

## No Time For Celebrations

On the eve of the Republic Day the President of India ‘expressed anguish and dismay that the benefits of a surging economy have not percolated to the weaker sections’ and ‘said the country cannot look at the future without addressing the needs of under-privileged and disadvantaged sections of society’. On the next day, the occasion was celebrated with usual pomp and glitter, gleefully oblivious as the high and noble were of the distressed public. After all our knowledgeable Finance Minister has assured us every other day that the fundamentals of our economy are strong.

Over a month before the celebration another poor man had left his unfed mortal coil in the western part of West Bengal. The administration soon tried to explain it away as a case of malnutrition – a trite way of escape. He was entitled to at least 100 days’ work under the National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme and held an Annapurna Yohana card that was supposed to fetch food enough to live on. Schemes are there aplenty, but, unfortunately for the destitute millions, schemes cannot work themselves out. Where are the *men* who will implement them?

However, deaths of non-entities from obscure villages are not nationally mourned. Failures of the State to feed its people are not advertised. The power of the Republic lies in the people indeed! Even before ‘we, the people’ declared India as a Republic, even when the Independent Dominion was born on 15 August 1947, curiously with Lord Mountbatten as the Governor General of India, the power was usurped by power-hungry politicians and unscrupulous businessmen who to this day live in a marvellous symbiosis to rule over the people, to deceive and exploit them. The administration, the police, *et al* are to be at their beck and call. There is hardly any public servant worth the name. A large majority of them are servants of power and lucre, for unfair benefits do trickle down (perhaps the only case for the champions of the trickle-down theory). Corruption is a global phenomenon, claimed a former Prime Minister. So it is. But not to the extent that leaves so many people to die of hunger, cold, and malnourishment in a ‘surging economy’.

The British Prime Minister, Mr. Gordon Brown, during his visit to New Delhi last month, said that objectivity, rationality, impartiality, and honest pursuit of truth are ‘the qualities you have to leave behind when you go into politics’. Actually you leave many more qualities behind, not only when you go into politics, but often when you serve the politicians’ purposes. Meek submission to all vested interests for the sake of ease and comfort has become the bane of our educated middle class.

Way back in 1895 Swami Vivekananda observed, ‘There is some chance if you can impart education to the masses. Is there a greater strength than that of Knowledge? Can you give them education? Name me the country where rich men ever helped anybody! In all countries it is the middle classes that do all great works. How long will it take to raise the money? Where are the men? Are there any in our country? Our countrymen are boys, and we must treat them as such.’ And he wrote with a bleeding heart, ‘They are children, yea, veritable children, though they be great and high in society. Their eyes see nothing beyond their little horizon of a few yards – the routine-work, eating, drinking, earning, and begetting, following each other in mathematical precision. They know nothing beyond – happy little souls! Their sleep is never disturbed, their nice little brown studies of lives never rudely shocked by the wail of woe, of misery, of degradation, and poverty, that has filled the Indian atmosphere – the result of centuries of oppression.... But there are others who see, feel, and

shed tears of blood in their hearts, who think that there is a remedy for it, and who are ready to apply this remedy at any cost, even to the giving up of life. And “of such is the kingdom of Heaven”.’

People adored him, but few tried to work out the *ideas* he gave with his life’s blood. His real purpose and plan are lost to all but a few. We have not cared to know the remedy and apply it ‘at any cost, even to the giving up of life’, because we do not ‘see, feel, and shed tears’. The result has been dangerous and is going to be worse. But little do we realize the gravity of the situation and of the trend. Let there be some, at least, amongst us today to have this fire of feeling, and let them grow in number. ‘Let us all work hard, my brethren; this is no time for sleep’, he said. And this is no time for celebrations either, if they are not meant to rouse people to the urgency of action. Let us instead open up our hearts to his call: ‘Act on the educated young men, bring them together, and organise them. Great things can be done by great sacrifices only. No selfishness, no name, no fame, yours or mine, nor my Master’s even! Work, work the idea, the plan, my boys, my brave, noble, good souls – to the wheel, to the wheel put your shoulders! Stop not to look back for name, or fame, or any such nonsense. Throw self overboard and work.’

It is, therefore, our sacred duty to train our young men to develop their brain and brawn and expand their heart, even in the midst of social decay, to enable them to work for common weal. The Mahamandal has taken it up upon itself – this noble, though thankless, task – on a nation-wide scale.