

8th – Understanding Marginalisation



What does it mean to be socially marginalized:

To be marginalized is to be forced to occupy the sides or fringes and thus not be at the centre of things. In the social environment too, group of people or communities may have the experience of being excluded.

- They experience a sense of disadvantage and powerlessness vis-à-vis more powerful and dominant sections of society who own land, are wealthy, better educated and politically powerful. Thus, marginalization is seldom experienced in one sphere. Economic, social, cultural political factors work together to make certain groups in society feel marginalized.
- In many societies around the world, from the earliest times, there have been people who were forced to live on the margins or edges of society.

The untouchables: One of the worst fall outs of the caste system the practice of untouchability. The touch, even the mere sight, of these people was considered as polluting. But the irony is that without them rendering their services, society would have fallen apart.

- The people, who were treated as 'untouchables', now use the self-respecting term 'dalits' to describe themselves.
- The constitution has declared everyone equal in India. But, untouchability continues to be practised and these marginalized sections of society continue to remain backward even today. Dalits endure segregation in housing, schools and access to public services. They are denied access to land, forced to work in degrading conditions, and routinely abused at the hands of the police and upper caste community members who many a time enjoy the state's protection.
- If the country has to progress and enjoy socio-economic development, then it is absolutely essential to provide opportunities to the marginalized, to bring them up to the marginalized, and to bring them up to the same level as the rest of society. For this purpose, the government of India has taken various measures. The marginalized in India have been placed in various categories such as scheduled castes (SCs), scheduled tribes (STs) and other backward class (OBC).
- Though dalits are legally allowed access to any public place, be it religious or non-religious, unfortunately, the mindset of the people has not really changed and even now, atrocities against dalits are common.

Who are Adivasis?

- Adivasis- The term literally means 'original inhabitants'- are communities who lived, and often continue to live, in close association with forest. Many of India's most important mining and industrial centers are located in Adivasis areas Jamshedpur, Rourkela, Bokaro and Bhilai among others.
- Adivasi societies are also most distinctive because there is often very little hierarchy among them. This makes them radically different from communities organized around principal of Jati-Varna (caste) or those that were or those that were ruled by kings. Adivasis practice a range of tribal religions that are different from Islam, Hinduism, and Christianity.
- These often involve the worship of ancestors, village and nature spirits, the last associated with and residing in various sites in the landscape - 'mountain - spirits', 'river-spirit', 'animal - spirit', etc. the village spirits are often worshipped specific sacred groves within the village boundary while the ancestral ones are usually worshipped at home. Adivasis had their own language (most of them radically

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different from and possibly as old as Sanskrit), which had often deeply influenced the formation of 'mainstream' Indian language, like Bengali. Santhali has the largest number of speakers.

Adivasis and stereotyping:

In Indian, we usually 'showcase' Adivasi communities in particular ways. Adivasis are invariably portrayed in very stereotypical ways - in colorful costumes, headgear and through their dancing. Besides this, we seem to know very little about the realities of their lives. This often wrong leads to people believing that they are exotic, primitive and backward. Adivasi are blamed for their lack of advancement as they are believed to be resistant to change or new ideas.

Adivasis and development:

Forest absolutely crucial to the development of all empires and settled civilization in India. Most medicinal herbs and animal products (wax, lac, honey) and animals themselves (elephants, the main stay of imperial armies), all came from the forest.

- In addition, the continuation of life depended heavily on forest, that help recharge many of India's rivers and as in becoming clearer now, crucial to the availability and quality of our air and water. Forests covered the major part of our country till the nineteenth century and the Adivasis had a deep knowledge of access to, as well as control over, most of these vast tracts at least till the middle of the nineteenth century. Forest lands have been cleared for timber and to get land for agriculture and industry. Adivasis have also lived in areas that are rich in minerals and other natural resources. These are taken over for mining and other large industrial projects.

- Losing their lands and access to the forest means that tribal's lose their main sources of livelihood and food. Having gradually lost access to their traditional homelands, many Adivasis have migrated to cities in search of work where they are employed for very low wages in local industries or at building or construction sites. They, thus, get caught in a cycle of poverty and deprivation. Many tribal children are malnourished. Literacy rates among tribals are also very low. When Adivasis are displaced from their lands, they lose much more than a source of income. They lose their traditions and customs- a way of living and being. "They took our farming land. They took the cremation ground, temple, well and pond."

Minorities and Marginalization:

The constitution provides these safeguards to religious and linguistic minorities as part of our fundamental rights. The term minority is most commonly used to refer to communities that are numerically small in relation to the rest of the population. However, it is a concept that goes well beyond numbers.

it encompasses issues of power, access to resources and has social and cultural dimensions. The Indian constitution recognized that the culture of the majority influences the way in which society and government might express themselves. In such cases, size can be a disadvantage and lead to the marginalization of the relatively smaller communities. Thus, safeguard are needed to protect minority communities that are small in number relative to the rest of society may feel insecure about their lives, assets and well-being. This sense of insecurity may get

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accentuated if the relations between the minority and majority communities are fraught.

The constitution provides these safeguards because it is committed to protecting India's cultural diversity and promoting equality as well as justice.

Muslims and marginalization:

Muslims are considered to be a marginalized community. In India today because in comparison to other communities, they have over the years been deprived of the benefits of socioeconomic development. Muslims in India were lagging behind in terms of various development indicators. On a range of social, economic and educational indicators the situations of the Muslim community are comparable to that of other marginalized communities like scheduled castes and scheduled tribes.

- Economic and social marginalization experienced by Muslims has other dimensions as well. Like other minorities, Muslim customs and practices are sometimes quite distinct. Muslims may wear a burqa, sport a long beard, wear a fez, and these become ways to identify all Muslims. Because of this, they tend to be identified differently and some people think they are not like the 'rest of us'. This social marginalization of Muslims in some instances has led to their migrating from places where they have lived, often leading to the ghettoisation of the community.

Social inequalities naturally progress to economic inequalities:

Social inequalities lead to economic inequalities in a vicious cycle that most find difficult to break out of. The socially backward often find it difficult to get a good job. For example, more than 50% of the street cleaners employed by the government belong to the backward communities. There should be a nationwide resolution to create awareness among all the people, to strive to remove discriminatory barriers and have a change in their mindset. Dal movement towards equal opportunity is the test of Indian democracy.

Child labour:

One of the saddest consequences of poverty in India is child labour. Children in economically backward families are often forced to work, as the money they bring in helps the family survive. There are believed to be more than 15 million child laborers under the age of 14 in India. More than 50% of them work 1 hour a day, seven days a week, for a measly wage in factories making fireworks, all kinds of cottage industries. They work in the most appalling conditions.

Unequal access to healthcare:

Those of you who live in any of India's big cities would have seen the growth of several specialty hospitals, gleaming buildings of glass and steel. Medical tourism, that is coming of foreigners to India for medical treatment has become a major earner of foreign exchange for the India government. Healthcare, used to be a service industry has now become a profit-driven industry.

As a result, many of the public health centers (HCs) in the rural areas do not have doctors or nurses. India spends less than Rs 640 per capita on health. Compare this with what other countries - China around Rs 13, 80, United Kingdom around Rs 1, 20,000, and the USA spends around Rs per capita. Most of our government-run hospitals are starved for funds.

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The compare of doctors and nurses are sorely inadequate to deal with the thousands of patients who crowd these hospitals. There are not enough beds for patients to lie on. Operation theatres are ill-equipped. Electricity is erratic, and there are no generators. In some government hospitals in Bihar, doctor have been known to do emergency operations with light provided by hand- held torches. Thousands die each due to lack of timely medical attention. Social and economic justice continues to evade the marginalized India people of even 65 years after independence.

