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Study of social change among the schedule castes: the role of government sponsored programmes

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Abstract

Every developing society, a large proportion of their population resides in rural areas and belongs to poorer sections of the society. It is because of this reason that most of the development programmes are geared up to mainly the deprived regions and social groups of population. This has been the strategy perused by most developing societies, mainly during the 1950s and 1960s. These societies are confronted with two major problems: poverty and unemployment. They are seriously engaged in search of the solutions to these twin problems. The decades of the 1950s and 1960s are the period of over-optimism in the mind of the policy makers to increase productivity, per capita income, job opportunities and uniform growth through the planned programmes of development. They have succeeded to the extent that most programmes have generally benefited the rich and local elites. The gap between the rich and the poor at all levels and in all sectors has increased. The economic growth, even when achieved, did not 'trickle down' to the poorest sections and to the rural sector of the society. The number of poor, inequalities of income, land, resources and access to services have increased. By the mid-1970s it became necessary to rethink about the growth pattern in productivity, employment, and income, sectoral progress, and distributive justice.

Keywords: schedule castes and government sponsored programmes

Introduction

The Social and economic indicators have shown a trend of slow progress in rural as compared with urban areas and a tendency of maintaining the gap between the rich and the poor. Such a tendency the pattern of progress has been strengthened by certain international institutions. Although, such institution have popularised the concept of rural development and the problem of rural poverty. They have encouraged the introduction of the concept in official development plan documents of almost all members of developing societies. The international agencies like the Food and Agriculture Organization and the ILO of the UN have highlighted the need for sectoral progress because of the following reasons. Firstly, about two thirds of the population of developing societies reside in rural areas and there is a higher proportion of rural dwellers who are poor.

Secondly, the accelerated population growth of the 1950s and 1960s has helped in creating serious social and economic problems. Thirdly, despite progress in agricultural productivity in some regions of a number of developing societies, the plight of the landless labourers and small farmers has not been improved significantly. Finally, a drastic reform is needed on Chinese pattern of social progress in which they eliminate destitution and unemployment through a system of communes.

The central objective of social progress according to international institutions, particularly, the World Bank, is the strategy designed to improve the economic and social life of a specific region and social groups of people of mainly rural areas. The strategy involves extending the benefits of development to the poorest among those who seek a livelihood in the rural area. The specific social groups include backward social classes, small farmers, tenants and the landless.

The World Bank and other international agencies and institutions give more emphasis on raising productivity, increasing employment mobilizing resources and the upliftment of specific social groups.

The development must involve improvement in socio-cultural qualities of life and encourage participation of the poor in the decision-making process.

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This strategy came to be known as 'growth with justice' or 'redistribution growth (Chenery, 1974) ^[5]. This involves income potential and redistribution of additional income but does not involve any basic restructuring of the production system or a redistribution of assets. The reliance of this strategy on growth generated through the market mechanism. It includes poverty alleviation through employment creation additional production, and promotion of appropriate value system. Infact most social scientists suggest that the rural economy of most of the developing societies have widespread problems: poor health services, low agricultural output least satisfactory infrastructures, exploitation of the landless, skewed land ownership, unimaginative administration, colonial life style, wide inequalities, and socio-economic backwardness. These problems are interconnected and, therefore, the 'integrated social development' programmes are proposed by the international agencies with the following agenda.

Firstly, the improvement in the living standards or 'well-being' of the masses by ensuring that they get social security and their basic needs such as food, shelter, clothing and employment are met. Secondly, the improvement in rural areas by ensuring more productivity and less vulnerability to natural hazards, poverty and exploitation, and more mutual benefits to all parts of local, regional, national and international community. Thirdly, the improvement in self-sustaining development involves by ensuring mass participation in programmes of development. Fourthly, the improvement in autonomy of structure and functions by ensuring administrative decentralization and political self-government.

In India problems of rural poverty, unemployment, illiteracy, vulnerability of backward classes are some of the crucial problems which have drawn the attention of national and international agencies. The weaker sections are the most vulnerable sections of Indian society. Their poor condition is the creation of age old economic exploitation, deprivation, structured and organised in equalities. Mter Independence, India adopted two models of development:

(1) Liberal and democratic framework of modernization and (2) Scientific and technological framework of modernization. As a result, India became a welfare state committed to the welfare and development of its people in general and of the vulnerable sections in particular. The preamble of our Constitution is provides Justice: social, economic and political; liberty of thought, expression, belief, faith and worship; equality of status and opportunity; and the promotion of all among the Indian citizens. It provides fraternity assuring the dignity of the individual and the unity and integrity of the nation. It provides, directive principle of state policy, fundamental rights and protection of specific sections under the articles 38, 39 and 46 of the Constitution of India. All these stand testimony to the commitment of the state to the Indian people at large. Derived from this the Government of India has adopted the strategy of planned programme of development to reduce inequality of income, status and of opportunities for the people. The planning era in the country started with initiation and implementation of the first five year plan in 1951. This plan envisaged the establishment of Community Development Projects (CDP) for all-round and balanced development of all sections and regions. The central theme of the CDP is to help people to help themselves. Through the functioning of the CDP, the activities clustered around

the development of the entire Indian community with special emphasis on the upliftment of the weaker sections.

The measures which were taken in the first five year plan for the development of such sections are listed below:

(i) The provision to provide education as an urgent need of these sections, particularly the scheduled castes (SCs). The extensive measures for increasing educational facilities for them have been taken by the state and the central government. The concession given them take the form of free tuition, stipends, scholarships, provision of books, stationary and other equipments. There is provision for opening of educational institutions in areas where Scheduled Castes live in large numbers and establishing hostels for their benefits.

(ii) The provision for the allotment of wasteland for the SCs residing in rural areas.

(iii) The provision to reserve certain percentage of government positions for the SCs and relaxation and in almost all these cases the standards of in age, qualification or experience for them.

(iv) The provision to provide a sum of Rs. 10 crores from state funds for the benefit of the SCs during the plan period. The central government also provided a sum of Rs. 4 crores as an additional financial help for them. A provision was also made for more liberal disbursement of money under different head to institutions working for the Scs. An effort was made to improve efficiency in proper utilization of funds through effective and well-supervised organization. Similarly an effort was made to establish community centres to integrate isolated colonies of the SCs.

The second five year plan (1956-61) aimed at accelerating the rate of growth and initiating a strategy to bring about the necessary structural changes in the economy. While agriculture continued to get high priority, there was due emphasis on industrialisation. A "socialistic pattern of society" was explicitly accepted as the goal of the country's programme for social and economic development. This meant that "the pattern of development and the structure of socioeconomic relations should be so planned that they result not only in appreciable increases in national income and employment but also in greater equality in income and wealth, so that, the benefits of economic development reaches more and more to the relatively less privileged classes of the society, and there is progressive reduction of the concentration of income, wealth and economic power. In this plan, development programmes for scheduled castes were formulated with the object of improving their social status by providing them butter educational and economic opportunities. For this purpose, Rs. 21.28 crores was earmarked for their welfare.

Besides this, a sum of Rs. 6.25 crores was allocated by centrally sponsored schemes consuming housing; drinking water supply; economic uplift and aid to voluntary organisations for the removal of untouchability.

The third five year plan (1961-66) arrived at the achievement of a "good social life" for every citizen through development based on socialistic pattern of economy. The plan laid down the foundation of a self-reliant economic growth. This plan conceived the "first stage of a more intensive development leading to a self-reliant and selfgenerating economy". In addition to this, the plan provided Rs. 40 crores for special programmes the welfare of the backward class, and out of this, Rs. 30 crores were provided for the upliftment of the scheduled castes. About

one half of this amount was meant for their educational development and balance was divided almost equally between: the schemes for economic upliftment and the schemes for health, housing and other aspects.

These provisions were intended to supplement benefits which should be available in an increasing measure to scheduled castes from the general development programmes provided for in the plan. The plan placed special emphasis on ensuring that the scheduled castes obtained their due share of the benefits in each programme. The community development programme, the rural work programme, schemes for land resettlement, the programme for village and small industries and other schemes undertaken in the interest of agricultural labourers had the greatest significance for raising the living standards of scheduled castes.

As already explained, programmes for scheduled castes included in the third plan were intended to provide for certain special schemes. They did not in any sense take the place of development programmes undertaken for the community as a whole. In the field of education, the main aims were to make available special facilities to the scheduled castes i.e. scholarship, provision of residential facilities at educational institutions, exemption from fees and financial assistance for needy students. For promoting economic life, stress was laid on allotment of land, assistance in cultivation, training in running small scale industries and providing improved techniques in the traditional crafts. The bulk of the special allocations made in the third plan sponsored by the centre was concerned with the following:

- (i) Improvement in the working condition of persons engaged in unclean occupation including eradication of the practice of carrying night soil as head loads.
- (ii) Subsidies for housing for sweeper and scavengers.
- (iii) Provision of house site for those members of the scheduled castes:
 - a) Who are engaged in unclean occupation and
 - b) Who are landless labourer.
- (iv) Award of post matric scholarship and
- (v) Aid to voluntary organization working for the welfare of the Scs.

Under the general housing programmes funds were earmarked for acquisition and development of lands for granting house sites to agricultural workers amongst whom members of scheduled castes form a considerable proportion.

Up to the beginning of the fourth plan, the main emphasis was on the blanket general coverage of the population with the developmental programmes without any reference to the beneficiaries of this development. The sole concern was increased production and economic growth. No attention was given as to who the beneficiaries were and who reaped the fruits of development. Furthermore, the agricultural production sector was the main focus of rural development activities and there was hardly any programmes worth the name for landless labourers, artisans or even marginal farmers. Under this broad policy of planned efforts, the fruits of development accrued mainly to the asset-owning classes, that is, large and medium land holders and those owning sizeable assets for other pursuits allied to agriculture. The over all national convass was that the country as a whole registered high rate of growth of basic agricultural commodities. Briefly, growth took place in the

economy as a whole in the aggregate sense, but looked at disaggratively, the long standing structural disparity in the population persisted on more or less the same scale instead of showing a declining trend.

Just prior to the initiative of the fourth plan, the economists and the planners started quantifying poverty conditions and the people living under conditions of absolute poverty. It revealed that a sizeable proportion of the population were stagnating under poverty conditions and were left out of the mainstream of development. Such kind of situation even after two decades of planned economic development sounded an alarm for the planers as to what was the ultimate objective of developmental efforts in a welfare state. This then led to the recognition of the principle of growth with distributive justice.

In the selection of blocks under the (IRDPA), the preference is given to those areas where the scheduled castes constitute more than 20 percent of the population and all such blocks will be covered in the plan. In these blocks, identified scheduled caste families will be assisted through loans and grants with agricultural inputs. For the development of horticulture and animal husbandry under the rural housing programmes the emphasis is given on particular benefit to the scheduled castes. Under water supply and sewerage schemes, emphasis is placed on construction of sanitary latrines in rural and semi-urban areas so as to eliminate the pernicious habit of carrying night-soil as head loads. The weepers and scavengers thereby rendered surplus will be helped with alternate occupations. It will also be ensured that the benefits of other enlarged rural social services such as health and education are provided to other backward communities.

The scheduled caste development corporations which constitute one of the instruments of economic development of scheduled caste families have been acting as catalysts to promote beneficiary oriented programmes. In the seventh plan, the functioning of the corporations was thoroughly evaluated and the shortcoming rectified.

In most part of the country, scheduled caste live in separate localities lacking essential services. In towns, they live in slums devoid of basic amenities. Basic facilities like drinking water, housing facilities electrification link roads and fair price shops were expected to be provided in their bastis by the end of the seventh plan. Total elimination of scavenging was one of the objectives of the seventh plan. The major task of this plan was the removal of deficiencies in the implementation of programmes. These include assignment of specific responsibilities to collectors in the implementation of SCP programmes, communication of desegregated physical and financial targets to district and block level authorities, strengthening of implementation machinery, regular inspection, preparations of check list for each programme, avoidance of multi-counting of beneficiary families and review of programmes at the level of the chief secretary and the chief minister. In the field of personal policies, selection of dedicated and competent persons and their posting with reasonable security of tenure was most important. The seventh plan period was expected to provide linkage between sectors and programmes, back up services, organisational structures and personnel co-ordination.

Conclusion

The SCP has identified some core sections for economic

development of the scheduled castes, viz, animal husbandry, land development and agriculture production, leather, weaving, cottage and village industries. As compared with the all-India target of putting 50 percent of scheduled castes above the poverty line during the sixth plan period, the government of Bihar has the target to help all the scheduled castes to cross the poverty line. The efforts were made to formulate various schemes in this direction under various developmental programmes like IRDP, RLEGP, NREP, MNP, antodya, JRY and Indira Awas Yojna, These schemes under the SCP were implemented by various government departments.

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