



Introduction

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Chapter 5 Patterns of social inequality and exclusion

Chapter 5 Patterns of social inequality and exclusion

Introduction

What Is Social About Social Inequality And Exclusion?

Social inequality and exclusion are social because they are not about individuals but about groups. They are social in the sense that they are not economic, although there is usually a strong link between social and economic inequality.

They are systematic and structured as there is a definite pattern to social inequalities.

Chapter 5 Patterns of social inequality and exclusion

Social Inequalities

The social resources can be divided into three forms of capital - economic capital in the form of material assets and income; cultural capital such as educational qualifications and status; and social capital in the form of networks of contacts and social associations, Patterns of unequal access to social resources are commonly called social inequality.

Chapter 5 Patterns of social inequality and exclusion

Social Inequalities

Sociologists use the term social stratification to refer to a system by which categories of people in a society are ranked in a hierarchy. This hierarchy then shapes people's identity and experiences, their relations with others, as well as their access to resources and opportunities.

Chapter 5 Patterns of social inequality and exclusion

Three key principles help explain social stratification:

Social stratification is a characteristic of society, not simply a function of individual differences: Social stratification is a society-wide system that unequally distributes social resources among categories of people.

Chapter 5 Patterns of social inequality and exclusion

Three key principles help explain social stratification:

Social stratification persists over generations: It is closely linked to the family and to the inheritance of social resources from one generation to the next. A person's social position is ascribed. That is, children assume the social positions of their parents.

Chapter 5 Patterns of social inequality and exclusion

Three key principles help explain social stratification:

Social stratification is supported by patterns of belief, or ideology: Justification of caste system in terms of the opposition of purity and pollution, with the Brahmins designated as the most superior and Dalits as the most inferior by virtue of their birth and occupation.

Chapter 5 Patterns of social inequality and exclusion

Social Inequalities

Prejudices refer to pre-conceived opinions or attitudes held by members of one group towards another. Prejudices are often grounded in stereotypes, fixed and inflexible characterisations of a group of people. Stereotypes are often applied to ethnic and racial groups and to women.

Chapter 5 Patterns of social inequality and exclusion

Social Inequalities

- If prejudice describes attitudes and opinions, discrimination refers to actual behaviour towards another group or individual. Discrimination can be seen in practices that disqualify members of one group from opportunities open to others, as when a person is refused a job because of their gender or religion.

Chapter 5 Patterns of social inequality and exclusion

Social Exclusion:

- Social exclusion refers to ways in which individuals may become cut off from full involvement in the wider society.
- It focuses attention on a broad range of factors that prevent individuals or groups from having opportunities open to the majority of the population.

India like most societies has been marked by acute practices of social discrimination and exclusion.

- It is important to note that social exclusion is involuntary- that is, exclusion is practiced regardless of the wishes of those who are excluded.

Chapter 5 Patterns of social inequality and exclusion

Social Exclusion:

Social exclusion is sometimes wrongly justified by the same logic it is said that the excluded group itself does not wish to participate. The truth of such an argument is not obvious when exclusion is preventing access to something desirable.

Chapter 5 Patterns of social inequality and exclusion

The Caste System as A Discriminatory System:

The caste system is a distinct Indian social institution that legitimises and enforces practices of discrimination against people born into particular castes.

These practices of discrimination are humiliating, exclusionary and exploitative.

Historically, the caste system classified people by their occupation and status.

Chapter 5 Patterns of social inequality and exclusion

The Caste System as A Discriminatory System:

Every caste was associated with an occupation, which meant that persons born into a particular caste were also born into the occupation associated with their caste - they had no choice. In strict scriptural terms, social and economic status were supposed to be sharply separated.

Chapter 5 Patterns of social inequality and exclusion

The Caste System as A Discriminatory System:

For example, the ritually highest caste - the Brahmins - were not supposed to amass wealth, and were subordinated to the secular power of kings and rulers belonging to the Kshatriya castes.

However, in actual historical practice economic and social status tended to coincide. There was thus a fairly close correlation between social (i.e. caste) status and economic status - the 'high' castes were almost invariably of high economic status, while the 'low' castes were almost always of low economic status.

Chapter 5 Patterns of social inequality and exclusion

Untouchability:

'Untouchability' is an extreme and particularly vicious aspect of the caste system that prescribes stringent social sanctions against members of castes located at the bottom of the purity-pollution scale.

It is important to emphasise that the three main dimensions of untouchability - namely, exclusion, humiliation-subordination and exploitation - are all equally important in defining the phenomenon.

Chapter 5 Patterns of social inequality and exclusion

Untouchability:

Dalits experience forms of exclusion that are unique and not practised against other groups-for instance, being prohibited from sharing drinking water sources or participating in collective religious worship, social ceremonies and festivals.

The performance of publicly visible acts of (self) humiliation and subordination is an important part of the practice of untouchability.

Chapter 5 Patterns of social inequality and exclusion

Untouchability:

Moreover, untouchability is almost always associated with economic exploitation of various kinds, most commonly through the imposition of forced, unpaid (or under-paid) labour, or the confiscation of property. Finally, untouchability is a pan-Indian phenomenon, although its specific forms and intensity vary considerably across regions and socio-historical contexts.

Chapter 5 Patterns of social inequality and exclusion

Untouchability:

The so-called 'untouchables' have been referred to collectively by many names over the centuries. Mahatma Gandhi had popularised the term 'Harijan' (literally, children of God) in the 1930s to counter the pejorative charge carried by caste names.

Chapter 5 Patterns of social inequality and exclusion

Untouchability:

However, the ex-untouchable communities and their leaders have coined another term, 'Dalit', which is now the generally accepted term for referring to these groups. In Indian languages, the term Dalit literally means 'downtrodden' and conveys the sense of an oppressed people.

Chapter 5 Patterns of social inequality and exclusion

Untouchability:

It was neither coined by Dr. Ambedkar nor frequently used by him, the term certainly resonates with his philosophy and the movement for empowerment that he led.

The Dalit Panthers, a radical group that emerged in western India during that time, used the term to assert their identity as part of their struggle for rights and dignity.

Chapter 5 Patterns of social inequality and exclusion

State And Non-State Initiatives Addressing Caste and Tribe Discrimination:

The Indian state has had special programmes for the Scheduled Tribes and Scheduled Castes since even before Independence.

The 'Schedules' listing the castes and tribes recognised as deserving of special treatment because of the massive discrimination practiced against them were drawn up in 1935, by the British Indian government.

Chapter 5 Patterns of social inequality and exclusion

State And Non-State Initiatives Addressing Caste and Tribe Discrimination:

Among the most significant additions is the extension of special programmes to the Other Backward Classes (OBCs) since the early 1990s.

The most important state initiative attempting to compensate for past and present caste discrimination is the one popularly known as 'reservations'.

Chapter 5 Patterns of social inequality and exclusion

State And Non-State Initiatives Addressing Caste and Tribe Discrimination:

This involves the setting aside of some places or 'seats' for members of the Scheduled Castes and Tribes in different spheres of public life. These include reservation of seats in the State and Central legislatures (i.e., state assemblies, Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha); reservation of jobs in government service across all departments and public sector companies; and reservation of seats in educational institutions.

Chapter 5 Patterns of social inequality and exclusion

State And Non-State Initiatives Addressing Caste and Tribe Discrimination:

The proportion of reserved seats is equal to the percentage share of the Scheduled Castes and Tribes in the total population. But for the OBCs this proportion is decided differently.

The Caste Disabilities Removal Act of 1850 disallowed the curtailment of rights of citizens due solely to change of religion or caste.

Chapter 5 Patterns of social inequality and exclusion

State And Non-State Initiatives Addressing Caste and Tribe Discrimination:

The most recent such law was the Constitution Amendment (Ninety Third Amendment) Act of 2005, which became law on 23rd January 2006. Coincidentally, both the 1850 law and the 2006 amendment related to education.

Chapter 5 Patterns of social inequality and exclusion

State And Non-State Initiatives Addressing Caste and Tribe Discrimination:

The 93rd Amendment is for introducing reservation for the Other Backward Classes in institutions of higher education, while the 1850 Act was used to allow entry of Dalits to government schools. The Constitution abolished untouchability (Article 17) and introduced the reservation provisions mentioned above.

Chapter 5 Patterns of social inequality and exclusion

State And Non-State Initiatives Addressing Caste and Tribe Discrimination:

The 1989 Prevention of Atrocities Act revised and strengthened the legal provisions punishing acts of violence or humiliation against Dalits and adivasis. State action alone cannot ensure social change. In any case, no social group howsoever weak or oppressed is only a victim.

Dalits too have been increasingly active on the political, agitational, and cultural fronts.

Chapter 5 Patterns of social inequality and exclusion

State And Non-State Initiatives Addressing Caste and Tribe Discrimination:

From the pre-Independence struggles and movements launched by people like Jyotiba Phule, Iyotheddas, Periyar, Ambedkar and other to contemporary political organisations like the Bahujan Samaj Party in Uttar Pradesh or the Dalit Sangharsh Samiti of Karnataka, Dalit political assertion has come along way.

Dalits have also made significant contributions to literature in several Indian languages, specially Marathi, Kannada, Tamil, Telugu and Hindi.

Chapter 5 Patterns of social inequality and exclusion

The Other Backward Classes

The Constitution of India recognises the possibility that there may be groups other than the Scheduled Tribes and Scheduled Castes who suffer from social disadvantages.

These groups - which need not be based on caste alone, but generally are identified by caste - were described as the 'socially and educationally backward classes', This is the constitutional basis of the popular term 'Other Backward Classes' (OBCs).

Chapter 5 Patterns of social inequality and exclusion

The Other Backward Classes

The OBCs are a much more diverse group than the Dalits or adivasis.

The first government of independent India under Jawaharlal Nehru appointed a commission to look into measures for the welfare of the OBCs.

The First Backward Classes Commission headed by Kaka Kalelkar submitted its report in 1953. But the political climate at the time led to the report being sidelined.

Chapter 5 Patterns of social inequality and exclusion

The Other Backward Classes

From the mid-fifties, the OBC issue became a regional affair pursued at the state rather than the central level. The southern states had a long history of backward caste political agitation that had started in the early twentieth century.

Chapter 5 Patterns of social inequality and exclusion

The Other Backward Classes

Because of these powerful social movements, policies to address the problems of the OBCs were in place long before they were discussed in most northern states.

The OBC issue returned to the central level in the late 1970s after the Emergency when the Janata Party came to power.

The Second Backward Classes Commission headed by B.P. Mandal was appointed at this time.

Chapter 5 Patterns of social inequality and exclusion

The Other Backward Classes

However, it was only in 1990, when the central government decided to implement the ten-year old Mandal Commission report, that the OBC issue became a major one in national politics.

The politicisation of the OBCs allows them to convert their large numbers - recent surveys show that they are about 41% of the national population into political influence.

This was not possible at the national level before, as shown by the sidelining of the Kalelkar Commission report, and the neglect of the Mandal Commission report.

Chapter 5 Patterns of social inequality and exclusion

Adivasi Struggles:

The jana or tribes were believed to be 'people of the forest' whose distinctive habitat in the hill and forest areas shaped their economic, social and political attributes.

Tribal groups have had long and close association with Hindu society and culture, making the boundaries between 'tribe' and 'caste' quite porous.

Today, barring the North-Eastern states, there are no areas of the country that are inhabited exclusively by tribal people; there are only areas of tribal concentration.

Chapter 5 Patterns of social inequality and exclusion

Adivasi Struggles:

Since the middle of the nineteenth century, non-tribals have moved into the tribal districts of central India, while tribal people from the same districts have migrated to plantations, mines, factories and other places of employment.

Chapter 5 Patterns of social inequality and exclusion

Adivasi Struggles:

From the late nineteenth century onwards, the colonial government reserved most forest tracts for its own use, severing the rights that adivasis had long exercised to use the forest for gathering produce and for shifting cultivation. Forests were now to be protected for maximising timber production.

Chapter 5 Patterns of social inequality and exclusion

Adivasi Struggles:

Denied access to forests and land for cultivation, adivasis were forced to either use the forests illegally (and be harassed and prosecuted as 'encroachers' and thieves) or migrate in search of wage labour, Firstly, after the Independence of India in 1947, the government monopoly over forests continued.

Chapter 5 Patterns of social inequality and exclusion

Adivasi Struggles:

Secondly, the policy of capital-intensive industrialisation adopted by the Indian government required mineral resources and power-generation capacities which were concentrated in Adivasi areas. Adivasi lands were rapidly acquired for new mining and dam projects. In the process, millions of adivasis were displaced without any appropriate compensation or rehabilitation.

Chapter 5 Patterns of social inequality and exclusion

Adivasi Struggles:

It was justified in the name of 'national development and 'economic growth', these policies were also a form of internal colonialism, subjugating adivasis and alienating the resources upon which they depended. Projects such as the Sardar Sarovar dam on the river Narmada in western India and the Polavaram dam on the river Godavari in Andhra Pradesh displace hundreds of thousands of adivasis, driving them to greater destitution.

Chapter 5 Patterns of social inequality and exclusion

Adivasi Struggles:

Like the term Dalit, the term Adivasi connotes political awareness and the assertion of rights, Literally meaning 'original inhabitants', the term was coined in the 1930s as part of the struggle against the intrusion by the colonial government and outside settlers and moneylenders.

Chapter 5 Patterns of social inequality and exclusion

Adivasi Struggles:

Being Adivasi is about shared experiences of the loss of forests, the alienation of land, repeated displacements since Independence in the name of 'development projects' and much more.

Chapter 5 Patterns of social inequality and exclusion

Struggle For Women's Equality And Rights:

Because of the obvious biological and physical differences between men and women, gender inequality is often treated as natural.

Gender is thus also a form of social inequality and exclusion like caste and class, but with its own specific features.

The women's question arose in modern India as part of the nineteenth century middle class social reform movements.

Chapter 5 Patterns of social inequality and exclusion

Struggle For Women's Equality And Rights:

They are often termed as middle class reform movements because many of these reformers were from the newly emerging western educated Indian middle class,

They were often at once inspired by the democratic ideals of the modern west and by a deep pride in their own democratic traditions of the past.

Chapter 5 Patterns of social inequality and exclusion

Struggle For Women's Equality And Rights:

The anti-sati campaign led by Raja Rammohun Roy in Bengal, the widow remarriage movement in the Bombay Presidency where Ranade was one of the leading reformers, from Jyotiba Phule's simultaneous attack on caste and gender oppression, and from the social reform movement in Islam led by Sir Syed Ahmed Khan.

Chapter 5 Patterns of social inequality and exclusion

Struggle For Women's Equality And Rights:

Raja Rammohun Roy's attempts to reform society, religion and the status of women can be taken as the starting point of nineteenth century social reform in Bengal.

A decade before establishing the Brahmo Samaj in 1828, Roy undertook the campaign against "sati" which was the first women's issue to receive public attention. Rammohun Roy's ideas represented a curious mixture of Western rationality and an assertion of Indian traditionality.

Chapter 5 Patterns of social inequality and exclusion

Struggle For Women's Equality And Rights:

Rammohun thus attacked the practice of sati on the basis of both appeals to humanitarian and natural rights doctrines as well as Hindu shastras.

The deplorable and unjust treatment of the Hindu upper caste widows was a major issue taken up by the social reformers.

Chapter 5 Patterns of social inequality and exclusion

Struggle For Women's Equality And Rights:

Ranade used the writings of scholars such as Bishop Joseph Butler whose 'Analogy of Religion' and 'Three Sermons on Human Nature' dominated the moral philosophy syllabus of Bombay University in the 1860s.

At the same time, M.G Ranade's writings entitled the 'The Texts of the Hindu Law' on the 'Lawfulness of the Remarriage of Widows and Vedic Authorities for Widow Marriage' elaborated the shastric sanction for remarriage of widows.

Chapter 5 Patterns of social inequality and exclusion

Struggle For Women's Equality And Rights:

While Ranade and Rammohun Roy belonged to one kind of nineteenth century upper caste and middle class social reformers, Jotiba Phule came from a socially excluded caste and his attack was directed against both caste and gender discrimination.

He founded the Satyashodak Samaj with its primary emphasis on "truth seeking". Phule's first practical social reform efforts were to aid the two groups considered lowest in traditional Brahmin culture: women and untouchables.

Chapter 5 Patterns of social inequality and exclusion

Struggle For Women's Equality And Rights:

A similar trend of drawing upon both modern western ideas as well as the sacred texts characterised Sir Syed Ahmed Khan's efforts to reform Muslim society. He wanted girls to be educated, but within the precincts of their homes.

Chapter 5 Patterns of social inequality and exclusion

Struggle For Women's Equality And Rights:

Like Dayanand Saraswati of the Arya Samaj, he stood for women's education but sought for a curriculum that included instruction in religious principles, training in the arts of housekeeping and handicrafts and rearing of children, Stree Purush Tulana (or Comparison of Men and Women) was written by a Maharashtrian housewife, Tarabai Shinde, as a protest against the double standards of a male dominated society.

Chapter 5 Patterns of social inequality and exclusion

Struggle For Women's Equality And Rights:

A young Brahmin widow had been sentenced to death by the courts for killing her newborn baby because it was illegitimate, but no effort had been made to identify or punish the man who had fathered the baby. Stree Purush Tulana created quite a stir when it was published.

Chapter 5 Patterns of social inequality and exclusion

Struggle For Women's Equality And Rights:

Begum Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain - was born in a well-to-do Bengali Muslim family, and was lucky to have a husband who was very liberal in outlook and encouraged her education first in Urdu and later in Bengali and English.

Chapter 5 Patterns of social inequality and exclusion

Struggle For Women's Equality And Rights:

She was already a successful author in Urdu and Bengali when she wrote *Sultana's Dream* to test her abilities in English.

This remarkable short story is probably the earliest example of science fiction writing in India, and among the first by a woman author anywhere in the world.

In her dream, Sultana visits a magical country where the gender roles are reversed.

Chapter 5 Patterns of social inequality and exclusion

Struggle For Women's Equality And Rights:

Men are confined to the home and observe 'purdah' while women are busy scientists vying with each other at inventing devices that will control the clouds and regulate rain, and machines that fly or 'air-cars'.

In 1931, the Karachi Session of the Indian National Congress issued a declaration on the Fundamental Rights of Citizenship in India whereby it committed itself to women's equality.

Chapter 5 Patterns of social inequality and exclusion

Struggle For Women's Equality And Rights:

The declaration reads as follows:

1. All citizens are equal before the law, irrespective of religion, caste, creed or sex.
2. No disability attaches to any citizen, by reason of his or her religion, caste, creed or sex, in regard to public employment, office of power or honour, and in the exercise of any trade or calling.

Chapter 5 Patterns of social inequality and exclusion

Struggle For Women's Equality And Rights:

3. The franchise shall be on the basis of universal adult suffrage.

4. Woman shall have the right to vote, to represent and the right to hold public offices. (Report of the Sub-Committee, 'Woman's Role in Planned Economy').

Chapter 5 Patterns of social inequality and exclusion

Women's Struggle for Rights after Independence:

Two decades after Independence, women's issues re-emerged in the 1970s. In the nineteenth century reform movements, the emphasis had been on the backward aspects of tradition like sati, child marriage, or the ill treatment of widows.

Chapter 5 Patterns of social inequality and exclusion

Women's Struggle for Rights after Independence:

Two decades after Independence, women's issues re-emerged in the 1970s. In the nineteenth century reform movements, the emphasis had been on the backward aspects of tradition like sati, child marriage, or the ill treatment of widows. In the 1970s, the emphasis was on 'modern' issues-the rape of women in police custody, dowry murders, the representation of women in popular media, and the gendered consequences of unequal development.

Chapter 5 Patterns of social inequality and exclusion

Women's Struggle for Rights after Independence:

The law was a major site for reform in the 1980s and after, specially when it was discovered that many laws of concern to women had not been changed since the 19th century.

The sharp fall in the child sex ratio and the implicit social bias against the girl child represents one of the new challenges of gender inequality.

Chapter 5 Patterns of social inequality and exclusion

The Struggles of The Disabled:

The differently abled are not 'disabled' only because they are physically or mentally 'impaired' but also because society is built in a manner that does not cater to their needs.

The very term 'disabled' is significant because it draws attention to the fact that public perception of the 'disabled' needs to be questioned.

Chapter 5 Patterns of social inequality and exclusion

The Struggles of The Disabled:

Here are some common features central to the public perception of 'disability' all over the world- Disability is understood as a biological given. Whenever a disabled person is confronted with problems, it is taken for granted that the problems originate from her/his impairment.

The disabled person is seen as a victim.

Disability is supposed to be linked with the disabled individual's self-perception.

Chapter 5 Patterns of social inequality and exclusion

The Struggles of The Disabled:

The very idea of disability suggests that they are in need of help.

In India labels such as 'disability', 'handicap', 'crippled', 'blind' and 'deaf' are used synonymously.

Chapter 5 Patterns of social inequality and exclusion

The Struggles of The Disabled:

Destiny is seen as the culprit, and disabled people are the victims. The common perception views disability as retribution for past karma (actions) from which there can be no reprieve.

The very term 'disabled' challenges each of these assumptions. Terms such as 'mentally challenged', 'visually impaired' and 'physically impaired' came to replace the more trite negative terms such as 'retarded', 'crippled' or "lame“.

Chapter 5 Patterns of social inequality and exclusion

The Struggles of The Disabled:

There is a close relationship between disability and poverty. Malnutrition, mothers weakened by frequent childbirth, inadequate immunisation programmes, accidents in overcrowded homes, all contribute to an incidence of disability among poor people that is higher than among people living in easier circumstances.

Chapter 5 Patterns of social inequality and exclusion

Approach Adopted for the Disabled in Census 2011:

Information on disability was collected during the Population Enumeration phase of Census 2011 through 'Household Schedule'.

Questions on disability were asked about all persons in the household.

Enumerators were instructed to contact the disabled person in the households, besides the respondent, to collect information.

Chapter 5 Patterns of social inequality and exclusion

Approach Adopted for the Disabled in Census 2011:

All types of household, i.e., 'National', 'Institutional' and 'Household', were covered.

Questions and instructions on disability were finalised after field trial of selected questions, including disability in selected area; extensive deliberation was held with civil society organisations and nodal ministry; pre-test of all census questions covering rural/urban sample in all States was conducted.

Chapter 5 Patterns of social inequality and exclusion

Approach Adopted for the Disabled in Census 2011:

Aspects considered in finalising questions: simple nomenclature of the types/ categories of disability for easy comprehension by both enumerator and respondent, relevance of data for the planners and policy-makers, feasibility of canvassing the question to cover all types of disabilities as listed in the Persons with Disabilities Act, 1995, and the National Trust Act, 1999.

Chapter 5 Patterns of social inequality and exclusion

Approach Adopted for the Disabled in Census 2011:

A filter question to ascertain disability status was included.

Attempt was made to collect information on eight types of disabilities as against five in Census 2001.

The placement of the question on disability in the census Schedule was changed and the question was brought forward.

Special efforts were made to improve the coverage, which included extensive training to the enumerators and publicity measures.

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