# Social Exclusion and Inclusion: Women in Rural Area of India

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## ABSTRACT

### Social Exclusion

As the saying goes, "God created Adam and Eve as an equal but since ages women have been downtrodden and relegated to an inferior position in the social set up. This is true not only of developing countries like India, but of developed countries as well. The status of women throughout the world has been undergoing a lot of changes right from ancient time.

The dreams of women transcend all boundaries, though they vary from place to place. Women deserve esteem, respect and love, not as individual, but as symbols of reverence, creation and values, which are spiritual and aesthetic. Unfortunately, they have suffered the most in social upheavals, political conflicts and wars.

## Social Exclusion

Social Exclusion is the social and institutional process where in different groups of people or communities are excluded from full participation in some economic activities. The exclusion sociologically is happening on the grounds of caste, community and economic inequality and gender. Thereby, the most excluded ones in the Indian Society include Scheduled castes, Scheduled tribes, other Backward Communities and people from minorities. Women are the most marginalized among the excluded community.

Across the globe, woman is systematically excluded from participation in social, economic and political life. The absence of women in these fields has implications not only for young women themselves but also for society as a whole, poverty and perpetuating disparities in health, education and economic achievement. Internationally, this marginalization makes it difficult or impossible for some countries to achieve society-wide goals, such as the millennium development goals identified by the United Nations as bench marks to reduce poverty.

Female social exclusion begins early in life and is especially notable at life transitions such as puberty and marriage. Exclusion is also evident in many of the obstacles girls encounter during the transition to adulthood. Adolescent girls encounter barriers to entering and staying in schools, finding work, making friends, learning life skills, accessing health services, and participating in civic life. In some parts of Asia, like in India, sex-selective abortions and female infanticide reduce girl's chances of even starting life. The Population council has been studying the causes and effects of girls exclusion in developing countries.

## Most Excluded Girls

Girls' exclusion is most profound in countries that are extremely poor and those where women have been historically marginalized. In the developing countries, the interaction of gender, culture and poverty underlines female social exclusion. According to an estimate, 60 million girls aged 6 to 11, who are not in schools belong to ethnic, religious, linguistic, racial or other minorities. Girls who belong to these minorities suffer disproportionately to their male counterparts and to the girls in the mainstream population. For example, total enrolled girls in schools were 4% in 1961 and which increased to 15.4% in 1981.

In some instances, obstacles created by the gender, poverty and ethnicity are compounded by geographic exclusion- being from "the wrong side of the town or residing in a remote countryside. Girls tend to have limited mobility relative to their male counterparts, so services and opportunities that are not girls' immediate neighborhood can be far out of reach. Girls may also lack in the financial means to travel safely to access employment or educational opportunities.

## Social Exclusion is a barrier to development

The social exclusion of girls perpetuates poverty at the individual and household levels by denying them access to education, services, resources, decision making and markets. Expectations and actual experiences of exclusion and discrimination can cause

feelings of powerlessness among those left out, which may in turn result in low self esteem and diminished aspirations for the future. Research has shown that these feelings can lead to lower achievements among members of excluded groups. In India, it is found that young people from low caste and high caste backgrounds performed equally well in tests when information about their caste was not revealed. When castes were publicly announced, however, the low class children performed worse than their high caste peers (DFID 2005). If parents expect that their daughters will be discriminated against in the labor market, they may choose not to invest in their education.

The social exclusion of girls has consequences at the country level. Even when national economy grows, excluded groups are left behind. Social isolation and relative economic deprivation are associated with poorer mental health, especially among females of rural areas, and can further reduce the ability to excluded individuals to be productive members of society. As the gap between the poor and non-poor increases, poverty becomes deeper and more intractable.

## Causes of Women Exclusion

Whether intentional (due to tradition or discrimination) or unintentional due to desire to protect females from harm or threat to their chastity, the outcome is the same. Girls' lives are more limited in every way than those of males.

Starting at an early age, girls residing in the same communities and households as boys are more excluded from investments and opportunities. In many settings, puberty is the time when gender role expectations become differentiated and intensified. Boys' experience more freedom of decision making and mobility, while the movements of girls outside the domestic sphere becomes increasingly circumscribed, often because of parents' fear of male attention, the temptation of unsanctioned activities, and the political damage to their daughters' reputation. The boys are given the bulk of house hold attention, resources and freedom is linked to the perception that the boys contribute more to the household economy and that they counted on the far old age security of parents especially in the rural areas of India where the most uneducated people live. In contrast, girls are perceived to contribute less in terms of their labor and income generating capacity, and in some contexts are even seen as a drain on household finances because of the cost associated with the marriage. The extra investment is evident in their achievements relative to girls in education, literacy and participation in labor force.

Population council research provides evidence from a number of settings that adolescent girls lack protective social networks and support. In Allahabad (India) 93% 0f boys but only 22% girls reported being able to travel unaccompanied to visit a relative.(Scbastien et al 2004) Poorer

girls reported having the fewest friends than boys in the poorest areas of India. In rural areas, boys were (are) much more likely than girls to have engaged in social events. Even the girls are not allowed to go for higher studies.

For many girls, marriage is the only socially acceptable avenue for a poor and overly protective natal home and many girls eagerly anticipate marriage with the view that it will expand their social horizon. This expectation frequently does not materializes .However, Council Research shows that married girls have more limited peer networks, less social mobility and freedom, more limited access to media and other sources of information and lower educational attainment than their unmarried peers compared with women who marry later, married adolescents have husbands much older than themselves. They also have less freedom to movement, less autonomy and decision making in household and reproductive decisions and also in some settings, increased risk for gender based violence and gender transmitted sexual infections and HIV infections are prevalent.

## Promoting Strategies for Including Females

Although there is much work to be done, several approaches are proving beneficial for girls. As mobility is restricted for many girls, especially at the approach of puberty, the primary requirement for their social inclusion is a safe, supportive space where they can interact with peers and mentors, strengthen their social networks, and enjoy freedom of expression and movement. Safe spaces for girls can serve as location for any number of beneficial services, including financial and business education, health interventions, assertive training and skill building for sexual negotiations. Safe spaces also act as a foundation for building girls' capacity to organize and mobilize themselves.

To fully participate in civic life, girls need access to documentation, such as ID cards and other government documents. They also require access to health and other youth oriented services. The result of the several council studies reveal that most socially isolated adolescents are the least likely to have contacts with youth centers, adolescent friendly clinics and peer education programs. Ironically, the very adolescents most in need of services- girls who are young, poor, rural married, not attending school and living without one or both parents are most under represented.

Women and girls enjoy certain human rights especially linked to their status. In 1946, the United Nations established a commission on the status of women. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights adopted in 1948, enshrines the equal rights of men and women and addressed both the equality and equity issues. Now, in India, to make sure the participation of women in political areas, the Government has passed a bill

in which women have 33% reservation in panchayats and in municipal elections. This is done for their active participation in political issues.

Even in the case of sexual harassment in 1997, the Supreme Court of India took a strong stand against sexual harassment of women at workplaces. The court also laid down detailed guidelines for prevention and redressal of grievances. The National Commission for women subsequently elaborated these guidelines into a code of conduct for employees.

To save girl child, gender selection and selective abortions were banned in India in 1994, but despite this the use of ultrasound scanning for gender selection continues. Female infanticide is still prevalent in some rural areas.

Education of the girls has been a high priority with the Government of India. The National commitment to provide free and compulsory education to all children in the 6-14 years of age group is now fundamental right of every child in India after the passing of the Constitution (86th amendment) Act in December 2002. Even, Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, or Education for all program recognizes that ensuring girls' education requires changes not only in the education system but also in societal norms and attitudes. In our Constitution, the article 38 to 51 which contains directive principles provide equal environment to women with men for social and economic development like-

  Article 39 provides equal wages to woman for the same type of work. Article 42 provides that the State shall make provision for securing just and humane condition of work and maternity relief.

In recent years more and more women are coming out for education, employment and public life. This sometimes generates domestic and public life problems like remarks, assault etc. And for the solution of these problems some provisions are there like-

- Section 190 of Criminal Procedure Code deals with the complaint cases.
- Section 174 of the Criminal Procedure code prescribes the mode of inquiry in a case of suicide or homicide, or death by an accident, machinery, animals or under such circumstances that a reasonable suspicion arises that some other person has committed the offence.
- Section 294 and 359 of the Indian Penal Code would clearly indicate that the substance of the act eve-teasing would be covered by them.

## SELF HELP GROUPS

Self help groups have 10 to 25 members who meet regularly once a week or fortnight to collect savings from members, decide to which member loan should be given, take decisions on collective activities and initiate action against defaulting members which affect the financial well being of the SHG.

Most SHG starts by saving regular contributions by the members and not with the help of any external financial capital. The contributions are very small, say Rs.10 per week, after a period of consistent savings the SHG's give loans from savings in the form of small internal loans for micro enterprise activities and consumption. The SHGs' that have utilized their own funds are further assisted by banks and other financial intermediaries. The micro financing has been the most important means of women empowerment provided through SHGs promoted by NGOs (Non-Government Organization). The important activities of NGOs are-

- Encouragement for the creation of SHGs by women and becoming members facilitating access to microcredit.
- Women below poverty line families were made members of the SHGs.
- Create awareness through congregations, road shows and informal meetings.
- Training for income generating activities like tailoring, candle making, home -made food etc.
- Exploitation of poor women by money lenders and pawn brokers has stopped.
- The confidence gained from earning income and increased savings has empowered women members to take decisions about their lives and of their children.
- The most important impact of NGO intervention has been the creation of social capital. By developing leadership qualities, interactions among inter and intra groups, information sharing among members and active participation in developing issues, the NGO's are making decentralized democracy.
- With necessary information, awareness and interaction, women know the importance of voting, contesting elections and getting elected.
- With increase in income, they are now able to take decisions for their children's studies.

### Laws for the safety of Women
- Molestation cover cases of utterance of obscenity, lewd jokes and singing of songs are generally covered by section 294 of IPC.
- Beating up the wife in any form would be covered by the definition of 'hurt' as given under section 319 of IPC.

- In recent years, women have been subjected to rape almost every day. The law related to rape has undergone a sea-change after amendment of the sections 375& 576 and the insertions of new sections 376A, 376B, 376C, & 376 in the IPC by the Criminal Law (amendment) Act 1993.

- According to Hindu Marriage Act 1955, women can make a petition for restitution of conjugal rights, judicial separation and divorce.

The Government as well as voluntary agencies in India are providing welfare services for women such as education, health, vocational training and handicrafts, shelter and protection for widows and destitute etc. In a recent, study in Maharashtra villages conducted by National Commission on Women showed that in about 30% of cases women were the sole bread earners and in another 55% cases they contributed a major share in the income of the families.

In the first half of the 19th century the British worked for improving the woman's condition by taking the problems like Sati, polygamy, child marriage, etc. Some social reformers like Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Keshab Chandra Sen, Dwarka Nath, M G Ranade, Pandit Rambai, Jyothiba Phule and Sir Ahmad Khan and the organizations they founded or associated with like Brahmo Smaj, Prarthana Smaj etc, started with religious reforms that were needed for social upliftment.

A Central Social Welfare board is established by the Government for women welfare for that purpose 4 crore was spent in the first five year plan. CSWB is constituted as a statutory autonomous body. Government has also established State Social Welfare Advisory Board (SSWAB) for women welfare. In the first five year plan, no provision was there for social welfare under state government. In the second five year plan a revised allocation of Rupees 7 crore was made under state plan which was only a small amount.

Report on the status of women say that even after the creation of central and state social welfare boards. There is no clear pattern in Social administration. The responsibility for planning and administering women welfare and development is scattered in various department and other agencies of the government. The federal framework and the need to involve voluntary or community organizations is the task generally resulting in three tier structure of administration, with agencies at the centre, state and local level.

## Conclusion

This paper has highlighted the various situations and consequences of social exclusion and inclusion. Social exclusion is a situation when some people are excluded from full participation in some economic and social activities on the basis of caste, gender etc. In this paper, I have explained I have made efforts to explain the most excluded ones, the woman, where their position stands in the society especially in a developing country like India. I have highlighted some of the causes of exclusion of women and laws enacted by the Indian government to safeguard their fundamental rights according to the Constitution of the country. Apart from the laws, how some Self Help Groups and Non-Government Organizations are trying to fill the gap of this social disparity and exclusion of women in all the societies and castes of India.

## References

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