

Politics of Caste-based Exclusion and Poverty Alleviation Schemes in Rural India

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Paper presented at the *The Politics of Inclusion International* workshop organised by the Comparative Research, Programme on Poverty – CROP, (ISSC/UiB), and UNESCO's Management of Social, Transformations Programme (MOST), UNESCO Headquarters, Paris, France, 6-7 July 2017.

Abstract

While social inclusion and inclusive societies are commendable goals, and also reflected in legislation and policies, the persistence of poverty and social deprivation suggests the need engage with how In spite of legislation prohibiting caste-based exclusionary practices in India, and implementation of reservation policies and welfare schemes, the vast majority of the Dalits – the so-called 'lower castes' continue to Caste-based stratification represents one of the most pervasive forms of social exclusion injustice with the so-called 'lower castes' or Dalits having been historically exposed to multiple exclusions and the majority continuing to experience social deprivation and poverty. Associated with the Hindu tradition, the caste ideology legitimises inequality according to the status of birth, restricts interactions between the castes, and accords differential privileges according to where a person is placed in the caste ladder. Since gaining Independence, the government of India has enacted legislation penalising caste-based exclusionary practices such as untouchability, and implemented reservation policies as well as welfare schemes to improve the upward mobility of the Dalits. This paper is concerned with the ways in which Dalits have been included in and benefited from such targeted legislation and schemes. Based on fieldwork conducted in 'Ambedkar' villages (with special programmes for Scheduled castes) and 'Non-Ambedkar' villages in Uttar Pradesh, it was found that, in spite of progressive legislations, schemes, central monitoring system and a pro-Dalit political party in power, there were no significant changes in the livelihood options of the Dalits in Ambedkar and non-Ambedkar villages. The paper shows that the relatively 'high' castes used their economic, political and patronage powers to influence the local government, implementing agencies and the police to subvert these schemes in their favour, resulting in the adverse incorporation of the Dalits into schemes specifically targeted to their benefit. The problem was compounded by the fragmented nature of government and NGO interventions, which did not sufficiently recognize the interlocking and cumulative nature of the exclusions and atrocities experienced by poor Dalits, particularly with respect to their human rights, human development and human security in their daily lives. Under these circumstances, caste-based ideologies and practices continued to perpetuate the lower status of the Dalits by integrating them into programmes and schemes in accordance with dominant norms, values, rights and processes of inclusion and exclusion. The paper suggests that countering social inclusion and promoting secure and sustainable social inclusion of vulnerable groups involves unpacking and challenging the norms of inclusion that often validate the values of the more powerful, while discrediting which often favour the more powerful political and economic prorecognising the different ways in inclusion and exclusion which multiple the government and other concerned actors need to develop multiple strategies at different levels to develop more effective and sustainable ways of the Dalits in rural India.

Key words: Social exclusion, Dalits, Schedule castes, Ambedkar village, human security, and human rights

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Government-sponsored schemes, such as poverty alleviation, employment generation and welfare programs as well as affirmative policies to promote the representation of marginalised groups are key measures used to promote social inclusion in developing countries. These programs, while well-intentioned, are however not always effective in contexts where prevailing power relations oppose initiatives challenging their structural position in society. This paper deals with caste-based exclusion and the associated structural violence experienced by the so-called ‘low-castes’ or Schedule Castes in rural India, where dominant caste-based power relations uphold ideological biases and cultural practices that legitimise and enforce the exclusion of the so-called ‘low-caste’ groups. In spite of affirmative action on the part of the government, these groups continue to remain economically disadvantaged (Nandwani 2016).

Caste-based discrimination contradicts the principles of the 16th Sustainable Development Goal that focuses on peace, justice and inclusion for all. This paper argues that effective inclusion of the Scheduled Caste, or the Dalits – the name they have assumed themselves - would require new conceptual and policy frameworks that identify the different power relations as well as the interlocking and cumulative nature of exclusionary practices that inform their daily lives, and restrict them from accessing the full benefits of government intervention. The paper shows that multiple forms of violence and discrimination threaten the human development, human rights and human security of Dalits, and especially Dalit women, because of inter-relational aspects between class, caste and patriarchy. The paper exposes the limitations of targeted interventions that do not acknowledge these power relations and outcomes, as well as the necessity of a multidimensional action, including strategic alliances and collective mobilisation with committed groups, to reduce exclusion and to promote, in line with the 16th SDG, a just and sustainable inclusion of Dalits in society.

Important legislation and inclusionary policies supporting the Dalits, have been implemented in India since it gained its Independence in 1947. The Government of India adopted a new constitution in 1949 that included Articles 15 and 17, under Fundamental Rights, prohibiting discrimination and untouchability.¹ Subsequently, laws such as the Anti-Untouchability Act of 1955, which became the Protection of Civil Rights Act in 1979, and the Prevention of Schedule Caste and Schedule Tribes Atrocities Act (1989) were passed, penalising violence

¹ One of the main authors of the Indian constitution, Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar, belonged to the Scheduled castes and took up this issue as the first Minister of Law in post-colonial India. Under his influence, protective and preventative measures with regard to Scheduled Castes were included in the Indian Constitution (adopted in 1949)

and discrimination against Dalits.² The government also introduced reservations for schedule castes and schedule tribes in the public services, including for civil service jobs in administration and education and other public services. In view of their poor economic status, Dalits living in rural areas were also eligible for government-sponsored poverty alleviation programs.

The law, complemented by favourable policies and programmes, is in line with promoting the social inclusion of the Dalits. The provisions are also in line with the objectives of the 16th SDG, and its targets including the removal of all forms of violence (16.1), promotion of the rule of law (16.3), reduction of corruption and bribery (16.5), the development of effective, accountable and transparent institutions (16.6), ensuring responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making at all levels (16.7), and the promotion of and enforcement non-discriminatory laws and policies (16b). The Government of India has also promoted the political representation of women by passing the 73rd Amendment to the Constitution in 1992, mandating that at least 33% of the seats in local government (*Panchayat*) and one third of Chairpersons of *Panchayats* be reserved for women. In many ways, the content of laws and policies since Indian independence has favoured social inclusion of Dalits and of women. Yet in spite of such measures, as will be outlined in the subsequent sections, Dalits and Dalit women in particular continue to face different types of exclusions that limit the potentially positive outcomes of legislation and special schemes. There is therefore a need to analyse the nature and implications of the entrenched forms of social exclusions, and to develop appropriate strategies so that Dalits enjoy sustainable forms of social inclusion.

The chapter is developed along the following lines. Using Johan Galtung's concept of different forms of violence, and using available secondary research, the chapter shows how the combination of physical, structural and cultural violence has led to long-term deficits in the human rights, human development and human security of the Dalits. The piece complements this macro data by using micro-level analysis in two villages to expose the local-level dynamics of caste-based power relations in the daily lives of the Dalits, demonstrating how the interlocking and cumulative nature of exclusions and exploitation prevented them, and particularly the Dalit women, from accessing their legal entitlements. It shows how these forms of violence combined to shape the politics of Dalit social exclusion and inclusion – the latter often reflecting a form of perverse incorporation where caste-based norms and practices were retained. The final sections pull out the implications for their rights, development and security, and the promotion of their sustainable social inclusion.

About our methodology

There are two important methodological considerations that frame the analysis. The first has to do with the focus on local interactions. The paper is guided by Sally Moore's notion of 'semi-autonomous social fields', that have "internally generated rules" that are the more "immediate forces that dictate the mode of compliance or noncompliance to state-made legal rules" (1973:721). She has argued that the failure of legislation to bring about social change is often because "new laws are thrust upon going social arrangements in which there are complexes of binding obligations already in existence" with the these obligations being more

² These included the Anti-Untouchability Act of 1955 (subsequently the Protection of Civil Rights act in 1979) and the Prevention of Schedule Caste and Schedule Tribes Atrocities Act (1989)

effective than the laws (1973:723) resulting in “piecemeal” legislation that “only partially invades the on-going arrangements” (1973: 743). This paper shows how caste-based exclusion and patriarchal norms function in semi-autonomous fields with power relations that enforce compliance along lines of inequality and discrimination. These controls can often be stronger than the law and manifest in the daily interactions of people.

The second is the focus on the interactions during the year 2009. This choice of 2009 is based on the understanding that it an important moment to assess the effectiveness of favourable government intervention to remove caste-based exclusion. The pro-Scheduled Caste Bahujan Samaj Party had risen to power, and a Dalit, Mayawati Prabhu Das, had become the Chief Minister Uttar Pradesh in 1995, and served four other terms in office. This political progress was accompanied by extra attention by the government to countering caste-based atrocities, as well as the appointment of more scheduled caste officers in the government administrative services with special officers to monitor progress and implement schemes. The pro-Dalit Political Party, BSP (Bahujan Samaj Party), which was ruling the province during 2009, lost the provincial elections in 2012 to Samajwadi Party (SP), leading to the disbanding of many of the privileges, schemes and monitoring system started by the BSP in Ambedkar villages. In March 2017, the Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP), a ‘right-wing Hindu’ party of the ‘upper castes’ defeated Samajwadi Party with a huge majority in the province.³ While field work has also been done after 2009, the interactions of that year reflect how class and caste relations in society operate to promote exclusion and exploitation even when the political climate and government interventions are meant to promote inclusion.

Characteristics of Dalit Exclusion

According to Galtung “(w)ith the violent structure institutionalized and the violent culture internalized, direct violence also tends to become institutionalized, repetitive, ritualistic, like a vendetta” (1990:202). In his lecture, “Religions, Hard and Soft” (1994) Galtung noted that religious sanctions associated with the caste system under Hinduism could be seen as a form of structural violence manifested in both economic exploitation and political repression of

³ The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), currently ruling at the centre too, works from an ideology to transform India into a Hindu theocratic state based on the principles of the book called ‘Manusmriti’. The book ‘Manusmriti’ advocates a society based on four social hierarchies in which Dalits belongs to the lowest ladder of the society without any human rights and dignity. The BJP Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh, Yogi Adityanath was/is the Head Priest of the Gorakhnath shrine in Gorakhpur district. He is a supporter of the Rashtriya Swaim Sevak Sangh (an extremist Hindu outfit) ideology and founder of ‘Hindu Yuva Vahini’ (a militant youth wing). Under his leadership, Dalits and Minorities are under tremendous fear and stress for their protection and development. This has been seen in the form of open violence of the right-wing Hindu cow vigilante groups against Muslim minorities, and the burning of houses and killing of Dalits by 'higher castes' in Saharanpur. In 2005, Adityanath led a 'purification drive' which involved the conversion of Christians to Hinduism. In one such instance, 1,800 Christians were reportedly converted to Hinduism in the town of Etah in Uttar Pradesh. He said, "I will not stop till I turn UP and India into a *Hindu Rashtra* (Hindu state).” <https://www.synergiafoundation.in/news-analysis/yogi-adityanath-cm>. Thus, the recent political changes and the rise to power of the BJP government at the national level are unlikely to remove caste-based exclusion and the exposure of Dalits to structural, cultural and personal violence.

those at the bottom of the caste pyramid. His earlier work viewed patriarchy, together with racism and class ideologies, as part of structural violence, leaving women with low status, which exposed them to “cultural violence” whenever religious ideology was used to “justify or legitimise direct and structural violence” against them (Galtung 1990:291). However, he later argued that patriarchy combined “direct, structural and cultural violence in a vicious triangle” with rape, repression and intimidation being part of the triangle along with structural violence and cultural violence. The result was that patriarchy institutionalised violence by ideologically internalising dominant and subordinate relationships, along gender, caste and identity lines, with low status women being the ultimate victims (Galtung 1996:40).

In Galtung’s typology of violence, structural violence can be said to exist whenever: “human beings are being influenced so that their actual somatic and mental realizations are below their potential realizations” (1969:168). His distinction is between physical violence (direct violence on the body), structural violence (which harms and kills without physical contact) and cultural violence (which legitimates the other two forms of violence). This three-fold typology of violence is especially suited to understanding long-term and enduring processes of caste-based power relations and discrimination in rural India. The notion of violence can be captured by the use of cultural violence to legitimate or obscure how unequal power relations result in both unequal life chances, and in direct physical violence, often with impunity. The subsequent paragraphs review research highlighting how different forms of violence operated to produce long-term disadvantages and deficits in relation to Dalits’ human development, human rights and human security.

Arguably, caste is one of oldest and most pervasive forms of social stratification, and results in injustices based on ascribed role differentiation. Caste stratification, traditionally associated with the Hindu religion, is sustained by an ideology that legitimises inequality according to the status of birth. Interactions between castes is restricted, and differential privileges and burdens are accorded, according to one’s position in the caste hierarchy. The so-called ‘Higher castes’ and more particularly the Brahmans, have over time developed rules that helped ensured superior status for themselves in the overall social hierarchy; the British colonisers helped entrench this system (Thapar 1979:27, Srinivas 1966:5). Historically, caste controls have been most violently enforced on those at the lowest rungs of the caste ladder, the so-called Scheduled Castes, or Dalits.⁴ Through daily practices of humiliation and coercion, the ideology of Dalits as ‘untouchables’ and hence as the ‘others’ and ‘outsiders’ to the caste system, persisted. They were viewed as regressive, barbaric and irrational in contrast to those within the caste system.

Caste discrimination in India, based on ‘ascriptive’ characteristics, has led to the long-term deprivation of the Dalits through limiting their access to education, employment and income

⁴ While the official categorisations still use the specific sub-castes under the category of Scheduled Castes, the term “Dalit” has increasingly been used as a preferred term by the groups themselves. Literally meaning “down-trodden” or “oppressed” or “broken pieces”, the term ‘Dalit’ was taken up initially by the Dalit Panthers, a protest organisation founded in 1972 in Maharashtra. By the 1970s and the 1980s, different and wider themes were taken up by Dalit politics, challenging Hindu Brahmanical hegemony and including the plight of the ‘backward castes’, peasants, women and tribal groups (Omvedt 2006:6) The term ‘Dalit’ came increasingly to signify the expression of defiance on the part of the scheduled castes themselves (Sooryamurthy 2008).

based, leading also to 'passive discrimination' where the lower castes themselves are discouraged and lack the self-confidence and encouragement to challenge their historical social and economic barriers (Thorat and Newman 2007:4121-4122). As a result, the living standards of the Dalits are associated with lower physical and human capital, and their returns on these assets (particularly schooling) are noticeably lower than that of the non-Schedule Castes (Kijima 2006). Caste continues to operate in the labour markets by assigning Dalits to relatively low-paid jobs and even those with high educational qualifications face discrimination at different levels (Banerjee and Knight 1985; Thorat and Atewell 2007).

The caste system also governs relations between individuals and groups through practices of humiliation (Guru 2000). These can be seen from the following examples, demonstrating the insecurities of the Dalits in many spaces. While Government's policies and programmes promoted the education of children from the Scheduled Castes, Dalit children often experience prejudice, punishment and rejection in the school system, by the other children, teachers and even the parents of the children, resulting in a relatively high degree of drop outs and poor performance in exams, which in turn, affect their life chances in their future (Sedwal and Kamat 2008). In a similar manner, government sponsored mid-day meal scheme and the public distribution systems continue to experience problems of caste discrimination and restricted access to the Dalits (Thorat and Lee 2003). Discriminative practices include Dalits not being allowed to enter non-Dalit households or even eating together (70% of the villages), restrictions to entry of religious places (64% of the villages) denying or restricting access to irrigation and water facilities (32% of the villages), public and private services, purchase and use of private and public land, including housing as well as entry into village shops, restaurants and police stations (Shah *et al* 2006).

These exclusions are often maintained through coercion, threats and physical violence reflecting the deficits the Dalits with regard to their human security. The latter involves protection against individual violence as well as "human rights, good governance, access to education and health care and ensuring that each individual has opportunities and choices to fulfil his or her potential" (Annan: 2000 quoted in **Commission on Human Security** 2003:8) and the importance of dealing with, among others, insecurities that threaten human survival or the safety of daily life, or imperil the natural dignity of men and women, (Sen in **Commission on Human Security** 2003:8).

The human security 'discourse' also highlights "interconnections between conventionally separated spheres, which helps it to link diverse organizational worlds; and a motivating focus on human vulnerability and the human rights that flow for every human being from basic human needs" (Gasper 2005: 242). It recognizes that the social relations and the forms of governance that form part of the daily existences of people mediate the effectiveness of such interventions. As Truong *et al* have argued, 'the referent of security is not just the individual with rights and entitlements, but also the social relations that mediate human life in ways that ensure its quality and flourishing' (Truong 2006: xii). In these ways, the notion of human security allows for understanding interconnections and their cumulative impact on the daily lives of individuals. It also underscores that significance of the local and local agents in promoting exclusion and inclusion and the need for a comprehensive framework of strategies and interventions to counter these problems and enable effective inclusion.

These processes have been institutionalised and practised over centuries, exposing the Dalits to a rigid and pervasive form of structural violence and social injustice. They have resulted in major deficits with regard to their human rights and human development (Thorat 2009; Thorat 2007: 5-8). As a result, these groups have been historically disadvantaged with regard to their social and economic entitlements and even today continue to face discrimination in economic, social, political and cultural social relations, resulting the majority living in deprivation and poverty (Thorat 2009: 9). Religious beliefs, societal practices and laws have also often exposed women to “multiple and overlapping patriarchies” requiring the law to take into account the rights of women in the specific patriarchal arrangements (Sangari 1995).

The combined effects of violence and deficits to their human rights, human development and human security of the Dalits imply their sustained social exclusion. The term ‘social exclusion’ is most often used in the European context, for example, to refer to socio-economic exclusion, such as long-term unemployment, for example, or systematic exclusion of certain groups from integration and citizenship rights (Silver 1995). It is important to recognise that social exclusion is a dynamic and on-going process, reflecting “the dynamic processes of being shut out, partially or fully, from any or all of several systems which influence the economic and social integration of people into their society” (Commins 2004: 68). Applying the concept to the problem of caste in India allows for better insights into how various forms of disadvantage overlap and reinforce one another (Rodgers et al 1995).

Social exclusion goes beyond income poverty to allow for the multidimensional nature of social deprivation of specific groups, like castes and women (de Haan 1998).⁵ Sukadeo Thorat was the first to pioneer the use of the concept of social exclusion to analyse dynamics of caste-based discrimination and their impact on Scheduled Castes. Developing Ambedkar’s claim that the primary unit in a Hindu society is caste, Thorat argued that caste functions to ostracise and deny basic human rights to the perceived lowest castes, through a host of caste-based exclusionary practices. According to him, the caste system works as a “regulatory mechanism to enforce the social and economic organization through the instruments of social ostracism (or social and economic penalties) which has been reinforced with the justification and support from the philosophical elements in the Hindu religion” (Thorat 2007: 3). This ‘forced exclusion’ resulted in restrictions experienced by different groups in accessing and using land, labour, credit and other resources. The outcome is occupational immobility, with those belonging to so-called higher castes assuming rights and privileges of control. Inequality, a lack of freedom and the denial of basic human rights thus frame and influence the quality of life, indeed life itself, for those assigned to the lowest castes.⁶

⁵ Studies, initially undertaken on behalf of the ILO’s International Institute of Labour to explore the value of this approach in different contexts and countries, showed that while there were differing ways of defining and understanding the excluded, they did show links between poverty, inequality and lack of productive employment. The UNDESA report (2010) used the social exclusion approach to understand poverty by taking into account identity, social relations, as well as non-material dimensions of deprivation (2010: 3). Social exclusion has also been extended to include among others, lack of security, lack of justice, lack of participation and representation (Kurian and Bedi 2004).

⁶ Thorat (2007) has shown that caste-based exclusion occurs in the economic sphere (denial of employment, capital, land, etc), and in access to social services (provided by government or private agencies). Finally, exclusion is practiced in certain jobs because of notions of purity

Accordingly, Thorat proposed a dual solution for promoting social inclusion of Dalits: a set of policies for economic empowerment (remedies to improve their access to land, capital, quality employment, and education, for example), and equal opportunity legislation to provide safeguards against caste discrimination, through caste reservation policies and other, similarly targeted policies. He also emphasised the importance of participation of discriminated groups themselves in different forms of governance if more ‘inclusive’ policies are to be devised (Thorat 2008). Many of these ideas have been taken on board by the government in its policies. The next section demonstrates why, in spite of these provisions, laws and programmes do not produce the intended outcomes.

Case study of Dalit Exclusion

The section complements the available macro-level data by focusing on micro-level analysis in two villages, selected to expose local-level dynamics of caste-based power relations in Dalits’ daily lives. Since caste-based discrimination is more visible and pervasive in villages, and since three-fourths of Scheduled Castes, who make up 16 % of the Indian population,⁷ are located in the rural areas, the authors decided to select two rural case studies. The aim is not to generalise from these two cases, but to demonstrate ‘up close’ how interlocking and cumulative forms of violent exclusions prevent Dalits, and especially Dalit women, from accessing their official legal entitlements. As noted previously, the focus on local interactions allows for a deeper understanding of how laws and policies which may be well-designed, still have to be struggled for, as the Dalits lives are embedded in semi-autonomous social fields where caste-based power relations enforce compliance along lines of inequality and discrimination in the daily interactions among people of different castes and across gender lines.

(a) Exclusions at the local level

The micro-level interactions are based on surveys and interviews undertaken in 2009 in two neighbouring villages, Barai Kalyanpur and Nagla Bakhti, located in Awagarh sub-division of Etah District in Uttar Pradesh, the largest state in India. As noted earlier, analysing local-level interactions is a useful methodology for understanding how caste-based discrimination and patriarchal norms can limit the impact of laws and policies on the lives of people (Moore 1973: 721).

Both of the selected villages had a substantial Dalit or Scheduled Castes population, eligible for a range of poverty alleviation and other special support programmes. This suggested a relatively favourable environment for economic and social inclusion of the Dalits, since Scheduled Castes constituted 87 per cent of the village population in Barai Kalyanpur and 66 per cent in Nagla Bhakti. Most of the families who owned less than one hectare land were *Dalits*. Most of the Dalits were eligible for the poverty alleviation and welfare schemes. The important programmes that promote inclusion included (a) the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS), entitling poor household to 100 days of wage-employment during one financial year; (b) housing schemes - Mahamaya Awas Yojna, Indira Awas Yojna and Mahamaya Sarvajan Awas Yojna – which provided financial

and pollution. All these factors have resulted in denial of equal opportunities to the excluded groups.

⁷ Although this figure would be higher if all Muslim and Christian Dalits were included.

assistance to the build a 'pucca' (good) shelter; (c) pensions schemes for widows, the disabled and the aged; and (d) Public Ration Distribution Schemes (PDS) to supply grain and essential commodities to the poor on a regular basis at subsidized prices in through a network of Fair Price Shops. There were also scholarships and other facilities that they could avail. In addition, one of the villages, Barai Kalyanpur, referred to as an 'Ambedkar' village,⁸ received a package of 11 welfare schemes, monitored by an 'Ambedkar Cell' headed by the Principal Secretary to the provincial Government/the Chief Minister. Special instructions for scheme implementation in the "Ambedkar Village" were given to the district officers and downward units at the block and villages.

Our village level surveys showed that Dalits did not fully benefit from these programmes. While they were entitled to 100 days of wage employment under the Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme, the survey showed that poor Dalit families received some 13 days of employment (and payment) and 10-12 days of employment over a period of two years in Barai Kayanpur and Nagla Bhakti respectively. Furthermore, just 0.5% of the Dalits in both villages were able to access the finance under the housing schemes, while only 20% of the Dalits accessed pensions which available to widows, elderly and the disabled. Dalits did fare better in accessing the Public Distribution Scheme: 70% of the Dalits in Baraia Kalyanpur benefited from government subsidised food and essential commodities, the equivalent figure in Nagla Bhakti being 60%.

There was however little or no knowledge of scholarships and other possibilities to support the studies for children of Schedule castes. Thus, in spite of government efforts spanning decades, the majority of the Dalits continued to remain poor and excluded from the benefits of most government supportive schemes. In addition, there were no significant differences in the situation of the Dalits in both villages, although those living in the 'Ambedkar' village were relatively better off on some aspects. The following sections highlight the local level dynamics of exclusions and inclusions in the daily lives of the Dalits.

(b) Exclusions in Governance

In line with the official national requirements, there was information placed on the notice boards of the Block Development Offices on relevant legislation such as the Untouchability Offences Act 1955, the Protection of Civil Rights Act (PCRA) 1976, and The SC & ST (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989 to protect the *Dalit* community. Information was also given on some 18 different welfare schemes, including the MGNREGA, old age and widow pension, pension for persons with disabilities, Ambedkar village development scheme, Indira AwasYojna, the Below-poverty-line (BPL) ration, Antodaya, clean toilet scheme, free tube-well boring scheme, loan for self-employment, as well as schemes for the empowerment and support of poor girls such the *Savitri Bai Phule Balika Madad Yojna*⁹ and *Mahamaya Garib*

⁸ The use of the term 'Ambedkar village' is linked to the Dalit leaders, Dr Bhim Rao Ambedkar, and his championship for the cause of the Dalits as reflected in the Constitution, which amongst other statements, explicitly prohibited discrimination on the grounds of "religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth" Article 15. (Human Rights Watch 1999 Appendix A).

⁹ *Savitri Bai Phule Balika Madad Yojna* (Savitri Bai Phule Girl Child Support Scheme) was named after Savitri Bai Phule dedicated her life to teach children from Dalit Communities and she was wife of great Dalit Social Reformer, Jyotiba Phule

*Balika Ashirvad Yojna*¹⁰ Such notices suggested that the national government and bureaucracy appeared to comply with the requirements that the details of support schemes be placed on public notice. But field surveys showed that insufficient efforts were made to disseminate this information to the targeted underprivileged. Most of the low-income Dalits who also had low levels of education were unaware they were eligible for these schemes and thus did not apply. It was clear, therefore, that the government had to take extra efforts to communicate effectively and encourage the excluded to avail of schemes in their favour.

Village development was managed by an elected local government, which functioned as a form of self-governance (*Panchayati Raj* institutions - *executive committee of the village republic*). While the supportive schemes were based on national and state policies, it was the local government in the village, or the *Panchayat*, led by the *Sarpanch*, that was influential in the implementation of the schemes. The role of caste was clearly visible in local governance and in the distribution of the benefits of programmes. The *Sarpanches* of both villages belonged to the 'higher' 'Verma/Thakur' castes who generally support the right-wing Hindu nationalist party, the BJP.¹¹ The Dalits, who formed the majority of the population, voted for the *Bahujan Samaj Party* (BSP), although there were several instances when they were intimidated and forced to vote for the BJP.

The Sarpanch continued to wield power in the *Panchayat*, with members from the 'lower' castes accepting this situation. And while some Dalits were elected, their attendance at meetings remained negligible, as the office bearers of these Panchayats were mostly from the dominant caste, with Dalits not informed about the meetings and their voices suppressed during the meetings.

At the same time, the village-level *Gram Sabha* (*general body of the village republic*) meetings were critical spaces for the selection of the beneficiaries under various welfare programmes. Among the issues reviewed were proposals for roads, drainage, street lighting, sanitation and jobs, the monitoring of schools as well as of the Health and Child Development Centres. The development plan for the villages, including the approval of quarterly expenditures and the Panchayat budget, were all undertaken in these *Gram Sabha* meetings. The exclusion Dalits experienced in these discussions meant that their voices and hence their access to benefits were limited.

The norms and practices of patriarchy also pervaded local government, countering the value of progressive legislation promoting female representation as heads of local government. The

¹⁰ The *Mahamaya Garib Balika Ashirvad Yojna* which literally means the 'Mahamaya Poor Girl Child Blessing Scheme' was named after the Chief Minister Mayawati, who led the government in Uttar Pradesh (1995, 1997, 2002-2003 and 2007-2102) and who supported many projects for the upliftment of the Bahujans, or the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. This scheme entitled all girls in families below the poverty line to a government fixed deposit (FD) of Rs 22,000 in the form of National Savings Certificate (NSC) which would be in the name of each girl born on or after January 15 in a family living below poverty line.

¹¹ That the two Sarpanches were supporters of the BJP were confirmed during the research and focused group discussions, as well as from other local sources and the local sources and Diocesan Board of Social Service (NGO) workers.

village of *Nagla Bakhti* was part of the *Misakala Panchayat* which was a reserved constituency for women *Sarpanch*¹². The caste hierarchy was firmly established through the formally elected head of the *Panchayat* being a woman from the Thakur (higher) caste. However, the dominance of patriarchal norms meant that her husband and father-in-law functioned as *de facto* heads of the *Panchayat*, with many referring to one or the other as the *Sarpanch* in the area. Barai-Kalyanpur - the *Ambedkar Village* – was also a *Panchayat* reserved for a female *Sarpanch*. It too was headed by a woman from the *Verma (Upper Caste)*, although her husband, who was the former *Sarpanch*, was referred to as the *Sarpanch*. Thus, enforcing quotas for women, a government legislation with the intention of promoting women’s political empowerment was not effective, as caste and patriarchal power relations at the local level prevailed.

BOX 1

Dulare, a man from the 'untouchable' Balmiki caste, narrated the pain and humiliation he felt when a Muslim family beat him up just for standing on a gully with a big sack of straw on his head, so that he could not see an elderly Muslim women coming from the back. The lady abused Dulare for his act of insensitivity and words were exchanged. As a result, men of the Muslim family came and thrashed him severely. Further, they approached Dulare’s neighbor who used to take loans from this Muslim family. Dulare’s neighbor was also from the Balmiki community and there was a government water hand pump on his land. Under the influence of Muslim family Dulare was not allowed to take water from that hand pump. After lots of harassment, Dulare filed a complained against both families in the police station under SC/ST Atrocities Act 1989 under section 3(1)10. It punishes a person for not less than 6 months but may extend to five years who ‘intentionally insults or intimidates with intent to humiliate a member of a Scheduled Caste or a Scheduled Tribe in any place within public view’. When the villagers supported Dulare’s family, the administration was forced to take action and both families apologized to Dulare.

(c) Caste-Based Atrocities

One of the pervasive characteristics of caste discrimination in many Indian villages is the prevalence of physical violence and coercion by the upper castes versus the Dalits. The Atrocities Act was specifically legislated to deal severely with these forms of aggression. However, in both villages, there were several instances where the ‘lower’ castes were subject to threats and brutality. At the same time, it was not uncommon for Dalits who challenged caste-based

violence on the basis of the Atrocities Act to face further exclusion, physical violence and intimidation on the part of the ‘upper’ castes. The following examples show how the upper castes were able to intimidate the community, the police and even the justice department. At the same time, these cases also show how Dalits have responded, using both collective action and the law to protect themselves and gain privileges.

In spite of laws that have prohibited untouchability, such practices remained common in both villages. For example, lower caste people were not allowed to sit at the same level as those belonging to the higher castes, even after political changes had introduced a change in power. Even the *Sarpanch* of nearby *Punhera Panchayat*, Ashok Balmiki, was not allowed to sit on the same cot with the ‘higher’ caste *Panchayat* members in the same village. In Isa-Nagri (Esoli Panchayat), Balmiki families were not allowed to touch the government water hand pump, which is used by whole village. These families were expected to wait for someone to come and pour water from the hand pump into their bucket.

¹² A *Sarpanch* is a democratically elected head of

These cases illustrate the systematic use of physical and personal violence in enforcing caste discrimination in spite of legal penalties associated with such practices, and in many cases, with the tacit or real consent of the state machinery. Even in the Ambedkar village (Box 1), the police was hesitant to challenge the status quo and it was only through mobilisation on the part of the villages from the ‘lower’ castes that attention was given to this problem.

(d) Government Land Distribution Scheme and Implementation

Ownership and use of land in villages is of vital importance as a source of income and survival, and government land-distribution schemes could be viewed as key to countering poverty and social exclusion. Given the skewed distribution of land in the region and the poor status of Dalit communities, government had initiated schemes to distribute land to Dalits with the intention to provide a means of survival and upward mobility. The field research showed that such distribution was severely opposed by those in power if they felt that it encroached on their own perceived rights. As most of the land was held by the ‘upper’ castes, this meant even if Dalits were entitled to and received land through the government schemes,

Box 2

Suresh belongs to the Jatav (Scheduled) caste and lives in Nagla Bakthi – the non- Ambedkar village. While he was working on his agricultural field, five people from the *Thakur* community passed through it harming his crop. When he requested them not to pass through his crop as it was getting harmed, the *Thakurs* claimed that he had insulted them. They abused Suresh and insulted him using derogatory remarks. The *thakurs* decided to teach Suresh and family “a lesson” and came armed and attacked them. Suresh then filed a case under SC/ST atrocities act, but all the witnesses were pressurised by the upper castes not to support him. The opposition advocate, at the Etah session court, was also a close relative of the *Thakur* community and no other advocate dared to go against him. Suresh changed 6 advocates but continued to face the same problem again and again from his advocate. Suresh has been fighting case for the past 8 years. He is mentally tired and his income is also drying up but he says, “I am fighting this case to protect my family because as long as case is in the court, *Thakurs* can not attack us...if I compromise.... and case goes in their favour, then they will attack me again.”

they faced opposition, threats and violence when actually using the property for productive purposes (Box 2). Their complaints were also not filed or taken higher, as the local police, who were required to do the required First Information Report (FIR), were aware of the local power relations and did not wish to oppose those in power, resulting in ‘upper’ castes often being allowed to commit atrocities and deny Dalits their rights of the land. Thus, while land was redistributed, its use and potential were dependent on the decisions of the upper castes. This was the case with Dalits from the Ambedkar as well as the non-Ambedkar villages. Some of these dynamics are reflected in the two examples given below (Boxes 3 and 4).

In Nagla Bakthi for instance, nine families from the scheduled castes received land under the state distribution scheme. However, the Etah district session court declared their ownership to

Box 3

Ramnaresh, from the Kori (weaver) caste, had purchased some land from the government, and laid the foundation for his house, but his neighbour, Mahesh Pal, (from the *Thakur* higher caste) objected saying that it did not leave him sufficient space to move his tractor. Although Ramnaresh showed Mahesh Pal all the legal documents establishing his ownership of the land, indicating the necessary space for the tractor to pass by. Mahesh Pal, with his friends, spoke to the head of the village Panchayat and overnight built a brick road encroaching on Ramnaresh land, removing the foundation for the house. With the support of some villagers, Ramnaresh took up this issue with the government. As a result, the land revenue officer measured the land and decided in favour of Ramnaresh. However, the Thakurs refused to accept this outcome. When Ramnaresh tried to file a petition against the Thakurs, the local police, including the superintendent in charge, refused to accept it. This forced Ramnaresh to go to the Police headquarters in Etah District. During his visit to Etah, the Thakurs set fire to *Ramnaresh's* house resulting in injury to the livestock, as well as destruction to the grain and clothes. Under pressure from the poorer groups in the village, the police finally came to the place and wrote a report in favour of Ramnaresh. The Thakurs in the meantime denied their involvement in the fire. The issue was taken up at the *Panchayat* and a compromise was reached by which *Ramnaresh* was allowed to use the “controversial” land as long as he allowed the *Thakur's* vehicle to pass along it. The *Thakur* was penalized for Rs. 2000 (\$ 35) for the loss of *Ramnaresh's* household goods. The result was that *Ramnaresh* could neither park his vehicle nor graze or tie his cattle on the controversial land as *Thakur* Mahesh Pal frequently moves his tractor on this land.

be illegal. The court in its judgement said that the papers, which are presented in the court by the people who owned this land, were forged documents. It was found that the *Patwari* (the land accountant, who was subsequently suspended) had written the number as 148s acre of land for distribution in the *Tehsil* document instead of 48 acres, and had distributed the extra land to many people from nearby villages. The nine families from the scheduled castes, who developed this land and went through a tedious process with their small savings to pay for this piece of land, were deprived in the land distribution scheme.

Another example (Box 4) shows how lack of finances stemming from feudal modes of payment (including debt bondage) and labour control also play a part in preventing access to

Box 4

Nahid s/o Nattu, age 45, father of 6 children from Muslim Sakka (waterman) caste received some 1/10 acre of land from the Panchayat, but he did not have money to pay to the Patwari in order to measure and allot that land to him. His whole family - 3 sons and 3 daughters - worked on the land of Thakur Shyampal along with him. His family were not paid in wages but instead received 50% of the crop they harvested. Nahid's family remained dependent on the landlord as his family needed his share of the grain for their basic subsistence needs. This resulted in Nahid having to borrow extra grain and money from the landlord for any extra or unexpected expenditure (such as ill-health) which he then had to repay from his share of the crop. Thus perpetual debt bondage, based on caste and class power relations meant that he was unable to access the government land distribution schemes.

land.

What comes out clearly from these examples is that a combination of mechanisms, including class and caste power relations, as well as physical and structural violence, are used to control the Dalit groups, often perpetuating their exclusions in different domains such as at work, within the community, and over their labour. Thus, including them in government schemes means countering these controls and exclusions in those interlocking domains, and thus going beyond a single or targeted government intervention.

(e) The functioning of the MGNREGA – Nagla Bakhti

The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) (2005) is meant to provide 100 days of employment for unskilled manual work per year, and an entitlement to an unemployment allowance in case the work is not provided. At a meeting organised by a member of a supportive NGO, it was found that the majority of those enrolled under the MGNREGA in Nagla Bakhti were from Scheduled and Backward castes. However, they received only between 5-20 days of work over a two-year period (2007-2009), even though the money allocated for the scheme had been spent.

The meeting served as an important platform to air the grievances of the so-called lower castes. The Dalits spoke in anger about the close ties that existed between the Sarpanch and the supervisor of the programme - who had to report regularly to the Sarpanch - and the fact that they belonged to the same Thakur caste. They also spoke about their frustration at the malfunctioning of the MGNREGA, including directly challenging the role of the Sarpanch in the way the scheme was implemented. Given the increasing political nature of the agitation, the Sarpanch was forced to address the workers.

As mentioned previously, while Prabha Kumari is the legal Sarpanch of Misa Kala Panchayat, her husband and father-in-law took all the decisions, executed projects and even represented her at meetings – and were also often referred to and called Sarpanch. In this instance, the husband addressed the group as the Sarpanch, and indicated that he had given the contract for the scheme to a man who paid the workers. He was of the opinion that this was perfectly

appropriate even though it was work registered under the MGNREGA. On hearing this, the workers got angry and submitted all their job cards to the *Sarpanch*, made the news public in the newspaper, and submitted a memorandum to the District Magistrate. This led to further confrontations between the *Sarpanch* and the workers. When workers went to the *Sarpanch* for employment, he told them, “Go and ask work from the media and District Magistrate, I don’t have work for you”. However, seeing the increasing hostility of the workers and their threats to take further action, he agreed that he would return the job cards and requested the workers to apply for work in writing, so that he could understand as how much work is required; and in case work were not available, he could apply for their unemployment allowance.

When asked why not even a single job card was issued to women under MGNREGA, the ‘*Sarpanch*’ responded that he understood that women do not like to work in construction, as it is against the tradition and not considered good work for them in the village. Women’s groups too accepted this argument and requested that if any ‘suitable’ work such as working in plant nurseries or tree planting should become available, or if some other work which can be done from the home were created, then they would involve themselves in the MGNREGA.

This case is important on several scores. It highlights the close relationship between castes and class factors: the *Sarpanch* and the contractor benefitted on both these scores. These links resulted in a distortion of supportive government schemes and programmes. It also shows that such patronage relations can exist without impunity, with laws controlled by upper castes and classes. The case also illustrates the patriarchal ideology, which assumed that it was not good for women to work in construction, and this being the only source of work available. At the same time, there is a clear ignorance or inability to get their rightful income (in lieu of days of work) as entitled to under the scheme. However, the case also shows how collective action and struggle - including using the power of the media - can challenge some hierarchies.

(f) Housing Scheme - *Indira Awas Yojna*

There are several welfare schemes available for the Dalits and the poor. One of the most important was the *Indira Awas Yojna* (Indira Housing Scheme) which provided housing grants for those officially categorised as ‘below the poverty line’. Most of the Dalits are eligible for this support. However, the ‘custom’ was that all eligible persons applying for such a grant had to pay the *Sarpanch* Rs. 5000 if they wished to avail of the support. This payment was rationalised by the *Sarpanch* on the grounds that he has to pay the Block Development Officer in order that the grant be sanctioned. Under these circumstances, the poor who applied for these schemes were forced to take loans to pay the required amount. These loans were provided by the *Thakurs* who were also the local moneylenders and demanded a very high interest rate (36-72% per annum).

"We paid Rs. 5000 each to get a house under IAY", say women in Barai Kalyanpur. Every family took loans either from their relatives or from the moneylender to pay the bribe and they were still repaying it back on high interest rate up to 3% per month (36% per year). Many families like *Mehru Nisha*, extremely poor and a widow (for 12 years) took a loan to pay the bribe. She and her children worked as daily wagers. Every family was granted Rs. 35 thousand each, however some of the families received Rs. 25 thousand only, and were awaiting the remaining amount. From this budget, families were only able to raise walls of a single room, and they lived under a polythene sheet.

There were people in the village who were given loans for self-employment schemes. However, all of them paid bribes to ‘*Suvidha Data*’ - meaning service providers. According to the Loan Officer, Rakesh Gupta from *Khadi Gram*¹³ : ‘it is prepaid channel...pay money and get benefit’. However, ‘even if loan application passes through Rakesh Gupta, there is no guaranteed that concerned bank will grant it’ says Reverend Luther, the local priest in Jalesar Church who works with rural *Dalit* in the area.

In spite of strong support from the then Chief Minister herself, there had not been, during the last six months of 2009, a single registration under *Mahamaya Garib Balika Ashirvad Yojna* in this ‘*Ambedkar Village*’. The same is the case with *Savitri Bai Phule Baliaka Siksha Madad Yojna*, (Singh 2009: 32), though the government officers of the Secondary Education Department stated that 940 million Rs had been deposited in the accounts of 62,975 eligible girl students, for their encouragement and as many as 52,082 bicycles had also been distributed¹⁴ . However, when asked in the village meetings in Barai Kalyanpur, no one, except the NGO workers, knew about the scheme.

Caste prejudice and collaboration were also part of the implementation issues. For example, the *Panchayat* documents (*Panchayat Barai Kalyanpur 2003-04*, indicated that in the selection process of beneficiaries for IAY, a list was prepared by the *Sarpanch*, and an affidavit declared ‘The undersigned (both *Sarpanch* and *Panchayat* Secretary) have visited above listed families and investigated personally their socio-economic status, that there is no one in the village poorer than the listed names. Therefore, the families are found genuinely eligible for the mentioned scheme’. Whereas, in reality it was Ram Sahay (Brahmin/Thakur) and Ram Charan (Brahmin) who received the housing benefits, even though they already owned houses as well as fertile agricultural land.

(g) Violence in the daily lives of the Dalits

The issues raised above are related to the ways in which caste and class have influenced the implementation of specific schemes. While those in power often hijacked the schemes, the cases also involved the use of physical violence, humiliation and other means of coercion in order to maintain the status quo. In addition, many of the schemes were fragmented interventions, and did not take on board the range of vulnerabilities, struggles and contestations that shape the lives of Dalits, making it even more difficult for them to access special programmes and benefits. The following story of Somati Devi, from the Ambedkar village, illustrates the nature of the oppressions that form part of the lives of the Dalits, underscoring the need for an integrated framework of interventions (Box 5).

Box 5

Somati Devi, a Dalit woman in the village of Barai Kalyanpur (the Ambedkar village which has been targeted for special schemes) was around 60 years of age and from the *Dhobi*’ (washerman) caste and in addition fell under the category of the ‘poorest of the poor’. She was eligible for a financial support as well as land under a scheme initiated by the Uttar Pradesh government. However, being illiterate, she paid for the services of a middleman who promised to register land under her name. He cheated her and asked her to work on some free

¹³ A Gandhian movement to promote Khadi (cotton) and home-made handicrafts for self reliance.

¹⁴ Information provided by the Chief Minister’s Office in 2009 during field work.

land owned by government. Unaware of the deception, she continued farming this land, until it was acquired by *Mazhar Khan*, one of the powerful men of village Barai Kalyanpur, who bribed the authorities and registered a substantial amount of land in his wife's and son's name under the same scheme. The land that *Somvati* had been farming on for the last six years was technically registered as part of *Mazhar Khan's* land. The Khan family asked *Somvati* to leave the land. *Somvati* and her family resisted him. The next day relatives, especially women of the Khan Family, thrashed *Somvati* on the field. The landlord registered a case against *Somvati* under section 98A pertaining to the illegal occupation of land, while the police arrested her son *Rameshwar* and kept him in the police station for 3 days without charging him with any penalty, pressuring him to sign a paper indicating that his family occupied disputed land so that they could charge him under section 98A. *Rameshwar* refused to sign the paper. In the meantime, his relatives and villagers along with the *Patwari* contacted the Superintendent of Police of Etah and some other higher authorities demanding that police should either issue a 'challan' (penalty order) or release *Rameshwar*. *Rameshwar* was released as there was no evidence against him.

Subsequently, *Somvati's* family filed a case against the landlord for physical assault and forceful removal from their land. The family spent a substantial amount of money to take the case to court and even sold their only remaining asset - (1 Bigha (1/5 acre) land) – to pay for the process. While *Somvati's* family won the case in Etah session court, the Khan family appealed against it in Allahabad High court. The *Somvati* family did not have any further resources to fight the case further and withdrew themselves and gave up the land. Few months later *Rameshwar* died of TB.

In spite of her situation, *Somvati* did not have an MGNREGA job card, although her son did have one, but he was ill with tuberculosis and unable to work. In fact, out of the 200 job cards in the *Panchayat area*, not a single MGNREGA job card was issued to women. With insufficient income, *Somvati* could not take her son to the hospital for treatment. The Sarpanch stated that there were no funds sanctioned from the government for this purpose.

Somvati also applied for the old age pension but the *Panchayat* head did not support this action. Reports indicated that influential people were against her receiving it. *Somvati* had applied for housing facilities under IAY long ago, but was again denied by the *Sarpanch*, who claimed there was no quota available at present. However, richer persons in the village who were also of a 'higher', Brahmin caste, such as Ram Sahay and Ram Charan were provided a house under the scheme.

Poverty and insecurity – based on both caste and class criteria – framed her existence. She and her family did not have any means of production, except her own labour at the age of 60. She continued to wash the clothes of upper caste families. In return, she received 10 kg wheat in six months from each family. The remuneration was fixed per family and was not dependent on the number of clothes she washed. If the family had two sons and they were not married, the family would give only 10 kg rice. If the two sons got married, the amount would increase to 20 kg extra wheat per family. On the other hand, there was no increase of benefits if the family had (married or unmarried) daughters.

Somvati's story is illustrative of the myriad of exclusions and human insecurities and that form part of her daily existence and which do not allow her to access either her human rights or special programmes which are meant to be for her empowerment. Her life demonstrates the

ways in which progressive legislation and programmes were either hindered or actively usurped by the upper castes and classes for their own benefit. Caste, class and gender power relations intersected to maintain the status quo.

(h) From Violent Exclusions to Human Insecurity and Exploitation

As the case study evidence has shown, the combination of structural, cultural and personal violence, stemming from caste discrimination, continued to limit the value of legislation and Government programmes promoting the social inclusion of Dalits. Humiliation and coercion were used to denigrate the Dalits and control them in the villages. As Galtung suggests, psychological violence can damage ‘the soul’, and destroys feelings of dignity and self-worth. Less overt forms of violence as well as physical and structural violence reinforce patterns of social injustice and social exclusion over time. In addition, caste-based discrimination was closely linked with economic exploitation, as reflected in the examples of housing, land, employment generation and other welfare schemes. Protection against individual violence and ensuring access to the basic aspects of human security, was far from being achieved in practice. The element of ‘freedom from fear’ embedded in the notion of human security was rarely met in practice for Dalit women, in particular, since their multiple exclusions were often maintained through coercion, threats and direct physical violence, including sexual violence. This means that implementing law in specific localities requires taking into account the violations of women’s rights in the local patriarchal arrangements.

The analysis showed that prevailing power relations undermine government policies, when their status as dominant groups is threatened. In this case, those higher up the caste hierarchy actively resisted progressive measures and regulations, using a variety of controls that included ideological/religious exclusionary practices as well as physical coercion and political influence. As noted by Galtung “(w)hen the structure is threatened, those who benefit from structural violence, above all those who are at the top, will try to preserve the status quo so well geared to protect their interests” (1969:179). Furthermore, inclusive policies are often developed and implemented by people who have historical, cultural and psychological biases that influence the terms of inclusion and exclusion.¹⁵

In the context of caste-based discrimination, historical biases associated with discriminatory practices of exclusion still prevail in rural village society, influencing the people and institutions who implement anti-discrimination programmes locally. As a result, inclusionary policies and programmes may be implemented whilst patterns of exclusion remain or even intensify. The ‘model’ of social relations may not be structurally altered. For example, greater participation by Dalits in government programmes provided them with some chances of short-term employment, some income and some food, but they retained their prior low caste-based social status. This in turn ensures they were incorporated, but adversely

¹⁵ In critically reviewing the social inclusion policies of the European Union, O’Brien and Penna (2009) observed that social inclusion policies there were embedded in a particular “integrative’ model of Europe, and it was necessary to “unpack” this model and its assumptions, so as to understand why the policies countering social exclusion were not so effective. They found that the policies reflected ‘traditional social profiles’ and stereotyping of groups, and put an emphasis on dealing with the consequences rather than the causes of discrimination and inequality. Inclusionary policies would need to focus on a particular political programme of integration based on specific norms, values and institutions.

incorporated, into programmes meant for their benefit, at the lowest levels only, and sometimes they were even excluded as the benefits were diverted to others with higher status and more control.

Based on the multiple forms of exclusions embedded in different fields of power relations, strategies of change for Dalits will need to be developed at different levels, and political alliances will need to be established across caste and identity groups, to effectively promote the sustainable social inclusion of Dalits in future. The need becomes even more urgent as many government programmes were removed in the subsequent period with the changing political climate.

Concluding remarks: Politics of exclusion and inclusion

It was clear that despite being the electoral majority in both villages, Dalits were confronted with class, caste-based and patriarchal power relations that enforced multiple exclusions and physical coercions, hindering their access to government-sponsored poverty alleviation and other welfare programmes. These practices acquiesced to the local police, lower bureaucracy and judiciary, who were aware of the power of the dominant castes, and in some cases, had strong social relations with them. The government programmes remain compartmentalised, with the result that Dalits were faced with inadequate information, bureaucratic hindrances and could not benefit fully from these schemes.

These government interventions also did not deal with the interlocking and cumulative nature of problems that Dalits face in their day-to-day lives. In the process, Dalits continued to experience social subordination, multiple exclusions, and deficits with regard to human rights, human development and human security, both in the Ambedkar and the Non-Ambedkar villages. In addition, patriarchy intersected all of society, reinforcing the male authority at all levels, with Dalit women usually belonging to the lowest ranks of the social hierarchy, and most vulnerable to violence, insecurity and problems of accessing welfare and other schemes.

The government policies and programmes meant to support inclusion contained implicit or explicit norms of inclusion which often imply that the “excluded” groups are expected to fit into and accept a particular model of society, which has historically been linked to the more powerful groups in society. In spite of political changes and positive intervention of the part of the government, caste-based boundaries remained. These norms and practices of the dominant upper castes also influenced the politics of inclusion, resulting in manipulating the implementation of the schemes, while promoting an adverse incorporation of the Dalits through limiting and shaping their involvement. In these ways, the structural, cultural and personal/physical violence against Dalits, and particularly Dalit women, is so embedded in society that breaking the mould involves challenging the status quo, confronting the values and practices of the more powerful castes and the patriarchal structures that have dominated the Indian system historically and to this day.

Under these circumstances, it is important to recognise that a single strategy or intervention cannot counter the interlocking and cumulative nature of exclusions. Multiple strategies taken at different levels and with different stakeholders need to be developed to help governments to promote, in line with the 16th SDG, a more equitable, just and inclusive society. The success of collective organisation and struggles, however limited, has however demonstrated the value and significance of supporting and involving the Dalits themselves in challenging

the status quo. They are the people who know the lived experiences of exclusion and are vital to bring about change.

In a positive contrast, activities of the Andhra Pradesh Vyvasaya Vruthidarula Union (APVVU) federation of 428 trade unions of rural informal workers formed at the subnational administrative unit, demonstrate the potential of such multiple level strategies, networks and struggles to effectively work for the empowerment of the Dalits, workers in the informal economy and poor women.¹⁶ At the same time legislation, favourable government schemes and supportive NGOs need to use a more comprehensive framework of intervention recognising and challenging the cumulative effect of the different forms of exclusions and violence at the local level and in the daily lives of the excluded. What the experiences of the Dalits in this article have shown is that promoting sustainable inclusion for the excluded involves developing appropriate conceptual tools and policy frameworks that acknowledge and counter the multiple and cumulative exclusions they experience, and recognising the need for multiple alliances and multiple strategies that to promote, in line with the 16th SDG, a more equitable, just and inclusive society.

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¹⁶ One of the authors of this article, Deepak Singh, worked with APVVU from 2011 till 2015. He there personally witnessed the empowerment of many Dalits in the region, who mobilised to struggle for their rights with the support of concerned and committed groups including human rights civil society organisations, national and international trade unions, and progressive civil servants. Over a 30-year period, most Dalits, who had worked as bonded labour on the land of the so-called upper castes, exposed to humiliation and physical abuse, were able to own land, get regular work under the government rural employment schemes, have access to the benefits of government welfare programmes and even gain respectable positions in local government. Most importantly they were able to confront and counter legal, social or other rights violations by the dominant castes <http://www.apvvu.org/index.php/about-apvvu>.

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