

Is Poverty in India a Politically Motivated- Critical Analysis of Poverty Economy

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Abstract:-India has battled poverty for several decades. The pre-occupation with and glorification of poverty among politician and elite group can be traced back to pre-independence period. In India poverty is considered as fertile land for Indian politics to grow and flourish. The poor segment of society is considered as an asset, vote bank and fertilizer for their political gains and growth. When poverty is curse on the human race, they are taken as blessings for the Indian politicians because in India poverty is highly politicized. This article has critically analyzed how an Indian politician instead of uprooting the poverty from the soil they use the poverty as the means of minting money and making hay during sunshine.

Key Words: poverty economy, Indian politics, poor segment, political participation, poverty education.

“Poverty is not just Absence of Income

Poverty is presence of helplessness, powerlessness and voicelessness”

I. INTRODUCTION TO POVERTY AND POVERTY POLITICS

Poverty is the major problem in India since decades. The political party in India poses loving the poor segment but wants them to remain poor forever. Poor classes have become a prop for every political party in India to win election from time to time. Every year cores of rupees are allotted in the budget by the government to eradicate poverty from Indian economy, the late prime minister Rajiv Gandhi have rightly admitted that for every rupee the government spends on anti-poverty programme only 20 paisa would reach the poor that is only 20% of total allotted money is used on poverty elevation.

According to the latest statistics released by the world bank, it is said that India is placed among the countries where income of poorest are growing slower than average, although it is one of the world's fastest growing economy(2016). There is absolute lack of political will, political participation and lack of proper education etc. towards eradicating poverty in India. Close to 60% of population in India are poor in one or other way. Logically speaking in a democratic country like India, it is very easy for political parties to exploit the poor for their personal gains. The various welfare schemes framed by political parties are benefiting only few poor segment of the economy, rest are still not aware of the welfare schemes and rather this schemes are used by the wrong people.

In most of the states like Tamil Nadu, Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh and various other states try to exploit the poor segment for political gains. Cash for votes, gifts, and other wrong means are used against the poor segment to win election. India is a place where 80% of the votes comes from the poor class who have high expectation on the government. Thus an economy which is highly depending on the poor can be termed as poverty economy, an economy where poverty is considered as fertile, and would like to retain poverty forever.

II. DEFINITIONS OF POVERTY

a. World Bank:

“Poverty is pronounced as deprivation in well-being, and comprises many dimensions. It includes low incomes and the inability to acquire the basic goods and services necessary for survival with dignity. Poverty also encompasses low levels of health and education, poor access to clean water and sanitation, inadequate physical security, lack of voice and insufficient capacity and opportunity to better one's life”.

b. United nations:

“Fundamentally, poverty is denial choices and opportunities, a violation of human dignity. It means lack of basic capacity to participate effectively in society. It means not having enough to feed and clothe to family, not having a school or clinic to go to not having the land on which to grow one's food or a job to earn one's living, and not having access to credit. It means insecurity, powerlessness and exclusion of individuals, households and communities. It means susceptibility to violence, and it implies living in marginal or fragile environments, without access to clean water or sanitation.”

c. Amartya sen:

“Poverty as consisting of a deprivation of a capabilities”, so that the poor have inadequate resources (financial, information, and so on) to participate fully in society in short, they are socially excluded

d. Goddard:

“Poverty is insufficient supply of those things which are requisite for an individual to maintain himself and those dependent upon him in health and vigor.”

III. HOW POVERTY LINE IS DEFINED IN INDIA?

In India, defining a poverty line has been a controversial issue, especially since mid-1970s when the first such poverty line was created by the erstwhile planning commission. It was based on minimum daily requirement of 2,400 and 2,100 calories for an adult in rural and urban areas, respectively. Economists such as DT Lakdawala and later YK Alagh, among others, were involved in working out the poverty line from time to time.

Later some modifications were made considering other basic requirements of the poor, such as housing, clothing, education, health, sanitation, conveyance, fuel, entertainment, etc, thus making the poverty line more realistic. This was done by Suresh Tendulkar (2009) and C Rangarajan (2014) during the UPA regime.

The Tendulkar committee stipulated a benchmark daily per capita expenditure of Rs27 and Rs33 in rural and urban areas, respectively, and arrived at a cut-off of about 22% of the population below poverty line. It sparked of a furious row, as these numbers were considered unrealistic and too low. Later, the Rangarajan committee raised these limits to Rs.32 and Rs.47, respectively, and worked out poverty line at close to 30%.

IV. IMPORTANT ASSETS AND CAPABILITIES OF POOR PEOPLE IN INDIA

Poor people opinions in India are sharply constrained by the dearth of assets and capabilities. In a developing country like India poor people feels that inequality in distribution of assets is increasing, that the gap between rich and poor is widening. Few assets and capabilities are discussed below that are either neglected or forgotten by the government of India to look into the issue that are very important for poor people in their daily life.

a. Poverty and material assets:

Without the protection of material assets, the country may slide into poverty at a quick time. In every country poor people noted the central role of material assets is preventing them from falling to the 'bottom of society'. The government of India has tried to reduce the poverty by increasing the economic growth, which is solely measured by raising per-capita gross domestic product. However to improve the policy effectiveness in order to reduce poverty, we need to focus on variety of deprivation measures instead of concentrating on income poverty only.

To be poor means not only having low income but also means lack of assets. Some of the material assets that are very important for poor are providing children's a quality education, reforming property rights, providing access to drinking water, pucca house, cooking fuel, toilets or any other social benefits which could be income enhancing or asset enhancing.

According to the latest survey, at least 41.9 per cent households live in one-room kutchra house in rural areas of the State. Less than 50% of the households in villages have toilet facilities. Three-quarters of the Indian population is affected by contaminated water, and 20% of the country's disease is thought to directly correlate. India does not have an adequate number of sewage treatment etc. The poverty in India can be eradicated only by providing these social benefits.

b. Poverty and health:

The state of India's health care system is somewhat dichotomous. The country is a global supplier of life saving affordable and good quality generic medicines, yet lakh of families are driven into poverty because they are forced to spend much of their earning and saving on medication to treat chronic and life threatening diseases.

The poor particularly spends disproportionately a large amount of their income on health care, mostly to by medicines and this is been known to India's policy makers for decades. No doubt India is a land of world class health care facilities but at the same time all these health care facilities are privatized for political gain and these facilities are only available for the rich class.

Majority of poor are still struggling to get these facilities and more over these facilities are nowhere in the government hospital where the facilities can be used by the poor segment of the society. Only one in five doctors in rural India are qualified to practice medicine, found a World Health Organization (WHO) report on India's healthcare workforce, highlighting the widespread problem of medical facilities in India. The people are forced to get these substandard medical facilities just because they are in no position to spend more money on quality medical facilities.

c. Poverty and education:

While education is every child's basic right. Severe poverty are depriving many children's in India from the world of books and learning. 37% of world's illiterate people are in India according to UNESO. In India children's find themselves on the margins of the education system and do not get benefit from learning, which is vital for their intellectual and social development.

It is been revealed in reports that illiteracy and lack of education among the people is the common factor that lead to poverty. Government of India do not spend good amount of money to provide quality public schools especially in rural areas. Poor people often sacrifice schooling in order to concentrate on making minimal living that in-turn leads to child labour.

Only 20% of the rural India has proper schooling facilities and best teaching fraternities to provide education to children's in rural areas.

V. WHY ANTI-POVERTY SCHEME FAILS IN INDIA?

In India majority of programmes and schemes on poverty alleviation such as generating work, providing health care, education, nutrition and support to backward classes and vulnerable groups etc. have been massively failed to solve the issue completely. There are several reasons for this

- a. Majority of poverty alleviation programme have been instigated and they function in silos.
- b. No systemic attempt to identify people who are really poor. The programmes are not been benefitting the real poor. For example. The schemes introduced under Public Distribution Scheme are not been enjoyed by the poor people rather majority of non poor segment have access to these schemes. (BPL Ration Cards)
- c. There is absolute no commitment by the government to support these programs. These programmes looks good only on the paper to drag the attention of the people get political gains and win elections in the name of these schemes.

For instance:

- Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) are the scheme meant to provide 100 days of work to the people but in reality this scheme never guarantees 100 days of work.
- Old Age Pension is another scheme which has no proper definition of how and how much the pension should be paid. It actually depends on the political parties that rules a particular state, in few state Rs 200 is paid per month and in other states Rs 1500 and more are paid. There is no uniformity in the scheme.

This is because the general understanding of poverty by the political parties is not clear. According to the critics the political parties in India deliberately want to keep poverty alive and make policies and programme only to gain political mileage.

VI. CONCLUSION

**“Poverty exists not because we cannot feed the poor,
But because we cannot satisfy the rich”**

In India politics over poverty have become an age old tradition. Each political party that comes to power in India always comes with a attractive slogan on eradicating poverty. The congress led government had a slogan called “Garibi Hatao” which means to remove poverty from the economy, but India could not do that due to lack of commitment by the government. At present BJP led government have also come up with a slogan “Pro-Rural, Pro-Poor”.

From time to time the slogans towards the poor may change but not the conditions of poor people. As we have discussed earlier, India is the only country which consider poverty as a fertile asset because it is used by the political parties to gain power and form the government. In reality it is the poor who turns out to vote during election hoping that the government would work for them and relieves them from the poverty.

When India is called as a fast growing economy on one hand on the other side of the economy the issue of poverty still remains due to unequal distribution of wealth and income. Political parties in India take undue advantage of helpless, powerless and voiceless poor people.

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