Introduction

What are now covered under social exclusion, such as poverty, discrimination, deprivation, denial, and so on, have been the subject of investigation for long. There are two distinct and significant issues to be considered for reflection in the case of wide acceptance of the concept of social exclusion in recent times. First, it takes cognizance of certain social and cultural bases in the creation of the condition of deprivation or discrimination in the politico-economic sphere. Secondly, the usage of the concept of exclusion is more inclusive than any other competing concepts of discrimination or deprivation, though these concepts are used to denote it. It is, therefore, important to understand that when we venture into the exercise of conceptualizing exclusion, we come across different shades of its interpretations, though semantically it seems quite simplistic. Farrington (2009, 9) is of the view that

> Social exclusion is a useful way of perceiving multiple-disadvantage, however, it must be defined and dealt with in way that identifies difference. The key to the problem of social exclusion lies in the construction of an appropriate definition, which distinguishes societal differences and which does not exacerbate the problems experienced by those excluded from society. Any definition must merely be one of best-fit, which reflects the social, economic and political reality of the state.

The concept of social exclusion has multiple dimensions and could be understood as a structural feature, a dynamic process and a normative institutional practice. All of these three dimensions may or may not operate simultaneously, that is, these could be distinguished as well as separated in the empirical context. Let us look at how these dimensions could be understood at the theoretical level.

Social Exclusion as a Structural Element

Race, class, and gender, in the western context, could be treated as the key structural elements in which exclusion is embedded. However, in the Indian context caste replaces race as the structural feature of exclusion. All these features could be treated as criteria along which societies are empirically stratified. Location in the hierarchy of strata creates conditions of exclusion through the absence of certain capabilities. Sen (2000) has clarified the concept of social exclusion in a comprehensive manner by making an important conceptual framework of capability deprivation and a state of affairs causing capability failures, a classical example of which is poverty– essentially a class dimension. He also draws a distinction between constitutive and instrumental bearings of social exclusion. Sen provides an interesting illustration of these two dimensions. For example, the inability to relate oneself with others could lead to impoverishment, which is of constitutive relevance, whereas denying oneself the credit facilities and thereby losing certain interesting opportunities is an instance of instrumental relevance. Sen (ibid.) further distinguishes between active and passive exclusion. Denying reasonable political status to refugees is an illustration of active exclusion and impoverishment developing as a result of poor economy is passive exclusion. However, social exclusion, in the existing literature, is primarily connected with poverty and unemployment. Certain individuals and groups that have been cited by Sen (ibid., 1) from the pioneer of the concept, Lenoir, as socially excluded are: mentally and physically handicapped, suicidal people, aged invalid, abused children, substance abusers, delinquents, single parents, multi-problem households, marginal, asocial persons, and other social 'misfits'. Such individuals and groups are most likely to experience deprivation in the labour market. Ostensibly, all these people are either marked by immutable disability or feature preventing them from becoming competitive and overcoming social exclusion. Therefore, social exclusion is fundamentally different from the Marxian notion of exploitation resulting from the appropriation of surplus value and causing pauperization.

Thorat (2007) has also taken a serious cognizance of poverty as a structural element of social exclusion. It is important to mention that caste as the other structural element has been the most reflected upon dimension of social exclusion in India. However, before the discussion on caste, it is important to underline the specific experiences of the Western countries particularly after globalization. Large-scale immigration to the West began in the 1990s, though some of the countries, such as the USA, Canada, England, and Australia,

were receiving immigrants even before the age of globalization set in after the collapse of Soviet Union in 1990. Most of the immigrants belonged to racially and ethnically diverse groups as a result of which they got socially organized as ethnic communities, leading to the emergence of ethnic stratification. In addition to class, race, and gender, ethnicity has been a serious source of exclusion in the labour market. The crucial structural element in this regard is that unlike poverty which leads to capability deprivations, in the sense that race, ethnicity, and gender are regarded as immutable characteristics and have all chances of causing discrimination in the labour market. Even if it is assumed that the coloured, ethnic groups (there is a lot of overlapping between race and ethnicity), and women have sufficient capabilities to compete in the labour market, their immutable characteristics may result in their underemployment. In the case of India, caste could be treated as an immutable characteristic of individuals.

It is thus clear that structural elements could be defined in general terms but there could be certain specific empirical features which vary across societies. In the words of Estivill (2003,15), 'Exclusion would appear to be a consequence not only of Western influences, but also to have its origins in the specific structures and rules of these countries, the individual and collective transgression of which may be severely penalized.' One of the examples Estivill has provided is that of the apartheid of all forms. Indian context of social exclusion finds its fullest expression in the form of caste inequalities.

Physical spaces as the basis of social exclusion have not been comprehensively brought under the conceptual framework, but it is an important structural element of exclusion. Gough et. al (2006), who have primarily dealt with poverty and social exclusion, take up neighbourhoods, localities, and regions as characterized by poverty and exclusion and identify localities, parts of the towns and certain regions in the country where people have low income and face threat of poverty and exclusion if it has not already happened. At the same time, they point out that 'there are parts of city and towns which are entirely poor and where the poor are physically isolated. Nevertheless, most of the poor do not live in poor neighbourhoods or wards … One cannot identify poverty simply with territory' (ibid. 56). Social exclusion as a structural element encompasses narrow boundaries of structures which are understood in certain exclusive terms by using a single criterion on which inequality is construed. Verma (2011, 93) rightly comments, 'Social exclusion offered a useful framework for analysing the various axes of inequality that affected the economically marginalized, socially disadvantaged and politically powerless in western societies'. It is, therefore important to understand exclusion in terms of how the groups and communities

get stratified in different societies. The identification of structural criteria along which inequality gets constituted in multiple forms is an important step towards mapping social exclusion. We thus have poverty/class, caste, religion, ethnicity, region, gender, physical disability, physical spaces, etc. along which exclusion could be conceptualized. However, social exclusion is inseparably linked with practices and processes and it is essential to understand whether groups and communities are excluded by virtue of their structural location only or owing to informal/formal mechanisms as intertwined with the structure.

Social Exclusion as a Dynamic Process

The arrival of the concepts of social exclusion and inclusion is not an accident of sociological imagination. Nor has it emerged as a result of the inadequacy of the earlier concepts which were explaining social exclusion in its myriad ways. Social exclusion is the child of globalization and privatization of the new world order. Globalization, which signifies the free movement of people, goods, and capital across nation-state boundaries, cannot be imagined without free market. In other words, the movement of people presupposes that there shall be no discrimination on the basis of the immutable characteristics of the people. The movement of people across nation-states should imply and assume that the labour market is egalitarian and employs people in terms of their skills, merit, and abilities making race, gender, ethnicity, religion and, in the specific context of India, caste irrelevant. The same principle could be assumed in the case of the payment of wages. In reality, this never happens. Labour market is influenced by many factors one of which is the division of people between the employers and the employees. The employers are not machines who would appoint a person by processing the information about the skills of the candidates. They are human beings with likes, dislikes, preferences, biases, stereotypes, prejudices, and intentions. Objectivity in the matter of selection of the person is likely to be affected by the subjectivity of the employer. Therefore, the labour market could be influenced by the subjective factors that emerge from immutable differences among the people.

Actual operation of social exclusion regards structure as a dynamic body that is constantly changing and evolving. The manifestation of exclusion occurs through institutional practices and in situations which are real and not imagined. As a practice it assumes the notion of agency, because the moment it is maintained that certain individuals or groups are excluded, the existence of agents involved in denying access to the labour market on equal footing

or the right to good life gets embedded in the concept of exclusion. Byrne (2009, 2) points out, 'Although the term is clearly systemic, that is to say it is about the character of social system and about the dynamic development of social structures, at the same time it has implications for agency. 'Exclusion' is something that is done by some people or other people.'

Since social exclusion is a multidimensional process covering economic (poverty, low-class situation), social (caste/race, gender, spatial location, ethnicity, religion), and political (power and dominance) aspects of society, it is likely to occur as a multiple phenomenon. The poor and unemployed may experience political powerlessness and loss of social status and prestige. Yet another illustration of multiple exclusions could be a situation when the economic deprivation in the form of discrimination in the labour market due to certain ascribed features of the individuals and groups based on gender, caste, race, region, and religion occurs, which may result in their impoverishment and absence of good quality of life. There could be another situation when the non-economic deprivation, resulting from the ascribed features of individuals and groups, would lead to the denial of full participation in public life as citizens.

Exclusion as a Normative Practice

Most of the linguistic expressions used to signify exclusion, such as discrimination, denial, exploitation, deprivation, etc. are normative and antithetical to the universal principles of equality and justice. How to approach the question of exclusion as undesirable is rooted in the two major theoretical models, namely Marxist and liberal democratic. Both the models attribute the state as the central agency whose function is to achieve equality and justice. Despite the fact that the Marxist approach treats state as manifestation of the bourgeoisie order to guarantee the unequal distribution of wealth and economic resources, it still provides the pivotal role to the state in ensuring economic equality in the initial stages of socialist transformation. The socialist state, though ephemeral, is regarded as the main agency to look into the needs of every citizen. On the other hand, the liberal democratic state is founded on the principles of individual liberty and distributive justice. Rawls (1972) argues for the equality of opportunity instead of equitable distribution of wealth. In other words, the liberal notions of equality and justice are the basis on which the issue of social exclusion makes sensible presence. If the citizens are not treated equally in terms of their skills and capabilities in the labour market, then the principle of equality of opportunity is violated. The policy of affirmative action is based

on the logic of giving equal opportunity to each and every citizen. It is clear that the question of values makes the concept of exclusion as negative which requires an agency to intervene into the structures and processes of exclusion to achieve inclusion. The normative nature of the concept of social exclusion necessitates state intervention to provide conditions for equal opportunity for all citizens irrespective of their gender, race, and other immutable characteristics including ethnicity, disability, and marginal spatial location. However, the normative context may not necessarily make equality as the non-negotiable value, in the sense that it is not expected of the state to create equality among all. In other words, whereas equality of opportunity is a desirable practice but the achievement of individuals may vary according to their capabilities, which may result in inequality. For instance, poverty could be regarded as the major contributor to deprivation of capabilities, but it is not necessary that exclusion and poverty are equivalent. One may be poor but not necessarily be excluded, an example of which could be the discrimination against homosexuals even if they are rich (Estivill 2003). Yet another example of the poor Brahmins could be given in this regard, who is poor but does not face caste discrimination.

The normative character of social exclusion creates its normative binary opposite that is desirable and positive, namely inclusion. Inclusive development or growth has become the objective of most of the countries. Inclusion is understood as the absence of discriminations of various kinds and providing equal opportunities to the individuals in the labour market. The purpose is to recognize and ensure the right to good quality of life of every citizen (Judge 2009). It is interesting to note that the emphasis on inclusive development implicates the idea of justice. It has been widely accepted that ethnically diverse societies experience slow economic growth (Mody 2005).

Overcoming Social Exclusion

The normative dimension of social exclusion entails the need for overcoming it through alternative strategies. The moment it is conceptually articulated that exclusion is built into structure and is a dynamic process, the normative content would assume the presence of agency in perpetuating the exclusionary practices. It has already been highlighted that society is dynamic, and is constantly evolving and changing. The recognition of exclusion as undesirable assumes that there is a need for intervention in the structure and institutional practices. Intervention generally comes from two sources, namely state and the masses. These two broad interventions could be christened as intervention from above and intervention

from below. Taking cue from the Marxist perspective, it may be argued that the excluded groups and communities make organized efforts to overcome exclusion. Within this intervention multiple strategies are possible and may vary across societies. The most notable strategy among various interventions from below is that of social movement.

Social movement may be regarded as an organized, sustained, and conscious strategy to overcome exclusion. The classical Marxist perspective treats working class struggles as efforts to change the existing class relations and establish the proletarian rule. However, working class is not the only collectivity to engage in social movements to achieve the desired goal. In the contemporary world various groups and communities, such as Blacks, gays, lesbians, bisexuals, women, religious communities, and indigenous groups, organize movements to make their voices heard. Unlike the working class struggle for transformation of society from the perspective of Marxism, most of these groups and communities wage movements in order to get recognition and rights to have good quality of life with dignity. Social movements invariably invoke the political system for the achievement of their goals. Bloch (1966) has cautioned that open and violent movements may not necessarily bring desirable change; rather they may contribute towards the reinforcement of the oppressive structure of the state. He argues for everyday resistance as the strategy has been quite effective in achieving goals. However, social movements are not indispensably violent, but may adopt a confrontationist stance in relation to the state. We have witnessed a large number of social movements that have been non-violent, of which the American Civil Rights Movements, women's movements, etc., have been notable examples. The social movement as a strategy to end social exclusion is essentially linked with the nature of state. Whereas a totalitarian state may be highly intolerant of social movements, a liberal democratic state may subsume collective actions of groups and communities as the legitimate way of interest articulation.

It is important to keep in mind that strategy of social movements may not necessarily be the sole effort of the excluded. It may be initiated by others who involve the excluded group(s). In this regard, the civil society organizations have become important agents in ushering in the social movement strategy to overcome certain forms of discrimination. The NGOs are active in various sectors making positive interventions in helping the poor and deprived to live with self-esteem.

The intervention from above is primarily the effort of the state to intervene in the existing affairs through legislation and policies. Most of the liberal

democratic states regard social exclusion as antithetical to the principle of justice and equality. Affirmative action programmes are outcomes of this framework of equality and justice. The state intervention to end exclusion could operate in various ways. For example, the affirmative action programme, as mentioned earlier, is one such intervention where the labour market is regulated through state action. Legislation to end racial discrimination or caste-based untouchability is an important state intervention. Similarly, poverty eradication programmes, housing projects for the poor, etc., are important interventions. The policy of multiculturalism in the West is a classical instance of an effort to recognize the immigrant communities' right to practise their culture. The first national multiculturalism act of the world was passed in Canada in 1988 (Judge 2003) and other countries followed the effort thus acknowledging the right to cultural autonomy and practice. The policy of multiculturalism, in the words of Taylor (1994), is politics of recognition of different cultures and the right of the people to practise and preserve their culture. As everybody has the right to good life, it is, therefore, mandatory that the state ensures that no discrimination and deprivation occurs in the labour market. The ideology of melting pot gave way to the recognition of plurality. As we shall examine in the next section, India has a fairly long list of positive state interventions for ending social exclusion.

Social Exclusion in India

As a highly diverse society, India presents a complex mosaic of social formations invariably making it difficult for social scientists to offer a coherent explanation of its structure and processes. Therefore, social exclusion as a structural element as well as a dynamic process exists and functions at various levels. Thorat and Newman (2007, 4123) rightly point out, 'In the Indian context, exclusion revolves around institutions that discriminate, isolate, shame, and deprive subordinate groups on the basis of identities like caste, religion and gender.' Thorat and Newman (2007, 4121) choose to underline the distinct character of social exclusion in India by pinpointing its ascriptive character and adopt the definition offered by Buvinic according to which it is 'an inability in participation in the social, economic and political functioning of society' as well as the 'denial of equal access to opportunities.' Whereas the inability is related to an individual caused by his/her social location, denial is an imposition on a group.

What makes the Indian society distinct and unique with regard to exclusionary practices is not its economic dimension, but its social roots and shades best manifested through caste-based exclusions. Caste could be regarded

as the single most structural element of the Indian society whose dynamic processes in the form of discrimination tend to be overwhelming. Each caste is placed at a position in the hierarchy of castes. One cannot change one's caste status though the position of caste may undergo some changes over a period of time. Each caste is an exclusive cultural group and has distinctly marked boundaries in relation to other castes. The castes placed at the bottom of the system are most deprived and excluded in terms of various indicators, such as choice of occupation, interaction, marriage, and food. Ideally speaking, these castes were untouchables and excluded from taking up the clean occupations, wearing clean clothes, marrying upper caste women, and collecting water from the well meant for upper castes. All these facts of inter-caste interactions are well known and recorded in various texts.

It has been argued by many sociologists and anthropologists that caste has been dynamic and, like any other social formation, has been undergoing changes (Srinivas 1966). One of the major processes through which the castes have been improving their status is by imitating the life style of upper caste – a phenomenon called sanskritization by Srinivas (ibid.). Achieving higher caste status and becoming dominant caste have been seen as two distinct processes by Srinivas, for he (1987) argues that the domination is a function of numerical preponderance and control over land in rural areas. Theoretically, such a distinction provides the notion of caste a powerful place in the Indian social structure where inclusion is possible only through integration and consensus. However, the understanding of social exclusion is essentially multidimensional, but the significance of caste as an autonomous structural element powerfully emerges in the mapping of Indian society.

Caste as a dynamic process subsumes two major institutions of Indian society, namely religion and village. It is mistaken to presume that caste is an exclusive feature of Hindus, for various studies have shown that non-Hindu communities, such as Sikhs, Christians, and Muslims have caste system based on exclusion. Dirks (2001) has shown that most of the responses to the efforts of the Christian missionaries in India in their efforts to convert the local people were collective and not individual, which amply shows that since most of the conversions to these religions took place from the Hindu population, the decision to embrace a new religion was taken by castes. Despite differences of religion, caste differences and their sustenance have common logic with Hindu social formations. According to the 2011 Census of India, 68.84 per cent of the population of the country lives in villages. Villages being characterized by the particularistic and traditional values tend to have endemically structured

exclusions in different walks of life. Villages in India were constructed exotically as self-sufficient republics and communities by the British administrators and anthropologists, to which Ambedkar reacted sharply when he wrote, 'In this republic there is no place for democracy. There is no room for equality. There is no room for liberty and there is no room for fraternity. The Indian village is very negation of the republic' (Moon 1989, 26). Ambedkar was quite right in his observation about Indian villages. The caste discrimination and untouchability in villages in India was part of the world-view of the people and was regarded as a reified reality. The relationship between individuals was determined by the relationship between castes. Such a system of inequality could only exist if the hierarchy was maintained through the exercise of power. Interestingly, the caste inequality created the powerful legitimizing hegemonic idea of Karma, which propagated that the best way to assure a berth in heaven or higher caste was to follow the occupation and life of the caste in which you are born. Higher caste status and a better life world in the next birth were always treated as the reward for conformity to the caste principle in the present birth. The system sustained for centuries to the extent that even the egalitarian ideology of Islam could not make a difference to its operation and control. Islam, however, became the important base from which the attack was launched against the caste system.

The composite tradition that evolved out of the interaction between Islam and local belief systems in the form of the Bhakti movement spread all over India in the medieval period. It was among the most important efforts to bring a change in the caste system. The Bhakti movement contributed towards creating awareness that the seeds of dissent must be sown in the system that was responsible for providing legitimacy to the system. Whether it is Kabir, Chokamela, Nam Dev or Guru Nanak who founded the Sikh Panth, questioning the legitimacy of the caste inequality and untouchability remained their major concerns. Another notable aspect of the medieval Bhakti movement was the considerable presence of saints belonging to the Shudra castes (see Zelliot 1992 for details).

The practice of exclusion in the context of caste goes hand in hand with religion, economy, and politics. The practice could be classified into two overlapping phases in contemporary India, namely the traditional practices and modern practices of exclusion. Traditionally, untouchability has been the worst form of exclusion, as certain sections of the society are denied the basic human dignity of physical contact with others. The rationale that certain castes of untouchables could pollute upper castes signified the denial of the basic right over their bodies. Women belonging to Satnami and Nadar castes, to name