

As the piteous
spectacle of
thousands of



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As we take pride in knowledge society and race at breakneck speed on the information super highway and as we claim to have controlled world at our command, thanks to the Internet, we see at the end of the spectrum, the piteous spectacle of thousands of poor weak and downtrodden. Most of those affected by natural calamities are either poor or the poorest of the poor who don't have the basic nutritious food, during normal times, let alone emergencies, like natural disasters like floods, cyclone, drought or earthquake. India was once known as the 'sone ki chiriya or land of plenty. This was because India was full of riches in the form of mineral wealth.

Slowly and steadily, the repeated invasions of Turks, the Mughals, the Arabs and the Mongols depleted our resources. Finally, the British made us their colony and drained even the last bit of the wealth that was in our possession. They reduced the Rajahs, Maharajahs and the Nawabs into mere puppets by taking possession of their state coffers. By 1947, when the British left India and gave us independence, we had become a poor country. We were given the status of the developing country.

According to the World Bank report, one in every four persons living in abject poverty across the world (numbering 1.6 billion in all) is an Indian. India's growth rate has been around 5 per cent, yet the poor have remained untouched by the general improvement.

The bank puts it mildly; the poor have not been benefitted from the economic reforms. After Independence it became the priority of Pt. Nehru, our first prime minister to pool the resources which were readily available to build a strong country. For united India many ambitious projects were

launched for the welfare of the masses. Governments that followed also launched several programmes for the masses. But, after five decades of our Independence all those welfare schemes seem to have failed in their endeavour. One reason attributed to the failure of these welfare schemes is that these were undertaken only in certain parts of India.

No efforts were made to secure an over all welfare of the community. Most of the welfare schemes were concentrated on the green revolution in the Punjab and Haryana while South and East were ignored. The result was that those in the north prospered while those in other part of country suffered because of lack of resources. It is sad to note that even now in Kalahandi, Orissa; people die of the heat wave and starvation. As the winter approaches, those who are exposed to the cold wave die. Nothing ' concrete. To poverty has been done. This has led the migration of the people from these areas in search of greener pastures.

This is the main reason that our cities have become cosmopolitan. We also notice that people from the south usually migrate to the west. They perhaps believe that it is better to leave one's homeland that live in abject poverty. But many do not have such opportunities. So they migrate to places within the state. They are forced to live in appalling conditions in the slum of the city by the side of huge multi-storied buildings. They do not have access to sanitation, drinking water and above all are unable to sustain themselves without a job. The women folk leave their homes to work as maids in the buildings nearby while the children are sent to fend for themselves.

Politicians feel that large scale diversion of state funds to emancipate the poor could prove to be politically risky for them. The urban rich, who contribute to the state fund by paying taxes, could turn politically hostile which could prove fatal at the time of elections. Central grants for programmes like Indira Awas Yojna, providing housing for the poor has remained unsuccessful because of want of state funds. Since elections are fought on caste lines, politicians exploit the poor as their vote-banks. Politicians make tall claims and beguile them. Once elected, they hardly keep their-promises; with the fall of successive coalition governments resulting in fresh elections, poor have to bear the brunt. Being illiterate, they hardly find jobs to enable them to elevate their living standards. They are exploited even when they open a small business of selling tea, tobacco, cigarettes or snacks.

It is often witnessed that the local goons and the local police extort money from them. This is known as 'hafta' or protection money. Sometimes representatives of the municipal corporations visit their areas and demolish their makeshift shops, the mode of their sustenance. The recent budgets have announced several new schemes to benefit the social sector. They have been initiated to empower the weaker sections of the population and to improve the quality of rural life. The scheme is aimed to provide foods, health care, education, employment and shelter to the weaker sections within a decade.

The new scheme Annapurna provides food security to the poor senior citizens. Sarv Shikha Abhiyan aimed providing education to all has been launched. Gram panachayat would be allocated funds to set up primary

health care centres in their respective areas. Jawahar Rozgar Yojna would be replaced by Gram Samridhi Yojna to empower gram panchayat for creation of rural infrastructure. A new scheme called Samagra Awas Yojna would be launched to ensure integrated provision of shelter, sanitation and drinking water replacing Indria Awas Yojna. All self-employment programmes for rural poor would be integrated into a single programme called Swaran Jayanti Gram Swarozar Yojna to have greater participation of panchayat. Tall promises, 20 point and 30 point programmes and slogans like “ Do away with poverty’ or ‘ Garibi Hatao1 have not taken us even an inch towards the desired goal.

By concentrating on some parts of the country we have achieved not an iota of what our forefathers had envisaged. The present politicians, instead of bickering amongst themselves should expeditiously find a solution to the problem of poverty. They should understand need for uniform development throughout India. It is due to uneven distribution of wealth and attention that India has not reached the desired level of development. We must understand and undo the mistakes that have been committed by our forefathers.

It is only if the poor are raised from their state of poverty that India could really be proud of its independence. All said and done, we have to approach the problems of hunger, starvation and malnutrition in a pragmatic way, recognising that all the three problems do exist at the beginning of the 21st century. Neither the powers that—be not the people can run away from realities. We can window dress our flaws and failures by our vaunted achievements in science and technology or information technology. But any attempt to show a false picture on the front of fighting and eradicating

poverty will boomerang on us. Let us face facts. When we admit there are millions of poor in our country. We have also to there is hunger, starvation and malnutrition that are caused by poverty or the handling of poverty alleviation programmes.

The crux of the matter is that 'garibi hatao' has been an alluring slogan for political parties. The population of the poor, the hungry, the starving and the malnourished has been on the rise just because the marginalised segment of society gets no more than lip service from those who are supposed to give them either the means to earn honest daily bread or at least a square meal a day. Jawahar Gramin Smiridhi Yojna (JGSY), this Yojna was introduced in April 1999 by restructuring the Jawahar Rozgar Yojna and is being implemented as a centrally sponsored scheme on cost sharing ratio of 75: 25 between the centre and states. The programme is implemented by Gram Panchayats and work which result in creation of durable productive community assets are taken up. The secondary object however is generation of wage employment for the rural unemployed poor.

Swarnjayanti Gram Swarozgar Yojna—It was launched with effect from April 1 1991 as a result of annual amalgamating certain erstwhile programmes viz integrated Rural Development Programme Development of Women and children in Rural areas training of Rural youth for self employment. It aims at promoting micro enterprises and helping the rural poor into Self Help Group. This scheme covers all aspects of self-employment like organization of rural poor into Self-Help Group.

These schemes covers all aspects of self-employment like organization of rural poor into SHG and inter capacity building, training planning of activity clusters, infrastructure development, financial assistance through bank credit and subsidy and marketing support etc. The scheme is being implemented as a centrally sponsored scheme on a cost sharing ratio of 75 : 25 between the centre and states. Employment Assurance Scheme It was started on October 2, 1993 for implementation. It was implemented as a centrally sponsored scheme on a cost sharing ratio of 75: 25. Sampoorna Grameen Rozgar Yojna was launched with effect from September 2001.

The scheme aims providing wage employment in rural areas as also food security along with creation of durable community, social and economic assets. The scheme is being implemented on a cost sharing ratio of 75: 25 between the states and centre. National Social Assistance Programme It was introduced on 15th August 1995 as a 100% centrally sponsored scheme for social assistance to benefit poor households affected by old age, death of primary bread earner and maternity care.

Pradhan Mantri Gramodya Yojna It was introduced in 2000-01 with the objective of focussing on village level development in five central areas— health, primary, education, drinking water, housing and rural roads, with the overall, objective improving the quality of life of people in rural areas.

Pradhan Mantri Gramm Sadak Yojna: It was launched on 25th December, 2000 with the objective of providing road connectivity through good roads to all rural location with a population of more than 1000 person by the year 2003 and these with a population of more an 500 persons by the year 2007. An allocation of Rs. 2500 crore was provided for the scheme. Pradhan Mantri

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Gramodya Yojna Gramin Awas: This scheme is to be implemented on the pattern of Indira Awas Yojna with the objective of sustainable habitat development at the village level and to meet the growing housing needs of the rural poor.

Swarna Jayanti Shahri Rozgar Yojna: The urban self employment programme and the urban wage employment programme one two special schemes of the SJSRY, indicated in December 1997 which replaced various programmes operated earlier for urban poverty alleviation. This is founded on a 75: 25 bases between the centre and the state. Indira Awas Yojna: This is a major scheme for construction of houses to be given to the poor, free of cost. And additional component for conversion of unserviceable Kutcha house to semi-pucca houses has also been added. Samagra Awas Yojna: This has been launched as a comprehensive housing scheme in 1999-2000 on pilot project basis in one bulk in each of 25 districts of 24 states and in one Union Territory with a ensuring integrated provision of shelter sanitation and drinking water.

The underlying philosophy is to provide for convergence of the existing housing sanitation and water supply schemes with a special emphasis on technology transfer, human resource development and habitat improvement with people participation. Food Work Programme: This programme was initially launched in. February 2001. This programme aims at augmenting food security through wage employment in the drought affected rural areas in eight states i. e. Gujrat, Chattisgarh, Himachal Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Orissa Rajasthan and Uttaranchal. The centre make available appropriate quantity of food grains free of cost to each of the drought

affected states as an additional under the programme. Annapurna: This scheme came into effect from April 1, 2000 as a 100 percent centrally sponsored scheme.

It aims at providing food security to meet the requirement of those senior citizens who though eligible for pensions under the National Old Age pension are not getting the same. Food grains are provided to the beneficiaries at subsidized rates of Rs. 2/- per kg.

of wheat and Rs. 3/- per kg rice. This scheme is operational in 25 states and Union Territories more than 6.08 lakh families have been identified and the benefits of the scheme are passing on to them. Kushi Shramik Sanajit Suraksha Yojna: The scheme was launched in July 2001, for giving social security benefit to agricultural labourers in here in the age group of 18 to 60 yrs. Shiksha Sahayog Yojna: This scheme has been finalised for providing educational allowance of Rs. 100 per month to the children of parents living below the poverty line for their education from the 9th to 12th standard.

Poverty Ratio (i) All India number of the poor = 260 million (26.1%) (ii)

Urban number of the poor = 67.1 million (23.6%) (iii) Rural number of poor = 193.2 millions (27.1%)