

Poverty Eradication Programmes-How Far Successful?

Poverty is the greatest problem India is facing today. Poverty is a curse on Indian society. More than 40% of India's population lives below poverty line. They do not have enough money to have two meals per day. Various planning and programmes have been introduced to fight this disease but the result has been far from satisfactory. Poverty apart from economic factor has various psychological dimensions. It is the main stumbling block in our country's social and political development. Total eradication of poverty has to be taken drastically.

Since India's independence it was believed that Five Year Plans based on growth and socialistic pattern of society will help in solving the poverty problem. But the assumption that benefits of growth and economic development at national level will gradually trickle down and conditions of poor people would be better did not take place in reality. The condition of poor people became worse from bad. So from Sixth Five Year Plan the emphasis began to shift to direct attack on poverty. Various programs like IRDP, NREP, RLEGP, TRYSEM were introduced. Earlier land reforms were also introduced so that surplus lands could have been distributed among landless labourers. Land ceiling was imposed, tenancy rights were laid down. But implementation part was very poor due to feudal set up and domination of powerful and landowning castes in various regions of India. The administration failed miserably in implementing land reforms.

Land is the biggest asset for poor people in rural areas. Provision to get a land could have solved the basic problem of food and immediate employment for landless labourers and they could have been saved from exploitation by land owning castes and classes. Unfortunately, re-orientation of the agricultural relation so that the ownership of land is shared by a larger section of the population and tenancy rights providing security to the cultivating classes missed out of the planning process.

In order to attack poverty directly, the Sixth Plan conceived of two important programmes-Integrated Rural Development Programme (IRDP) and National Rural Employment Programme (NREP). The basic approach was to promote self-employment of the poor households through IRDP so that with the transfer of productive assets they may earn incomes that help them to cross the poverty line. It involved multi-pronged attack on the problem of rural development. It involved a sharp focus on target groups comprising small and marginal farmers,

agricultural labourers and rural artisans, and location of specific planning in rural areas. Similarly, NREP was to provide wage employment to fill in the periods of seasonal and sporadic under-employment. It was also to enlarge absorptive capacity of labour in rural areas in non-agricultural occupations by creating importance-social and economic.

Progress of IRDP during the Sixth Plan showed that the number of total beneficiaries covered was 16.56 million as against the target of 15 million, 6.36 million belonged to SC/ST categories. Progress of IRDP during Seventh Plan shows that 18.2 million families have been assisted and Rs. 3316 crores have been utilized. 45% of families assisted belonged to SC/STs. But when we critically analyze, there has been misclassification of the poor among the beneficiaries. Selection of ineligible families were made. Training was not imparted to majority of the beneficiaries. In about 22% cases no incremental income was generated. Adequate infrastructure facilities were not available to beneficiaries. Various evaluation studies suggest that the actual percolation effect of the programme has been much less in terms of poverty alleviation as compared with the impressive figures doled out by government report in terms of subsidies, bank credit and poverty line crosses.

Review of the progress of NREP suggests that though more funds have been pumped into the programme, commensurate increase in employment generation has not come about. Besides this, studies reveal that the employment being provided under the programme is for a very short duration and cannot make an impact on the levels of living of the rural people. It was a step in the right direction. To supplement this new Rural Landless Employment Guarantee Programme (RLEGP) was introduced for creating gainful employment, creating productive assets in rural areas.

In 1989, new program known as Jawahar Rozgar Yojna was launched by merging NREP and RLEGP. JRY aimed at rural employment programme reaching every single panchayat. JRY is being administered by village panchayat to implement rural employment programmes benefitting 440 lakh families below poverty line. JRY intends to provide village panchayats adequate funds to run their own employment schemes in the interest of vast masses of the rural poor. 30% of employment generated is reserved for women. 6% of the total resources are earmarked for Indira Awas Yojna at the national level. At least 60% of the resources have to be spent on wage component. 2 kgs of foodgrains per day is given to workers at subsidized (PDS) rates.

During 89-92, a total expenditure of 7697 crores was made under JRY generating total employment of 25.47 crore mandays. There was however, 100 percent achievement when compared with targets in terms of employment

generation. One evaluation organization revealed that though share of SC/STs in employment generation was more than 50%, the share of women was only 22-25% at district and 15-18% at village panchayat level. Adequate attention was not given to maintenance of assets. 89% of beneficiaries described the assets created as useful. Though JRY is motivated by the laudable objective of helping the poor and weak in rural society. However, there is need to develop grassroots organisational structure so that the intended benefits can be achieved and targeted beneficiaries can be provided with needed assistance.

To remove the urban poverty, Nehru Rozgar Yogna was launched. Slums are increasing day by day. About 40% of any big city consists of slums and living is really pathetic. So by and large various good intended programmes have been launched from time to time to eradicate the poverty from our country but lack of political will and administrative callousness make the conditions miserable for the poor. The need of the hour is that all efforts should be driven towards implementation of the programmes otherwise the very purpose will be defeated and India cannot become a developed and strong nation.