

Good Governance: The Crying Need

A UN report estimated that the size of the Indian population, which was below 36 crore in 1950, would cross 153 crore by 2050 in a world of 890 crore, that is, over 17% of world population, making it the most populous country of the then world. The population will have a bigger percentage of youths. The geographical area of this country is the seven largest one and covers a mere 2.4% of the total land area of the earth. Half of it is cultivated at least once a year. And about half the population is dependent on agriculture.

A 2005 report of the World Bank estimated that 42% of Indians are poor. Several conflicting estimates of poverty have emanated recently from government bodies and government appointed committees, as each suggested a different way to be followed to determine who is poor. None can say how many will remain in poverty in 2050.

In today's children lies the future. The UNICEF and many other organizations have painted a grim picture: one in three of the world's malnourished children live in India, 47% of children under the age of three are underweight, and at least 16% are wasting. About 50% of all childhood deaths are due to malnutrition. India has the largest number of child workers in this wide world. According to the 2001 census, 1.26 crore children were found working in hazardous occupations. During the following years, their number might have swelled. We have made great strides in development indeed!

Some young men associated with the Mahamandal, who are running a literacy and awareness programme among the working children of a brick kiln, found to their astonishment that even the adolescent boys were unaware of their country's name, let alone the map! When they asked these boys the name of their country, they could only utter the name of the village they hailed from. But, on second thought, it could be easily seen how perfectly normal it was. These boys start working before sun rise and continue till sun set. They were asked if they knew any game. They replied in a stoic mood: 'No. We never play.' There are laws and schemes for them, but one has to undertake a huge research to find out a few cases of genuine implementation. *Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan* has succeeded in increasing the number of enrolments to primary education, gradually encompassing a large portion of the *sarva*, but it has not yet ensured *shiksha*.

Child workers and street children come mainly from rural areas and urban slums. The cause of their distress is closely linked to the condition of agriculture. Most of the land owners are marginal farmers, who are actually nearly landless. And *Adivasis* are mostly absolutely landless. An expert group appointed by the Government of India reported in 2007, 'There has been a distinct slow down in agricultural growth during the past two decades, in spite of substantial acceleration in the growth of the Indian economy. The slow down is accompanied by a significant reduction in the share of agriculture in national product, but without much reduction in the share of workers depending on it for their livelihood. The two faces of the emerging distress are the manifestation of agrarian crisis that threatens the livelihood of farmers, particularly those of the small and marginal ones; and the agricultural development crisis.... The support systems to farming have weakened, public investments in agriculture have declined and institutions have become unresponsive.... The result is the manifestation of agrarian crisis, often, in the extreme form of distress that results in suicides by some farmers.' *Some farmers* numbered nearly 90,000 between 2002 and 2006.

Social support systems like 100 days' guaranteed work in rural areas and the *Antyodaya Yojana* have saved some lives in this crisis, but these do not alter the fundamental situation. Our agriculture is still primitive in the sense that it is largely dependent on the

monsoon and there is very little of modern infrastructure, technology, and inputs. There is a trend toward privatizing the sale of seeds, marketing of products, and even farming itself. Due to last year's severe drought and some financial factors, food prices have skyrocketed, causing a nosedive in the already low standard of living of the common man. The market price of sugar has been one of the worst hit, and the political party to which our food and agriculture minister belongs reminds us: 'No one dies due to not eating sugar. On the other hand, by eating items made from sugar, diabetes increases. So, it is not necessary that everyone consume sugar.' Hardly any step has been taken against hoarding and black marketeering or to improve the decrepit public distribution system. No sense of urgency is discernible on the corridors of power.

The reason is simple: none who matters in the business of governance seems to feel the pang. This is only symptomatic of a grave disorder that ails the whole upper class, the high ups of the government machinery, politics, industry, and even educational institutes and NGOs. It is apathy, callousness – dry-heartedness. And what dries up the heart? Too much of self-seeking, pleasure-mongering. Pleasure in power, pleasure in money, pleasure in the senses. People are naturally like that, unless they get a proper training for the refinement of their nature. Swami Ranganathananda used to compare it with the process of refining of crude petroleum. That requires a thorough change in the education of our country. We have to wait till this comes, till our education can produce men and women of the *refined* type. It is a vast country, with an extremely large population – half of whom finds it impossible to make ends meet. There is absolutely no miracle theory in the economics of any school that can bring about a positive change for them, without first having men who will intensely feel for them and without having such men for proper governance.

Laissez faire and its modern incarnations, liberalization and globalization under the tutelage of the trio, the World Bank, the IMF, and the US, have been found inadequate to serve even the low-population, advanced-economy Western Countries. Their big business profited under these banners, and whenever they got heavy blows, they took recourse to more and more State intervention. In poor countries it is impossible to reduce the role of the State in the matter of equitable growth. But every government in India in recent times has shown a proclivity toward offloading its duties to private players – even decontrolling the prices of life-saving drugs. This has ruined, above everything else, our culture, that could have made men of us. With scarcely any workable control over the media, the press, telecommunication, and the internet, the chance of redirecting education and culture for making 'men' is ever dwindling.

Good governance *for the people* is India's crying need. But let us not sit idle till we have it. Or else, we shall never have it. Let us begin to be and make 'men' with a sense of utmost urgency, so that we have such governance also in no distant future.