell 1998; Bhalla and Lapeyre 1997; Sen 2000);and about the relations between social exclusion and social inclusion (Jackson 1999; Kabeer 2000; Sen 2000).

Moreover, invoking these terms has moral and political implications: Exclusion is 'bad', inclusion is 'desirable' and we need to find ways to include the excluded (Loury 1999; Jackson 1999). In this context some critics such as Else Oyen (1977) put a note of caution on misuse of these terms and remark that researchers "pick up the concept and are now running all over the place arranging seminars and conferences to find a researchable content in an umbrella concept for which there is limited theoretical underpinning" (as quoted in Sen 2000:2). But some of the strong advocates of these concepts such as Arjande Haan (1999:12) notes, social exclusion and inclusion are theoretical concepts and thus ways of looking at society; they are "lens through which people look at reality and not reality itself". Therefore, there is no single way of understanding the concepts of social exclusion and inclusion. It is difficult to encapsulate these concepts in a single definition.

### **Conclusion**

Some warn against strict definitions as, "The power comes not from their analytical clarity, which is conspicuously lacking, but from their flexibility" (Homepage as cited in Australian Social Inclusion Board 2009:7). It appears that there are a number of key ideas that make up the notion of 'social exclusion' and 'social inclusion'. Thus, in totality, three defining characteristics of social exclusion are particularly relevant. First, social exclusion involves denial of equal opportunity in multiple spheres. Second, social exclusion is embedded in the societal relations, and societal institutions- the process through which individuals or groups are wholly or particularly excluded from full participation in the society in which they live.

Thirdly, the denial of equal opportunities or access results in lack of freedom and human poverty and general deprivation of excluded social groups (de Haan 1999; Sen 2000). On the other hand, social inclusion denotes the following characteristics of a society at large or individuals at least. Firstly, meaningful engagement in an individual's community, where they are free to participate exercising choice and control, find social connection and have a sense of belonging and responsibility. Secondly, inclusion is more than access to services and attendance at events or groups in a community location. It is a meaningful connectedness with a community, where acceptance is gained and responsibility is exercised. Thirdly, inclusion is a proactive approach that not only removes barriers to inclusion, but also requires investments and actions to bring about the conditions for inclusion.

### **Notes:**

<sup>1</sup>The concept of poverty, mainly British in origin, was also rejected due to its connotation with charity (see Silver 1994)

<sup>2</sup>Sen defines capability deprivation as poverty seen as the lack of capability to live a minimally decent life. Capability deprivation-to lead a minimally decent life leads to social exclusion (from participating in social life).

<sup>3</sup>Kabeer argues that the economically disadvantaged mobilise largely around their interest, demanding redistribution of resources whereas the culturally disadvantaged mobilise around the

question of identity, demanding recognition; bivalent collectivities on the other hand demand both redistribution and recognition, right to have different identities, which are manifested in the ways in which the dominant social groups invisible, seek to impose dominant values, or routinely devalue and disparage certain categories of people.

<sup>4</sup>The DFID/World Bank report defines social inclusion as the removal of institutional barriers and the enhancement of incentives to increase the access of diverse individuals and groups to development opportunities.

<sup>5</sup>While many authors raise the issue of the value added by the concept of social exclusion and whether the concepts are relevant for the so-called developing countries, they conclude that social exclusion is an improvement over the older and related concept of poverty, relative deprivation, capabilities etc. and that it could be used for the South.

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