



BOOK REVIEW

Combating Social Exclusion : Inter-sectionality of Caste, Class, Gender and Regions, New Delhi

Prof. Gaya Prasad

Former, Vice Chancellor, Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel University of Agriculture & Technology, Modipuram, Meerut

Corresponding author e-mail : gprasad1986@gmail.com

The recently published book, under review, is based on an extensive empirical study conducted in the state of Punjab. Social exclusion in the Indian context is multipronged and multidimensional, in light of the social divides of caste, class, gender, region, ethnicity, language and religion. The book clearly brings out the existence of social, economic and political exclusion based on caste, gender, region and class. The justification of conducting the study in the state of Punjab is as it has the highest proportion of scheduled caste population (31.90%) in India (Census of India, 2011). The strength of the study lies in an in-depth, multidisciplinary & mixed methods research methodology, *in which four regions of Punjab*, i.e. Doaba, Malwa, Majha and Kandi, were chosen and out of which, 8 villages have been extensively studied. The empirical analysis has been able to unravel the intersectionality in terms of caste, gender, class and regions. The book is spread over 7 Chapters with an emphasis on Education, International Emigration of scheduled castes (diaspora effect), State Intervention Policies and amelioration of scheduled caste, Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) and political inclusion and, intersectionality's amongst scheduled caste, and above all, suggests some intervening strategies for their amelioration. Furthermore, the salient feature of the book is its coverage of all the regions of Punjab and 15 out of the total 39 scheduled castes. To add, 21 case studies

of most depressed scheduled castes was also conducted, which brings out the disparities prevalent in the community.

It is surprising that the different forms of exclusion and discrimination continues in one of the most prosperous and progressive states of India. The findings of the study have been appropriately arranged in 7 chapters. It is generally known that caste-based deprivation, denial and discrimination is pervasive not only in Punjab where the study was carried out but across the country and amongst the Indian communities living in other countries as well. The book has attempted to document different forms of exclusion based on caste, class, gender and region and the impact of government policy interventions on this age-old injustice perpetrated with the idea of domination.

Though the findings of the study indicated that there has been some forward movement in political inclusion; but, social, cultural, religious and administrative inclusion remains a far cry. Different government schemes and policy interventions aimed at reducing/eliminating caste-based exclusion have not produced desired effects in social, administrative and regional inclusion in the manner envisioned in the constitution of India. Even more than 73 years after the independence, the country continues to witness rampant multi-dimensional discrimination based on caste.

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar was of the view that education can have transforming effect on the empowerment of lower caste communities especially scheduled caste across the country. In this regard, of the 23 schools surveyed in the study, the teacher-pupil ratio is approximately 1: 47 which is not a healthy ratio for imparting quality and inclusive education. However, contrary to what many believed, education has not been able to shake the age-old foundation of caste-based exclusion. Though due to political and social awakening, some positive change appears to be visible across the states. From states such as Punjab one would expect that caste-based exclusion will diminish faster as Punjabi people appear to have progressive outlook and have strong links with technologically and economically strong and socially progressive countries of the western world. The caste-based segregation was found in the places of religious worship, cremation grounds, and places of residence. To add further, the existence of caste-based groupings even in Indian Diaspora is surprising that such prejudice exists in educated Indian communities living in countries where caste system does not exist. Wide spread violence and discrimination against scheduled caste across the country is shameful for the nation.

An important contribution of the book is that the scheduled castes in Punjab constitute a highly heterogeneous category, with large variations within. The study entails landlessness, lack of proper educational facilities, acute poverty, lack of employment

opportunities, caste discrimination, gender discrimination as the major factors behind low status of scheduled caste in Punjab. The book does provide a sound mitigation strategy in short term as well as long term basis; for instance, holistic empowerment of the scheduled castes, improving the educational infrastructure, land and wage reforms, Equitable utilization of *Shyamlat* land (village common land), Nationwide Campaign against untouchability and manual scavenging, pro-active policies for the amelioration of the most depressed castes and women, Strategies to curb atrocities against scheduled castes, especially, women and promoting scheduled caste women entrepreneurship, etc.

The book also documents the deficiencies in the policies and mental attitude of the castes which are in social hierarchy. Economic empowerment can lead to education which can be instrumental in inclusion of scheduled caste and other lower caste communities in different sectors of the socio-political and economic activity of the country. The findings of the book should be of interest to all those who are interested in empowerment of scheduled castes in the state of Punjab. The book is a must read for all researchers working on social exclusion, discrimination and social inclusion. It sensitizes the reader to the ground realities in the twenty first century Punjab in an eloquent and meticulous manner. Therefore, I have no hesitation in recommending the book both to the students, researchers and policy planners.

