

## **Voluntary Social Exclusion: A Study with Special Reference to An Indian Community**

V.Thangaraj

*Ph.D. Research Scholar,  
C S S E & I P  
Gandhigram Rural Institute,  
[Deemed to be University]  
Gandhigram*

---

### **ABSTRACT:-**

Social exclusion undoubtedly a social problem worthy of concern. But what about voluntary social exclusion? Whether such voluntary social exclusion also would be a social problem worthy of concern? Brain Barry is of the view that every social exclusion whether voluntary or involuntarily, offends against social solidarity and social justice and hence amounts to a social problem. But Le Grand has argued that this view cannot be upheld in case of voluntary social exclusion because it is based on individual choice. He concludes that voluntary social exclusion is neither unjust nor inequitable because it arises from individual choice. Which view is correct? This paper, by carrying out a detailed study of an Indian society, concludes that in Indian context voluntary social exclusion always amounts to social problem and hence it is true to say social exclusion always includes voluntary social exclusion also.

**KEY WORDS:-**Social exclusion, voluntary social exclusion, individual choice, Indian society, social problem.

-----  
Date of Submission: 08-04-2022

Date of Acceptance: 25-04-2022  
-----

### **I. INTRODUCTION:**

Social exclusion undisputedly a social problem worthy of concern. But what about voluntary social exclusion? What will be the effect if an individual or a community has chosen to exclude themselves voluntarily from participating in key activities of the society in which they live? Whether such voluntary social exclusion also would be a social problem worthy of concern? Not everyone necessarily wishes to participate in key activities of the society whatever they may be. All of these individuals or groups may not be participating in the key activities of the society, but do all they constitute a social problem? If so what would be the nature of such problem? Is it the same kind of social problem as those are socially excluded for reasons beyond their control and if not what kind of problem it will be? Brain Barry has addressed these questions in a recent CASE book and has concluded that every social exclusion whether voluntary or involuntary, offends against social justice and social solidarity and thus amounts to a social problem (Barry,2002). But in a subsequent paper Le Grand differs much, holding that the arguments of Barry are weak for voluntary social exclusion for it implies that those voluntarily excluding themselves are not a social problem. He points out that if some individuals voluntarily decide to exclude themselves from mainstream, any move to include them is going to be against their expressed will. May be that voluntary social exclusion also would violate social solidarity but any attempt to correct the situation is likely to create resentment and thereby dilute solidarity yet further. In these lines Le Grand finally includes that voluntary social exclusion is neither unjust nor inequitable because it arises from choice (Le Grand,2003). Which view is correct? Which view is applicable to an Indian Society or community if the same is studied in Indian Context? This paper tries to find out an appropriate answer by carrying out a detailed study of a specified Indian society known for its voluntary social exclusion.

### **INDIAN SOCIETIES IN GENERAL:-**

Of course two scholars have expressed different views especially in case of voluntary social exclusion. But both of them are Western scholars. The question is whether the views expressed by both of them can have universal application? Their views may be relevant to study any group of individuals, society or community of well developed Western countries. But what about an Indian society and if intended study is to be carried out in Indian context only? The position of an Indian society is altogether different and it has to be studied and

analyzed more particularly with reference to Indian context. After all, the great United States of America itself cannot claim total inclusion of all sections of society despite its level of development, economic advancement and establishment of highly developed democratic institutions. Here, in case of Indian Society, it has historically been multi-religious, multi-lingual, multi-cultural, multi-ethnic and multi-racial community. Indian Society is generally portrayed as a closed society where social inequality becomes part of social structure and is transmitted from one generation to the next paving way for permanent social stratification. It is because of this social stratification social inequality continue to persist in all Indian societies quite contrary to their own constitution or law.

#### **CONSTITUTIONAL AND JUDICIAL SAFE GAURDS:-**

Of course Indian Constitution in its preamble ensures social, economical and political justice for all. Equality before law and equal protection of the laws (Art.14), prohibition of discrimination on grounds of religion, race, caste, sex, place of birth (Art.15), equality of opportunity to all in matters of public employment (Art.16), reservation in the field of education and employment for weaker sections (Art.16(4)) are all declared to be fundamental rights by Indian Constitution.

In addition, Supreme Court of India has also declared that social justice itself a fundamental right (Ashok kumar Gupta vs State of U.P), that right to dignity also is a fundamental right (LIC vs consumer centre) and that right to reservation also is a form of fundamental right as the same is intended to provide socio-economic equality to disadvantaged (State of U.P. vs Dr. Dinanath shukla). Indian constitution boldly declares that untouchability stands totally abolished and its practice in any form is completely forbidden (Art 17). The Directive principles of state policy enshrined in constitution also mandates all the states to take suitable steps to ensure equal justice and equal opportunities to all (Art. 39-A).

Thus both the Indian constitution and Indian Judiciary would recognize the principle of non discrimination and equal opportunity to all irrespective of their caste, race, religion, language, sex, culture, ethnicity etc. But what are the actual ground realities in India? Despite several promises put forth by constitution and pronouncements of judgements by judiciary, various forms of discrimination still continue to rule the field and continue to haunt Indian Societies. Declaration of abolition of untouchability still remains to be a mere paper tiger and practice of untouchability in its many forms has become the order of the day. Social stratification and caste based discrimination found to be a universal phenomenon which existed overtime and space in India.

#### **SOCIAL EXCLUSION AND VOLUNTARY SOCIAL EXCLUSION:-**

Social exclusion implies and involves at least two communities one attempting to exclude the other and the other suffering exclusion. On the other hand voluntary social exclusion implies or involves only one community which suffers exclusion. In case of social exclusion, problems and hurdles actively come from outside. But in case of voluntary social exclusion those problems and hurdles live within the society as self-invited. In case of active social exclusion, there are deliberate attempts to prevent individuals or groups from coming into mainstream of the society. But in case of voluntary social exclusion certain groups of people excluding themselves voluntarily from the mainstream. Reasons for such voluntary social exclusion may be many and varied. To implement inclusive measures in case of social exclusion, much focus is needed to correct and control the society which attempts to exclude the other. But in case of voluntary social exclusion the entire focus is needed on the community which voluntarily prefers to live in prolonged isolation and seclusion. It may be easy to control and correct the society which indulges in excluding the other and it may be easy to bring the excluded community also to mainstream because its exclusion is for the reasons beyond its control. But this is not the case with voluntary social exclusion. Here, it will be very difficult to control or correct the society which suffers exclusion and it will be more difficult to bring it to mainstream because the exclusion here is voluntary and choice based. The element of continuity in case of social exclusion may not be so rigid but may be flexible enough to incorporate or to adapt to necessary changes then and there. But such flexibility cannot be expected from a society which lives in voluntary social exclusion. It will continue to remain more prone to maintain continuity rather than giving room for any changes. This may be the case even when those changes are found to be very crucial for the overall development and progress of the society.

#### **GENERAL CONDITION OF MINORITY AND TRIBAL COMMUNITIES IN INDIA:-**

Minority communities, either religious or linguistic and tribal communities living in India used to follow their own religious tenets and peculiar cultural practices. Linguistic minority communities and tribal communities are more prone to maintain isolation and seclusion perhaps to uphold their privacy in following their own peculiar religious and cultural life, which would be generally primitive and tribal in nature. Their general behavior would be that they do not easily come out of their cultural border and in turn they won't easily

allow the other communities also to enter in to their cultural arena. The general tendency of these communities would be more towards maintaining isolation and seclusion even without realizing the consequences thereon.

To live in social isolation and seclusion or to live in a socially isolated group or society cuts the individual concerned off from the networks that are often key to achieve socio economic progress, good education and employment of opportunities. Lack of job opportunities itself depresses educational aspirations contributing further to inequalities in all fronts. Such social isolation and seclusion can impede peoples ability to engage in political activities also weakening the very democratic process itself of the country (Le Grand 2003). Lack of even basic education gives room for illiteracy and ignorance. As a result, although the states try their level best to provide services and reliefs to all without any discriminations, yet many of such individuals or groups living in voluntary social exclusion are left out without any access to some services and reliefs. This is partial denial of services and access to reliefs. All these factors have pushed those communities in such social isolation and seclusion in to back seat and most of those communities are now stand classified as the most backward classes.

#### **THOTTIYA NAICKERS:A LINGUISTIC MINORITY COMMUNITY IN TAMILNADU:-**

There are so many minority communities, either religious or linguistic, living peacefully in Tamil Nadu for centuries together. Notable among them is the community called Thottiya Naickers a Telugu minority community, known for its pious nature of cattle rearing and small scale agricultural activities. It is basically a pastoral community but surprisingly exhibiting all necessary attributes of a typical tribal community. This is the only linguistic minority community in Tamil Nadu which follows and exhibits typical tribal cultural traits. People of this community usually live in remote villages keeping isolation and seclusion and thus voluntarily excluding themselves from mainstream. Till date they are following their own peculiar and strange cultural practices which are generally primitive and tribal in nature (Singh K.S, 1996, Vol III:594). Generally they do not easily come out of their cultural border and in turn do not allow the other communities also to enter into their cultural arena (Ibid).

Irrespective of their social and economical status these people are conducting marriages even today in a common open place called "Mandhai" by putting up temporary pandals using fresh green leaves of prescribed trees fetched from Hillocks and forests (Thurston 2013, vol 7:192). Their marriage dress, ceremonies conducted, things used and other activities done while conducting marriage all would reveal the facts that they were originally hunters who turned out to be cattle reares first, and then agriculturists and ultimately became military chiefs and soldiers in Vijayanagar army. Whenever a girl attains puberty she is kept away in the outskirts of the village for about 14 days in a common place by putting up a temporary hut. After completion of 14 days only she is brought to her house after performing numerous purifying ceremonies and rituals (Ibid). In the same way whenever a housewife undergoes her menstrual period she is kept away in a common place outside a village and is allowed to comeback only after completion of atleast 5 days. They worship Jakkamma and Bommakka as their common female deities by conducting a free running race of bulls and oxen which is called as "Jalli" in Telugu and "Eruthottam" in Tamil. This ancestral worship is called Thottiyani malai festival. They always use only one musical instrument called "Urumi" or 'Devadundumi' for all occasions. Their own caste folk dances 'Devarattam' and 'Servaiyattam' performed to the tune of such Urumi are famous and unique in nature.

Thus, the community of Thottiyaniackers in Tamil Nadu are living as a separate distinct and exclusive social group having its own social structure, social organization and social hierarchy and following their own community dictum, tenets and peculiar socio cultural traits. The general tendency of this community preferring to live in voluntary social exclusion is perhaps due to their anxiety to obey their own community dictum and to follow the peculiar cultural traits prescribed by the community. This kind of living in obscurity and in continuous voluntary social exclusion has actually made the entire community to remain cutoff from the mainstream for centuries together.( Buchanan,1988. Vol2:331). As a result the entire community is put to suffer a long and broad vacuum both in the fields of ethno-historical accounts of the community and in the overall socio economic progress and development of the community. Lack of necessary social awareness and lack of education and employment all have pushed this community into a high degree backwardness, of illiteracy and ignorance.

#### **ACTUAL PLIGHT OF THE COMMUNITY:-**

Till recently people of this community would never allow education to girls and even if allowed, the same would be abruptly stopped once the girl attains puberty. (Sing K.S, 1996, Vol III:578). Child marriages are liberally encouraged in this community (Thurston 2013, vol 7:184). Even if the child becomes a widow she is not allowed to remarry. This is the case even if she attains majority subsequently. Once a widow is always widow is the community dictum (Thurston,2013 Vol 7:192). Thus not only higher education but also any kind of relief is denied to womenfolk of this community and hence they suffer highest degree of illiteracy ignorance and lack of even basic social awareness (Sing K.S. 1996, Vol III:1594). Thus women empowerment is

completely denied in this community. Even in case of boys they are allowed to go for higher education upto graduation or at the most post graduation only. Entry into professional courses is generally rare. Only a few have become so far as the Engineers or Doctors. Getting job opportunity is very rare. Only a few have achieved Government jobs that too class III or class IV level of jobs only. Nobody from this community has entered so far into class I or class II level of jobs. The youth of this community is lacking ability to earn jobs even in private sector also.

It is very unfortunate that none of this community has so far become an I.A.S or I.P.S or I.F.S officer or at least a class-I officer either under Central Government or under State Government. Nobody has become so far either as Supreme court Judges or as High Court Judges. Nobody is economically well off in this community. Nobody runs any industry or factory of any kind. No entrepreneur is found. Nobody runs any educational institution of any kind. Nobody holds any higher posts in any of the field. In political field the picture is still more gloomy. They lack political awareness to the core and nobody is interested in participating political activities in a big way. One or two alone used to come forward to contest the polls in the past and fortunately became M.L.A's also. But that remains only a past story and presently there is no contestants from this community either for M.P or for M.L.A elections. It is quite unfortunate to say that at present there is not even a single M.L.A or M.P hailing from this community.

#### **POTENTIAL FAILURES AFFECTING LONG TERM DECISIONS:-**

In the first part of his argument only Le Grand would contend that voluntary social exclusion may not be social problem because it is choice based. But in the second part of his argument quite surprisingly, he agrees that there are certain instances of potential individual failures which affect the right decision or choice of an individual or group of individuals concerned. He would term those instances of potential individual failures, as the externalities. He is of the view that when these externalities play role in shaping of the voluntary social exclusion of a group the same would damage not only welfare of the people of that group but also the welfare of other people also. Le Grand agrees with Bill New(1999) identifying four possible cases where such individual failure may occur. The first is where there is technical inability to complete the process of decision making especially with respect to long term decision making. Second one is due to weakness of the will. This is where the individuals though prefer for a long term decision but still make short term decisions that are not in their long term interest. A third case of individual failure is emotional decision making. Becoming attached to certain choices allows emotional to distort decisions. The fourth one concerns with relationship between preferences and experience. Preferences may prove to be different if the individual gets the actual experience going the other way (Le Grand,2003, 6,7).

#### **POTENTIAL FAILURES AFFECTING THOTTIA NAICKER COMMUNITY IN TAKING LONG TERM DECISIONS:-**

It is the view of Le Grand that when the above potential failures or externalities affect the decision making of a community living in voluntary social exclusion, the same will constitute a social problem on welfarist grounds only. But it is the categorical view of Brain Barry that voluntary social exclusion also would amount to social problem as the same also affects social solidarity and social justice which are basic necessity for democratic process or governance. In view of above study made in respect of an Indian linguistic minority community in Indian context it is apparent that the view expressed by Le Grand is not at all correct whereas the view expressed by Brain Barry alone is perfectly correct and totally applicable to Indian societies or communities especially in case of minority and tribal communities.

In case of Indian communities such as Thottiya Naicker community their voluntary social exclusion in question is not due to well considered individual choice but due to reasons beyond the control of the individuals or the group of individuals concerned. When an individual or group of individuals or a community is suffering lack of social awareness, lack of even basic education and employment opportunities, lack of economic progress and lack of political aspirations, we cannot expect them to make a well considered right decision or choice especially when they are all completely immersed in ignorance and illiteracy. If their prolonged voluntary social exclusion is due to such wrong long term decisions influenced by externalities, then such voluntary social exclusion also would certainly amount to social problem worthy of concern.

## **II. CONCLUSION:-**

As a result of detailed study and discussion made above the inescapable conclusion of this paper is that in Indian context voluntary social exclusion always occurs due to intervention of externalities affecting the long term future of the individuals or communities concerned and hence such voluntary social exclusion would certainly amount to social problem worthy of concern. This finding justifies the general saying that in Indian context social exclusion always includes voluntary social exclusion also.

**BIBLIOGRAPHY:-**

- [1]. Barry Brain,2002, 'Social exclusion, social isolation and distribution of income', chapter 2, Hills, Le Grand and Piachaud (2002).
- [2]. Buchanam, Francis, 1998, 'A Journey from Madras through the countries of Mysore, canara and Malabar', vols 1 to 3, Asian Educational services, New Delhi.
- [3]. Le Grand, Julien, 2003 ' Individual choice and social Exclusion', CASE Paper 75,2003.
- [4]. Muthiah. O, 2003, 'Devarattam' (Tamil), Thannane publications, Chennai.
- [5]. New, Bill, 1999, ' Paternalism and public policy', Economics and Philosophy, 15:63-83.
- [6]. Singh.K.S, 1996, ' Anthropological survey of India', vol.111, oxford university Press, New Delhi.
- [7]. Thurston Edgar, 2013, 'The castes and Tribes of southern India, Vols 1 to 7, low price Publications, New Delhi.

V.Thangaraj. "Voluntary Social Exclusion: A Study with Special Reference to An Indian Community." *IOSR Journal of Humanities and Social Science (IOSR-JHSS)*, 27(04), 2022, pp. 09-13.