Chapter: 4

Impact of Social Exclusion among Untouchables and Similar Other Groups

(OBC, Tribe, Nomadic and De-notified and Religious Minorities (Muslim converted low caste))

4.1 Introduction
In the previous chapter, we discussed Thorat's views on economic interpretation and theoretical perspective on the Indian caste system. In India, exclusion involves social processes that exclude, discriminate, isolate, and deprive some groups on the basis of group characteristics like caste and ethnicity. These include former untouchables, tribals, nomadic, semi-nomadic, and de-notified tribes etc. Such social groups constitute a significant portion of the India’s population. The former untouchables or Scheduled Castes (SCs) constitute the largest social group accounting for about 17 per cent of the population. The exclusion and deprivation of the SCs is closely associated with the institution of caste and the practice of untouchability. The SCs were excluded from access to property rights, civil rights, and civic amenities, except labour for the castes higher than them. Their deprivation amplified as they also suffered from physical and social segregation and isolation from the rest of the Hindu society through the institution of untouchability and inapproachability.

The adivasis or the Scheduled Tribes (STs) constitute the second largest social group, accounting for about eight per cent of India’s population and are closest to the SCs in terms of exclusion and deprivation. However, the basis of their isolation and exclusion is neither, caste nor, religion. Historically, STs have been ethnically different from the mainstream Indian society with a distinct culture, language, social organization, and economy. However, they continue to suffer from isolation, neglect, and exclusion, which cause considerable deprivation and poverty among them. With this backdrop, this chapter attempts to understand the contribution of Sukhadeo Thorat on the issue of how social exclusion has impacted on untouchables and other similar groups. Therefore, in this chapter we have taken three issues: first, the place of untouchables in caste system; their rights and consequences in livelihood; second is related on tribal, nomadic and de-notified tribe; and lastly we discuss the other religious minorities.

4.2 The Social Place of Untouchables in Caste System- Their Rights and Consequences on Livelihood
Untouchability is a distinct Indian social institution that legitimizes and enforces practices of discrimination against people born into particular castes, and legitimizes practices that are humiliating, exclusionary and exploitative. Although comparable forms of discrimination are found
all over the world, untouchability is made unique by the fact that its parent institution—the caste system—is found only in the Indian subcontinent.

As is well known, the caste system divides society into closed, hereditary groups ranked by ritual status. Caste are hereditary groups because membership is decided by birth alone; and they are closed because intermarriage (and often also food-sharing) between caste between castes is prohibited. Moreover, caste is a system because it is an interrelated structure in which each part or caste is linked to all the other parts. In the classical version, castes derive their meaning and status from their relative position vis-à-vis others in a hierarchical ranking based on traditional-religious notions of ritual purity and pollution. Although it originated in the Hindu scriptural and religious-social tradition, caste has entered among all the other religious communities of the Indian subcontinent, including Muslims, Christians and Sikhs (Shah and Other 2006).

Historically, the caste system classified people by their occupation and status. Every caste was associated with an occupation and status. Every caste was associated with an occupation, which meant that persons born into a particular caste were also ‘born into’ the occupations associated with their caste—they had no choice. Moreover, and perhaps more important, each caste also had a specific place in the hierarchy of social status, so that, roughly speaking, not were occupational categories ranked by social status, but there could be a further ranking within each broad occupational category. In strict scriptural terms, social and economic status were supposed to be sharply separated.

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. In modern times, and particularly since the 19th century, the link between caste and occupation has become much less rigid in the sense that ritual-religious prohibitions on occupational change or not easily impose today, and it is easier than before to change one’s occupation. Moreover, compared to 100 or 50 years ago, the correlation between caste and economic status is also weaker—rich and poor people are to be found in every caste. But—and this is the key point—the caste–class correlation is still remarkable stable both at the macro as well as the micro level. Although things have certainly changed, they have not changed drastically at the macro level—it is still true that the privileged (and high economic status) sections of society tend to be overwhelmingly ‘upper’-caste while the disadvantaged (and low economic status) sections are dominated by so called ‘lower’ castes. In short, even though there have been major changes
brought about by social movements over more than a century, and despite changed modes of
productions as well as concerted attempts by the state to suppress its public role in independent
India, caste continues to affect the life chances of Indians in the 21st century (Shah and Other
2006).

Strict separation and strict hierarchy – these are the fundamental aspects of the caste
system. Every caste is rigidly separated from every other caste and intermarriage and interdining
are prohibited across all caste boundaries. However, as the system has become less rigid, the
distinctions between castes of broadly similar social and economic status have weakened. Yet,
between different socio-economic groupings, the distinctions continue to be maintained.
‘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. Strictly speaking, the ‘untouchable’ castes are outside the caste hierarchy they are considered
to be so ‘impure’ that their mere touch severely pollutes members of all other castes, bringing
terrible punishment for the former and forcing the latter to perform elaborate purification rituals. In
fact, notions of ‘distance pollution’ existed in many regions of India (particularly in the south) such
that even the mere presence or the shadow of an ‘untouchable’ person is considered polluting.
Despite the limited literal meaning of the word, the institution of ‘untouchability’ refers not just to
the avoidance or prohibition of physical contact but to a much broader set of social sanctions, and it
is in this broad sense that the term is used in this monograph.

It is important to emphasize that the three main dimensions of untouchability –namely,
exclusion, humiliation- subordination and exploitation –are all equally important in defining the
phenomenon. Although other (i.e., ‘touchable’) low castes are also subjected to subordination and
exploitation to same degree, they do not suffer the extremes forms of exclusion reserved for
‘untouchables’. Dalits experience forms of exclusion that are unique and not practiced against other
groups- for instance, being prohibited from sharing drinking water sources or participating in
collective religious worship, social ceremonies and festivals. At the same time, untouchability may
also involve forced inclusion in a subordinated role, such as being compelled to play the drums at a
religious event. The performance of publicly visible acts of (self-) humiliation and subordination is
an important part of the practice of untouchability. Common instances include the imposition of
gestures of deference (such as taking off headgear, carrying footwear in the hand, standing with
bowed head, not wearing clean or ‘bright’ clothes, and so on) as well as everyday abuse and
humiliation. Moreover, untouchability is almost always associated with economic exploitation of
various kinds, most commonly through the imposition of forced, unpaid (or underpaid) labour, or
the confiscation of property. Finally, untouchability is a pan-Indian phenomenon, although its specific forms and intensity vary considerable across regions and socio-historical contexts (Shah and Other 2006).

4.3 On Tribal and Nomadic and de-Notified Tribe

In this point we given theoretical literature of S.K. Thorat related to tribal, nomadic and de-notified tribe. Historically, STs have been ethnically different from the mainstream Indian society with a distinct culture, language, social organization, and economy. However, they continue to suffer from isolation, neglect, and exclusion, which cause considerable deprivation and poverty among them.

The STs constitute about eight per cent of India’s population, equivalent to about eighty-five millions, with a sizable concentration in Central India and the North-Eastern states. The Central tribal belt stretches from Gujarat and Rajasthan in the West to Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, and Chhattisgarh in Central India to Jharkhand, Orissa, and West Bengal in the East. The Central belt accounts for about eighty-six per cent of the total ST population of the country followed by the North-Eastern states, which includes Sikkim accounting for about nine per cent of the total ST population. The rest of India accounts for a little less than five per cent of the total ST population (Shah and Other 2006).

For historical reasons, a very substantial section of India’s population has faced marginalization and suffered from deprivation and poverty. This section includes the SCs, the STs, and the OBCs.

Besides the SCs and the STs, however, there are other groups, which are on the margins of Indian society. These include nomadic, semi-nomadic, and de-notified tribes. The difference between the SCs and the STs, on the one hand, and the nomadic, semi-nomadic, and de-notified tribes on the other is that, while the former are settled communities with occupations of their own; the latter subsist in a nomadic or semi-nomadic state – without engaging in settled occupations.

Thorat said, owing to their unsettled character, the nomadic, semi-nomadic, and de-notified tribes do not figure in the population census and other official surveys and statistics (NSS for instance) as a separate category. Besides, a general neglect of these tribes in social science research, we do not have much idea about their socio-economic state – they remain outside the
settled world. Thorat tries to explore the historical dimension of these communities and attempts to throw some light on their socio-economic conditions. Besides, ascertaining their historical background, the analysis is also based on a survey of a community termed as the “Kaikadis”, from the state of Maharashtra (Thorat 1978).

The Kaikadi community is recognised by different names such as nomadic tribe in some states, semi-nomadic in others, and de-notified in yet another states. From the records, it appears that the Kaikadi community is in sizable and visible numbers in the state of Maharashtra and even outside it – it is found in the states of Karnataka, Kerala, Andhra Pradesh, and West Bengal. The mono-lingual feature of this community unites them around the common identity of Kaikadi, although they remain scattered in different geographical regions/states. Despite their scattered nature, the community remains unified through common dialect, social customs, and occupations.

Like many nomadic groups, the Kaikadi community also has undergone at least three different stages of social transformation. In Maharashtra, the Kaikadi community was originally recognised as a nomadic tribe. The colonial British rule had by law decreed them as criminal nomads. After Independence, the Indian State absolved them from the stigma of criminality and thus, de-notified them from their British identity of criminal tribes. Evidently, in contemporary times, this community is known as a ‘de-notified tribe’ (Thorat 1978).

In 1871, with the advent of British rule in India, a number of castes and communities were decreed by law as criminals – most of them had nomadic characteristics. Prominent among them were the Banjaras, Kanjar Bhattas, Chhapparbands, Pathatwals etc. Besides them, certain untouchable castes like the Mangs subsisting in some districts of Maharashtra were also included in the list of criminal tribes. Many of the tribes, declared criminal were nomadic and semi-nomadic in nature. Importantly, the recognition of nomadic or semi-nomadic tribes as criminal was based on the stereotype notion and unrealistic assumption of establishing a connection between nomads, nomadism, and criminal attitudes. It was assumed that the nomadic character of the community encouraged criminal attitudes – such an assumption precluded their notification as criminal.

In the Maharashtra, the Kaikadi community existed in almost every district of the state. Accounts of their historical origins are scarce. However, descriptions of the community in accordance to the 1871 notification of the British government refer to the community as “notorious skilful and determined thieves in Wardha, Berar, and also elsewhere. They make mats, repair hand
wheels, let out donkeys, and in general pursue miscellaneous occupations. Their women are famed fortune tellers”.

The Kaikadi community is basically endogamous and is structurally organized in a manner similar to caste. Their sub-division is based on occupational hierarchy and this sub-division is maintained by the institution of endogamy. Traditionally, they are known to engage in wooden-basket making, performing magic, snake charming, and carrying goods (soil, sand, and bricks) on donkeys. However, some among them have taken to settled ways of life and got absorbed stable occupations.

In early 1980s’ a survey was undertaken by the author to ascertain their socio-economic condition in the Marathwada region of Maharashtra. The survey was undertaken in two districts – Aurangabad and Parbhani – and covered about sixty-four families from six different villages.

The Kaikadi community in the survey districts consisted of about five main sub-castes – Dhontale, God Kaikadi, Monkey Holders, Snake Holders, and Gaon (village) Kaikadi. As mentioned earlier, the Kaikadis are segregated on the basis of occupational differentiation. The Dhontales were mainly involved in wooden-basket making; the God Kaikadis in carrying an idol of God and begging in the name of God; the monkey holders in earning their livelihood through monkey performances; the snake holders in snake charming. The Gaon Kaikadis constitute a prominent sub-tribe among the Kaikadi community, they being the ones who first came in contact with settled community life and making their settlements near or in the villages and later staying there either, permanently or temporarily. They were primarily occupied in making wooden-baskets, corn bins, and low stools etc. Some of them also took to farming (Thorat 1978).

4.4 Religious Minorities

Thorat also writes about the OBCs. He writes that the identification and definition of the OBCs goes back to first Backward Class Commission, popularly known as Kaka Kalelkar Commission which tried to provide definition on the basis of low social position of OBC in the traditional caste hierarchy of Hindu society, lack of general educational advancement, inadequate representation in government services, and inadequate representation in the field of trade, commerce and industry.
As the recommendations of the first Commission were not accepted so another commission i.e. Mandal Commission was entrusted with this task. Mandal Commission adopted comprehensive criteria on social, educational and economic basis. It used eleven indicators for identification of OBCs based on social backwardness, extent of manual labour for their livelihood, age at marriage, female participation rate, school attendance and drop rate, proportion of matriculates, family assets, kuccha houses and source of drinking water and extent of consumption loan. Based on these indicators the socially and educationally excluded communities from amongst the Hindu Shudras and some of the communities of the Muslims were included in the broader category of OBCs (Thorat and Kumar 2008).

The Muslim is the second largest minority social groups (after SC) accounting about twelve per cent of India’s population. Muslims comes closer to the SC in terms of exclusion and discrimination although the nature and causes may not be similar. Muslim is a religious minority group but minority status by itself need not lead to unfavorable exclusion and discrimination. In the case of Muslim however, due to historical reasons connected with Muslim dominance in the past and legacy of that deep division and hostility, they are perceived as ‘others’ and carry an identity of being different from the majority. This perceived notion of identity particularly by the Hindus which lead to social relation that cause selective exclusion and discrimination of Muslim in social, economic and political participation in the country.

Muslim constitutes about twelve per cent of India’s population. Empirical evidence on the economic condition of Muslim is limited, however that limited evidence does brings out their relatively less developed status as compared with the other religious groups particularly the majority Hindus.

About sixty-five per cent of the Muslim lives in rural area and the rest thirty-five per cent in urban area. In 1999-2000, the difference between Muslim and Hindus in the occupation are not significantly large. The important exception is their heavy concentration in self employment. Compared to Hindu, the Muslim share in self employment in farm is low, but the gap is not as pronounce as in the case of non-farm self employment.

In urban area also the Muslim are mainly engaged in self employment, fifty-three per cent as compared to thirty-six per cent and forty-four per cent for Hindus and Other religious groups. But compared to Hindus and other religious groups their share is much lower in regular wage and
salaried jobs, about twenty-nine per cent, forty-seven per cent and thirty-eight per cent for Muslim, Hindus, and Other religious groups respectively. The participation of Muslim in non-farm-self employment in rural and urban area is high and relatively low in regular salaried jobs. The self employed category is not homogenous and neither are the regular jobs. Like SC/ST the Muslim are also engaged in low capital intensity petty occupations.

Similarly in the case of regular salaried job the Muslim may be generally concentrated in low paid informal sectors. It is argued that the concentration of Muslim in self employment is not because they prefer it to salaried jobs but because they are unable to get formal employment. In other word, minorities engage in self employment as a way to circumvent the disadvantage they face in the quality regular job market. Self-employment Act as “residual sector” for them. This use of self-employment as the residual sector could be due to two major reason, low education and discrimination. Muslim possibly face distinct disadvantage in formal job markets because of discrimination, which limit their access to public jobs. Discrimination in formal employment sector also then act as deterrent for investment in education by discriminated groups and further push them to residual sectors -self-employed jobs.

In 1999-2000, the unemployment among Muslim was higher in the rural areas but only marginally more in the urban areas. Illiteracy rates are also higher among the Muslim. In rural area, 48% were illiterate, Compare to 44% of the Hindus. In urban areas, the gap is much wider,30% among Muslim and only 19% among the other. Muslim also have the largest illiterate women population. On health side NCAER survey reveals low level of access and utilization of basic government services. Overall, the performance of Muslim is worse for variables, which include public programmes like immunization, Anti-Natal care and other.

Lack of political participation is a problem which seems to be specific to them. There are no political reservation, as their representation in Loka sabha is lower than their population share - averaging 4 to 6 % (as against 12% population) and it has gone down in the1990's,which indicate the exclusion from power sharing and decision making process.

Since the Muslim are placed in disadvantage position with respect to occupation, employment rate, and access to education and health and political participation, it culminate in high poverty. In1999-2000 the percentage of poor was higher by significant margin as compare to other religious groups, 30% compared to 21 % for other religions and all India average of 26.50%.
Similarly the incidence of poverty in urban area was higher among the Muslim by substantial margin compared with the religious groups, 36.66%, 20.78%, 12.35% and 23.98% for Muslim, other religious groups, christens and all India average respectively.

4.5 Summary

The discussion on writings of Thorat, we have understand that, ‘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. Strictly speaking, the ‘untouchable’ castes are outside the caste hierarchy they are considered to be so ‘impure’ that their mere touch severely pollutes members of all other castes, bringing terrible punishment for the former and forcing the latter to perform elaborate purification rituals. In fact, notions of ‘distance pollution’ existed in many regions of India particularly in the south such that even the mere presence or the shadow of an ‘untouchable’ person is considered polluting. There are three main dimensions of untouchability – namely, exclusion, humiliation- subordination and exploitation. Although other low castes are also subjected to subordination and exploitation to same degree, they do not suffer the extremes forms of exclusion reserved for ‘untouchables’. We also understand that Scheduled Tribes have been ethnically different from the mainstream Indian society with a distinct culture, language, social organization, and economy. However, they continue to suffer from isolation, neglect, and exclusion, which cause considerable deprivation and poverty among them.
Reference


