

**SOCIAL EXCLUSION AND INCLUSIVE POLICY:
IN THE LIGHT OF SWAMI VIVEKANANDA'S THOUGHT**

STURJ, Vol. 1, Issue-2, DoP: 06.08.2021

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Abstract

Though the terms 'Social Exclusion' and 'Inclusive Policy' are of relatively recent origin, Swami Vivekananda's versatile thoughts and action make him the pioneer of these concepts. Many years ago, he strongly professed the causes and nature of misery of masses, poor, illiterate people of India. He boldly condemned all-social evils and advocated how to include the excluded people in mainstream life. Swami Vivekananda's thoughts were reflected in the recent policy measures of social inclusion of different countries in the World. He also preached the '*Advaita*' (nonduality) concept of Vedantic Philosophy, which is perfectly relevant and unique, as it insists upon the way of spiritual socialism through which true egalitarian human society is possible in a real sense. In the present paper, a humble attempt has been made to focus on the subject matter of social exclusion and inclusive policy in the light of Swami Vivekananda's epoch-making thought.

Keywords: Caste-based discrimination, inheriting social status, mass oppression, Vedantic socialism, classless and casteless society and egalitarian human society.

Introduction:

India is a holy land and treasure-house of religion and spirituality. The Vedas, Upanishads, Puranas, are the great sources of many social theories. Indian *rishis* (seers) have invented so many social ideas and contributed to Science, Arts, and Music for humankind globally. The term 'Social Exclusion' is relatively new in social science. It was first used in France by Rene Lenoir in 1974 and widely used in the United Kingdom, Europe, Australia, and America. British Government established

a separate department of Social Exclusion. It gave this concept cabinet-level priority with the appointment of a Minister for Social Exclusion. In the late 1990s, the International Labour Organization (ILO) also took the initiative for developed and developing countries. To address social exclusion, about 100 Research Institutes were established in South- Asia including India, China, Japan, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Nepal in the last two decades. In India, during the 10th & 11th plan period University Grants Commission (UGC) under the Ministry of Human Resource Development had launched a special scheme for the establishment of 35 Centres for Study of Social Exclusion and Inclusive Policy (CSSEIP) in 35 Indian Universities (Debnath, 2016:15).

Social exclusion is a multi-dimensional, dynamic and relational concept. Estivill (2003) states 'if poverty is a photograph, the exclusion is film.' Many social scientists and government agencies have defined social exclusion in various ways. ADLER Institute for Social Exclusion of America (2002) defined "Social Exclusion refers to the complex processes that deny certain groups access to mainstream life." 'Inclusive policy' means the strategic way through which the deprived or excluded people or groups may be included in mainstream life.

Socially excluded people in France as Lenoir (1974) have identified are 'mentally and physically handicapped', 'aged invalids', 'single parents, 'multi-problem households', etc. (Sen, 2004:1). Hilary Silver (1995) of USA has extended Lenoir's list of 'socially excluded group' by adding the people who are excluded from –'a livelihood', 'earnings', 'property, 'housing', 'education', 'citizenship', 'public goods', etc. (Sen, 2004:1). UNDP (2007) also extended the list in the perspective of discrimination based on race, colour, sex, language, religion, political opinion, national or social origin, etc. (Mathieson, 2008:88). The OXFAM Study (2013) identified Scheduled Castes (Dalit), Scheduled Tribes, Muslims and Women as socially excluded in India (Dubrochet 2015: 2). Recent COVID-19 Pandemic situation has also enhanced largely the number of excluded people in India as well as the World. Inequality Report-2020 of OXFAM and World Social Report-

2020 of UN both are showing inequalities and job insecurities increasing at an alarming rate in the World.

Indian society is characterized by multiple forms of exclusion and caste is a unique determinant of social exclusion. It is, often, voiced that caste-based social exclusion in India was deeply rooted in religion and Holy Scriptures. But it is not true at all. It is of course true that in the name of religion, a section of opportunist people oppressed another section of people for a long time in India. Evidence from history shows that in the name of religion people had been cheated, oppressed for long centuries through caste restriction. The present caste system is no doubt the greatest enemy of human society, and the cause of our downfall. Though, the ancient Hindu scriptures theoretically accept '*Chatur Varna*' based on '*Guna*' and '*Karma*', but not as the social grouping of the modern caste system. In the *Bhagavad Gita*, (Chapter-iv, verse-13) Lord Krishna declared

*“Chaturvarnyam Mayasristhamgunkarma Vibhagashah, Tasya Kartaramapi Mam
viddhyakartaramavyayam”.*

Therefore, the class of an individual should not be determined by birth or heredity but based on a person's inherent nature and capability in doing work. Many Hindu *Jogi* and sages have over the centuries frequently commented about inheriting social status. Goutam Buddha and Mahavira were against any caste structure. In the 12th century Basa Vanna, in the 15th century Sri Chaitanya Maha Prabhu, Ramananda, Kanaka Dasa, also denounced inherited social status and accepted all castes. In the 19th century, Raja Ram Mohan Ray, Swami Dayananda Saraswathi, Sri Ramakrishna Paramhansa Dev also actively campaigned against casteism. Mahatma Gandhi, B.R. Ambedkar and Rabindranath Tagore have also made commendable efforts for the inclusion of lower caste people into the mainstream. Swami Vivekananda (1863-1902), a Hindu iconic monk and the paragon of practical Vedanta, the greatest disciple of Sri Rama Krishna Paramhansa Dev was the pioneer of social inclusion in modern India. He strongly condemned mass oppression in the name of religion

and was against casteism. He boldly declared to remove priesthood from society. He said, “*Daridra Deva Vaba, Murkha Deva Vaba*”- the divine soul of poor and the ignorant be respected. Swami Vivekananda had quoted from ancient Indian Scriptures, ‘*Shrinentu Biswye Amritasya Putrya*’ (Shvetashvatara Upanishad, chapter-II, verse 5)– all people are children of immortal bliss and said ‘Each soul is potentially divine ’, ‘God is present in every *Jiva*’. Swamiji's vision and mission were for the elevation and upliftment of the masses, the destitute, the poor, the illiterate and the labour classes. Indian ancient scripture states, ‘*Basudaiva Kutumbakam*’(*Maha Upanishad Chapter-6, verse 72*) – the whole world is a family and Swami Vivekananda also preached the ‘*Advaita*’ (nonduality) concept of Vedantic Philosophy, which is perfectly relevant and unique, as it insists upon the way to spiritual socialism through which real egalitarian human society is possible. Recently, Prof. Vaneesa Cook, University of Pennsylvania, America has also highlighted the concept of “spiritual socialism” in her book ‘Spiritual Socialists’ (2019). She wrote ‘Spiritual socialists emphasized the social side of socialism and believed the most basic expression of religious values – caring for the sick, tired, hungry, and exploited members of one’s community – created a firm footing for society...spiritual socialism continually puts pressure on liberals, conservatives, and Marxists to address the essential connection between mortality and social justice”. (<https://www.goodreads.com>)

Vivekananda’s views on Social Exclusion

Swami Vivekananda was a versatile genius. There was no subject or problem, affecting human life, thought, and action, which did not receive his keen attention laden with his profound knowledge of history, accurate observation, and deep insight into the various factors that shape human life and thought. According to him, the causes of social exclusion or our downfall were as follows.

Neglect of the masses: Swamiji considered that the root cause of our downfall was neglect of the masses. Historical evidence revealed that people have been cheated for long centuries through

caste restrictions and they have lost their individuality. He states that “the great national sin is the neglect of the masses, and that is one of the causes of our downfall. Priest-power and foreign conquest have trodden them down for centuries, and at last the poor of India have forgotten that they are human beings” (Vivekananda,1993: 21).

Caste Politics: Swamiji said, “Caste distinction, Caste politics, and politics of caste, superstitions, the narrowness of mind and isolation of the people from the rest of the world multiplied the miseries of the Indian masses” (Pal, 2010:36).

Mass oppression in the name of religion: Old orthodox Brahminical doctrine of ‘*Adhikanand*’ propounds the exclusion of the ‘Shudras’ and the rest of the people from the benefit of Vedic knowledge. (Mangla, 2014:15). Vivekananda stated “No religion on earth preaches the dignity of humanity in such a lofty strain as Hinduism, and no religion on earth treads upon the necks of the poor and the low in such a fashion as Hinduism. What are we doing for their livelihood, for their improvement? We do not touch them; we avoid their company! Are we man? Those thousands of Brahmins- what are they doing for the low, downtrodden masses of India? ‘Don’t touch’, ‘Don’t touch’, is the only phrase that plays upon their lips!” (Vivekananda, 1993: 23).

The monopoly of education: Swamiji had also identified that one of the main causes of our downfall was monopolizing education. In the West education is for the general masses. But in India education was for the upper classes and not for the lower people. He said, “the chief cause of India’s ruin has been the monopolizing of the whole education and intelligence of the land, by dint of pride and royal authority, among a handful of men” (Vivekananda,1993: 24).

People have been taught- they are non-entities: Vivekananda said that “for centuries people have been taught theories of degradation. They have been told that they are nothing. The masses have been told all over the world that they are not human beings. They have been so frightened for centuries, till they have nearly become animals. Never were they allowed to hear of the atman” (Vivekananda,1993: 25).

Laziness and meanness: Lack of energy, courage, and begging for sympathy are the traits also responsible for our downfall. Swamiji said “we would do nothing ourselves and would scoff at others who try to do something- this is the bane that has brought about our downfall as a nation. Want of sympathy and lack of energy are at the root of all misery, and you must therefore give these two up” (Vivekananda,1993: 25).

Exclusiveness: Swamiji said that “one of the great causes of India’s misery and downfall has been that she narrowed herself, went into her shell as the oyster does, and refused to give her jewels and her treasures to the other races of mankind, refused to give the life-giving truths to thirsting nations outside the Aryan fold. That has been the one great cause; that we did not go out, that we did not compare notes with other nations” (Vivekananda,1993: 25).

Neglect of womenfolk: Swamiji had expressed his views that no nation can be prosperous by the dishonor of women *Sakti*. But in India, women were denied their rights to freedom and rights to education. The priests have undermined women and even they preached – ‘women are the gateways to the hell’ (Pal, 2010:122).The recent OXFAM Inequality Report (2020) also highlights that women's contribution to Indian GDP is 17% which the lowest in the World.

Swami Vivekananda was a pioneer of Social Inclusion in modern India. He upheld the noble idea of “*Vedantic Socialism*” for making human society truly egalitarian. Discarding the prevalent dogmatic caste system, he gave importance to individualism and called upon each individual to work for the wellbeing of their fellow human beings and create a better society. Swamiji’s thoughts on social inclusion may be presented as follows:

Education –the primary need: Swamiji has emphasized man-making and character-building education. He wanted that children of ‘Sudra’ be given more importance for education than those of 'brahmana'. He said that “Through education comes faith in one’s own self, and through faith in one’s own self the inherent Brahman is waking up them, while the Brahman in us is gradually becoming dormant” (Vivekananda,1993: 37).

Education for self-reliance: Swamiji categorically focused on self-reliant education. He said, “all the wealth of the world cannot help one little Indian village if the people are not taught to help themselves. Our work should be mainly educational, both moral and intellectual”. He spoke for bread first then religion. In the New Education Policy-2020, the Government of India has also emphasized vocational education. (NEEP-2020:43)

Uplift of Women: Swamiji wanted women emancipation, and women needed to be given proper honour at home and in the societies as it was given in the Vedic age. Proper education needed to be imparted for the upliftment of women. He wrote to Sister Nivedita – “what India requires today is a veritable lioness” (Pal, 2010:123).

Religion not to be hurt: Swamiji said “Religion is the idea which is raising the brute unto man, and man unto God” and the ‘manifestation of divinity. All religions are good and preach to the divine instinct in all individuals. Our ancestors of *Vedantic* Philosophy have proved in all religions the supper conscious state is identical and accepts all religions as true. In the world, Parliament of Religion Swamiji warned – “if anybody dreams of the exclusive survival of his own religion and the destruction of the others, I pity him from the bottom of my heart, and point out to him that upon the banner of every religion will soon be written, in spite of resistance: “help and not fight” “Assimilation and not Destruction”, “Harmony and Peace and Dissension” (Sharma,2008:259).

Multi-dimensional Exchange of Ideas-a must: For the upliftment of the nation, exchange of ideas is a must. India needs to share her spiritual treasures with other nations and receive the material, technological knowledge from other countries has.

Science and Technology: To remove poverty through economic development, Swamiji emphasized the knowledge of western science and technology. Swamiji also commented that unless there was a planned economic growth through science and technology even in the agrarian sector, people's standard of living could not be upgraded (Pal, 2010:123).

These were some views of Swami Vivekananda to make the Indian society classless, casteless, and also for a vibrant nation. Even when we look at the policy measure to reduce the social exclusion of different countries of the World, we also find the reflection of Swamiji's thought. It is to be observed, Swamiji's thoughts are reflected in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) adopted in the UN General Assembly. If we analyze the recent policy paper of the Department for International Development (DFID) to reduce social exclusion, we may observe many countries like; South Africa, Australia, Malaysia, Brazil, Bangladesh, Bolivia, etc. are giving more emphasis on mass education, creating job opportunity and accountability to protect people's human rights, what Swami Vivekananda had already suggested many years ago. Poverty, illiteracy, joblessness, corruption, violence these are not new problems of the human society, they existed even in Vivekananda's period also. Swami Vivekananda's views and epoch-making thoughts for the solution of these problems are still relevant in this 21st century also. Nivedita said Swamiji was "a man of a combination of old and new thoughts of India." (Pal, 2010:30). Many years ago, Prof. Robert Watson Frazer quoted from Max Muller in his book '*Indian Thought Past and Present (1915)*' that "Indian thought, philosophical and spiritual, must once more go over and conquer the world." (Burke, 2000: 222).

Conclusion:

Swami Vivekananda's vision and mission were for the elevation and upliftment of the excluded masses, the destitute, the poor, the illiterate, laboring classes, and for including them into the mainstream irrespective of caste, race, gender and religious affiliation. His epoch-making thoughts are still relevant in the present 21st century not only for India but for the World. His thoughts are forever valid. Swamiji's '*Advaita*' (non-duality) concept of Vedantic Philosophy is perfectly relevant and unique to make the human society truly egalitarian in a real sense. Hence, for policy formulation of social inclusion, Swami Vivekananda's thoughts may guide us.

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