

INCLUSIVE DEVELOPMENT OF
ODISHA

PROSPECTS & CHALLENGES

Volume 4

Manas Jena



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This publication represents the culmination of my work over the past three years, constituting the fourth volume of "Inclusive Development of Odisha." It is a compilation of articles that I authored, with the majority originally published in the Bhubaneswar edition of the Daily Pioneer, along with contributions to various other journals. In expressing my appreciation, I extend heartfelt thanks to individuals such as Vivek Sakpal, Vidyabhusan Rawat, Ajeya Rout, SP Nanda, Binu Mathew, Ramdev Biswabandhu, Dr. Kalyan Ray, Ramchandra CST Voltaire, Samarendra Das, Arun Khote, and others who have played a pivotal role in encouraging and supporting my endeavors.

Moreover, I acknowledge the platform provided by Facebook, where many of my articles found a home. The engagement and comments from friends on this social media platform have been both insightful and enjoyable. My sincere hope is that this volume serves as a valuable resource for those dedicated to fostering the economic development and social inclusivity of Odisha.

Embedded within the contents of this book are ideas and arguments that aspire to contribute meaningfully to the pursuit of social, economic, and political justice, especially for marginalized sections of the community. I am steadfast in my belief that constructive criticism and well-thought-out opinions are integral components of a democratic culture in public discourse, and I welcome such engagement with open arms. Overall, my objective is that this work serves as a catalyst for positive change and progress in Odisha's journey towards a more inclusive and prosperous future. Looking forward.

Manas Jena

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FOREWORD

Odisha is one of the 'richest' states of India. Obviously, I don't have any 'authenticated' data to prove that it really is but the state represent an irony of our system. A rich state with huge reservoir of mineral and other natural resources, Odisha's Dalits and Adivasis still remain outside the purview of the development policies of the government. It is the only state where a chief minister Biju Patnaik openly opposed the reservation for the OBCs and the current government led by his son Naveen Patnaik has shown no inclination to implement the reservation policies particularly that for the OBCs. Of course, the Dalits and Adivasis too are on the margin as far as their representation in the power structure is concerned. The Dalit Adivasi discourse is still absent in Odisha which once upon a time was the centre of Buddhist value system. Today, Buddhism in Odisha is extinct, though remains of old glorious civilisation are still visible in many parts of the state. The irony of 'richest' state with 'poorest' people or communities need to be understood so that remedial measures are taken to ameliorate their socio-economic conditions.

According to reports appearing in Newspapers, Odisha has around 46% OBC population inclusive of 208 castes, as per Backward Classes Commission report based on 2011 Census. That apart, the population of Scheduled Tribe is 22.85% while that of Scheduled Castes is 17.13% as per census data of 2011. It clearly means that nearly 86% of the Odisha Population is SC-ST-OBC. It will reach over 90% when the Christian and Muslim Population is added. Instead, the Census figures are cleverly being projected as per 'religious' identity to proclaim that 94% population is Hindu. It is therefore important to ask the question further what is the representation of these segments in both the polity and bureaucracy of Odisha. Interestingly, Odisha's history with Patnaiks is 'remarkable'. Biju Patnaik became Chief Minister from 1961-1963 and then 1990 to 1995, a total of 7 years. After him, J B Patnaik of the Congress party became chief minister 1980 to 1989 and then 1995-1999, a total of 13 years. Now, Naveen Patnaik has been the chief minister for the past 23 years which is a record off short but the irony is that it reflects a dark reality of the state of Odisha as where are Odisha's majority in the power structure. How can a state with nearly 96% of the non Savarna population has so much Brahmanical Kayastha dominance at every sector? Nobody bothers or

even feel a bit of shame that a community of Patnaik's dominate the politics for the last 33 years. If this is not 'casteism' then what exactly is the caste system. The governments are manipulating the data these days and hiding it from the general public which make them uncomfortable.

Odisha's crisis is the absence of an alternative vision that should have emerged from the Dalits Bahujan perspective. While the tribal resistance against their dislocation and mining continues but it is widely led by those who have been benefitted from the sucking of these resources. That apart, there are not much visible tribal voices in the state who cannot merely critique the government's policies but provide an alternative vision. Dalit movement also remain victim of the reacting to the issues and not creating its own autonomous voices and space. As far as the OBCs are concern, it is sad that there is no political space meant for them in Odisha so far. The popular political discourse in Odisha is between the Hindus and Christians and not between the dominant or oppressive castes and SC-ST-OBCs. It has resulted in the dominance of the Brahmanical elite in socio-political cultural lives. That is a deliberate strategy to keep the caste issue out of the discourse. Unfortunately, to counter, such narrative, an Ambedkarite Dalit Bahujan economic cultural narrative is needed and this vacuum is being fulfilled by Mr Manas Jena, an intellectual activist, Ambedkarite who has done extensive work on Odisha mining and Land Rights issues and is regularly contributing to media through his thought-provoking articles. Manas has rarely written from a victim perspective but an alternative vision for the Dalit Bahujans. Most of the time, a tragedy with those emerging from the margin is that they are reduced to writing their own stories. It is a strategy of the corrupted media which does not encourage alternative visionary voices from the Dalit Bahujan communities but Manas Jena has been working on this alternative vision for long and this book is a result of his effort to mainstream the discourse which has been left out by the policy planners and influencers.

Inclusive Development of Odisha Volume IV is basically a vision for Odisha by the year 2036 and beyond. These are collection of his articles published in the daily Pioneer. His four other volumes are already published and need to be studied and understood by the policy makers in the greater interest of a economically and culturally strong Odisha. Manas Jena is looking for an Odisha which is counted among the top 10 Industrialised states of India. Of course, he is speaking about Odisha's

inclusive Industrial development which provide space and employment to Dalit OBC and Adivasis too. It is a fact that Odisha has one of the largest migration population in India and this could not have happened if the youth had got employment in the state. Unlike other states, Odisha has huge mineral resources but all that is being profiteered by the private corporations without much involvement of the local youth.

Odisha has 480 kilometers long coastal line with some extremely important sea link like Paradip Port and yet it does not have a wide spread road, railway and communication network like other Indian states such as Odisha, Gujarat, Maharashtra, West Bengal, Tamilnadu etc. The railway network is key to Industrialisation and vice versa which in turn would be essential for the growth and development of the state.

Dr B R Ambedkar along with India's first Prime Minister Jawahar Lal Nehru felt that Industrialisation is key to India's development. Public sector was strengthened and the Indian state promoted the welfare model which was inclusive and forward looking. Today, we are witnessing a new trend of dismantling the state structure in favour of creation of a private monopoly with little respect to local communities who should have been stakeholders in these entities. Somehow, the state has now established itself as a 'real estate agent' and the result is the massive onslaught on the rights of the Dalits and Adivasis.

Manas Jena is one among very few who is not only well read but has a wider mass base in Odisha. His experiences with people's movement and in-depth understanding of Ambedkarism help him articulate things. He is concerned about Odisha and rightly feel that people speak about Gujarat Model or Dravidian model or Kerala Model or Delhi model because of the successes of these models. Each of these models had focussed on various issues that helped bring their states at the top of the national level but these models have specifics too. Like Narendra Modi's Gujarat model became famous for creating an enabling environment for the businesses. Ofcourse, it is another issue whether this 'art of easing business' model can be termed as successful or not and there can be different opinion on that. Kerala is famous for its education and health services. Tamilnadu is now leading with the Dravidian model with focus on school, health and industrialisation process. Tamilnadu is also the land of Periyar and the government of the day feel proud of associating with Periyar's rationalist humanist thoughts. In the National Capital territory of Delhi, the Aam

Admi Party was able to mainstream the issue of health and education. Despite all criticism, it was a known fact that Delhi's government schools are performing far better and the idea of Mohalla clinic is simply great though it is not functioning that way as it should have been but nevertheless it has given new ideas to other state governments too. Manas is right when he feels that there should have been an Odisha Model but alas it is not there. A state which has India's vital mineral resources does not have required infrastructure to build a new Odisha. He rightfully says that 'just availability of natural resources is not enough if it is not accompanied by basic infrastructure for communication and transportation added to availability of skilled man power.' Further, 'land issue has remained unresolved', says Manas. The fact is Odisha's Gods and temples have huge land while the Dalit Adivasis suffer from gross negligence by the government. Odisha's temples have become the biggest source of political power of the Brahmanical elite in the state.

Poverty, resources, culture and communities are interlinked in India. The communities who nurtured our forests actually are today being termed as encroachers while the those who are sucking the resources are termed as 'investors'. Odisha, the land of Ashoka the Great and his Buddhism find the ideology of Buddha virtually annihilated. A Philosopher who promoted humanism and scientific temper to Indian masses, who spoke against caste hierarchy is extinct in the land where he was needed more. Odisha is not merely a crisis of capitalism but a story of annihilation of the widely prevalent culture of Dalits and Adivasis. Kumar Hasan, one of Odisha's author and journalist told me in an interview, 'In Odisha, it is true; the caste discrimination is beyond imagination. Untouchability still exists. Caste system is in full operation. Some of the major religious doctrines of India, Jainism and Buddhism, were prevalent in Odisha, along with tribal religious beliefs. Jainism was in its highest order in the first century BC. Vaishnavism in the 11th century was established on the pyre of Jainism, before the advent of Brahmanism. But with the advent of Brahmanism in Odisha the tribal village deities were co-opted in Hindu religion.¹

In the same conversation Kumar Hasan define how Odisha does not have an autonomous voice of Dalit Adivasis. He says, 'Mainstream political

¹ Interview with Kumar Hasan by Vidya Bhushan Rawat
<https://countercurrents.org/2018/03/interview-with-kumar-hassan/>

parties headed by upper castes, mostly Brahmins, have no interest for the cause of these people. Tribal groups are the most underdeveloped class in Odisha, having no any facilities like education, healthcare, electricity, drinking water etc. They are the poorest among poor, having no land for them. The ratio of landless tribal and Dalits is 90 in Odisha. Tribal groups always depend upon nature for their survival and when their source of survival is attacked by means of mining, deforestation, their forest and forest land plundered, their river and rivulets dried, indigenous medicinal herbs and their deities destroyed by state and displaced, for the benefit of the company-multinational nexus, then they rise for their lives. They are ready to sacrifice their lives for the cause, and to save their coming generations. It is a struggle for their life and the bounty of nature. India is heading towards a developed capitalist country, thereby destroying every norm of law and constitution, killing and destroying its own people and environment in the name of development. Extraction of mineral wealth of tribal area in disguise of developmental policy is murderous for the tribal, the son of nature. The so-called economic liberalization has hurt India and its interior jungle folk the most. Likewise, reservation policy has become useless for tribal. Where there is no education, the reservation policy is meaningless. Only the Dalits and OBCs are privileged by such alluring policy to some extent in clerical opportunities.²

Kumar Hasan spoke about the irony that Odisha's Dalit Adivasis are suffering. They not only faced the economic deprivation but cultural annihilation and appropriation. While there is a resistance against the unjust economic order, the cultural resistance is not much visible. One does not deny the Adivasi resistance against the onslaught on their natural resources but most of the time the movements crash in the absence of an alternative. Most of the leaders provide you a eutopia which look romantic on paper but impractical on the ground. Manas Jena provide both the cultural as well as economic alternative which are intertwined. He brings Dr Baba Saheb Ambedkar's economic and cultural thoughts to provide an alternative which is essential if we are speaking about a new vision. In the last 75 years most of those claiming to be Ambedkarites actually became the vehement critique of Brahmanism and confined Baba Saheb Ambedkar to merely a critique of Brahmanism ignoring his socio-cultural

² Interview with Kumar Hasan by Vidya Bhushan Rawat
<https://countercurrents.org/2018/03/interview-with-kumar-hassan/>

vision and Economic thoughts. Baba Saheb's economic vision is not merely the profit for private thought but it means inclusion in the structure and upholding social justice. Manas articulate this beautifully in a conversation with me. He says, 'Dr Ambedkar's economic thoughts are based on the principles of equality and State ownership over means of production. He argued for nationalization of land and other means of production. He was suggesting for the fullest utilization of natural resources and human power to fulfil the material needs of the people with active State involvement. He argued for compact holding to be beneficial for agriculture production while avoiding too much agriculture. As a trade unionist, he played a major role in bringing labour legislation to regulate eight working hour and ensuring benefits of minimum wage, social security, insurance, equal wage and maternity benefit for women workers and banned child Labour'³.

He further elaborates his point by bringing Baba Saheb Ambedkar's Presidential Address at a Conference held in Cuttack on November 8, 1945 and this is extremely important. He says, 'Dr Ambedkar visited Odisha as the Labour Member in Viceroy's Executive Council to the Government of India. In his presidential address at a conference of representatives of Central Government and Government of Odisha, the central provinces and eastern States held at Cuttack on November 8, 1945, he explored the possibilities of developing Odisha Rivers to control flood while managing water for its best multipurpose use for the people. He made valuable opinion relating to the development of Odisha based on information which is still relevant in the present context. He was worried after realizing the socio-economic realities of the people in those days. He identified flood, drought, famines, deterioration in health, malaria, malnutrition, vitamin deficiency and above all, low income and poverty as the major issues of Odisha. While discussing about the underdevelopment and backwardness, he referred to learn from the drought of 1866 which was a major cause of tragic loss of life of thousands of poor people in Odisha.'⁴

³ Deprivation from Resources will Increase Inequality thus a threat to democracy and Human Rights : Manas Jena, *Contesting Marginalisation : Conversations on Social Justice Identities and Resource Rights* by Vidya Bhushan Rawat, Peoples Literature Publication P 167-183

⁴ Ibid

Dr Baba Saheb Ambedkar was originally an economist and he was deeply concern about the conditions of the Dalits and tribal in the country. Apart from social deprivation, he identified economic deprivation an important factor responsible for the plight of both the Dalit Adivasis communities.

There are so many people working on Ambedkarism but Manas Jena has brought forward those aspect of Dr Ambedkar which were hitherto unknown and Odisha government and its policy planners should give them a thought. Manas has traversed through Odisha and worked among the communities. He is not merely an intellectual but his connect with the masses is second to none and therefore the policy planners should listen to him when he brings the Ambedkar model for Odisha. Listen what Baba Saheb proposed in the conference for Odisha's development. 'He proposed that it is possible to connect Chandabali to Sambalpur by a navigable inland waterway by construction of three dams at seven mile above Naraj, Tikarpada and Sambalpur. It will be affordable, cheap and convenient artery for passengers and goods traffic from sea coast to Sambalpur. He was equally concerned about submergence of land and its impact. Finally, the conference decided to undertake a survey of the Odisha Rivers to prepare projects for unified and multipurpose development like flood control, navigation, irrigation, drainage, soil conservation and power development. Adviser to the then Governor of Odisha BK Gokhale also spoke on the meeting in support of the proposal of Dr Ambedkar and said Odisha is the most backward part of India and this irrigation project will bring multipurpose development for the State'⁵.

Every year, Odisha face the natural calamity during monsoon. The proposal that Dr Ambedkar gave remain out of sight of the authorities. The state still does not have a comfortable road and train network. Baba Saheb was a visionary who wanted to tap the vast water resources of the state for the better connectivity but those were never considered fit. Today, government of India is planning water ways in the areas where water level is questionable. Odisha can be a hub of water ways in India. Odisha languishes even today due to not merely apathy of the ruling elite but also complete absence of an alternative model for building a vibrant Odisha. Manas Jena has provided that vision based on Baba Saheb Ambedkar's

⁵ Deprivation from Resources will Increase Inequality thus a threat to democracy and Human Rights : Manas Jena, *Contesting Marginalisation : Conversations on Social Justice Identities and Resource Rights* by Vidya Bhushan Rawat, Peoples Literature Publication P 167-183

thought and ideas. Added with it, he also suggests to work on Odisha's historical Buddhist places which remain neglected by the state. If Odisha want to attract international attention, it must focus on building up the Buddhist heritage sites which were centre of learning and art.

Manas Jena's vision 2036 for Odisha can be simply termed as Odisha's Ambedkar model for sustainable and inclusive development which can bring back glory to Odisha. If Odisha's natural resources are utilised carefully and scientifically, it will be a game changer for ever as Manas says, 'The natural advantage of Odisha with river systems, as a perennial source of water wealth, has not been fully tapped and managed for the development of irrigation which is a major reason of underdevelopment of agriculture sector of the State. The development of agriculture will pave the way for industrialization where the water management will play a key role in producing power for the industry. The available hydropower will boost the smallscale industries especially the agro-based industries for balanced sectorial growth in the State. The utilization of natural resources and manpower in a scientific way will increase production, employment and income in the State and the backward economy can be changed.'⁶

Odisha's Ambedkar vision has potential to make it one of the most developed state in terms of inclusion and participation of the marginalised communities in the developmental process and respect for its vast natural heritage. Development would become humanist if it follows Baba Saheb's 'Madhya Marg' as espoused in Buddhism. Odisha has everything to gain from it. One sincerely hopes that policy planners, lawmakers, activists and stake holders from Odisha will welcome this hugely important initiative by Manas Jena so that it utilise its potential and the fruits of the development are shared by all equally.

Vidya Bhushan Rawat

⁶ Ibid

REFLECTIONS

Ajeya Rout

Manas Jena is a voracious reader with an enlightened vision for the future of Odisha, as well as India and the world. He strongly believes in an inclusive developmental future, and in almost all his writings, he supports his arguments with real facts and figures, advocating for the upliftment of downtrodden masses. Despite often being categorized as a Dalit intellectual, he asserts that this label is inaccurate. His focus remains on highlighting the real plight of the 94% of oppressed people, encompassing 17.13% of Scheduled Castes, 22.85% of Scheduled Tribes, and 44% of OBC people.

Manas Jena has faced pain and insults since his early school days. The insults he endured, coupled with the humanistic content of writings by literary figures like Sarat Chandra Chatterjee and the revolutionary ideas of Comrade Sivdas Ghosh, collectively influenced this simple young boy from Jajpur to become a committed and steeled revolutionary activist with a humanistic approach. These aspects are evident in almost all of his valued writings.

A well-known columnist in Odisha and India, Manas Jena is also a sincere activist who actively participates in various actions in the state and across India, often taking the lead. His native focus is on Odisha, a state known for its abundant raw materials and natural resources but plagued by poverty. He laments the fatalistic mindset of the people, who, despite being the poorest, seem intoxicated with elements of decadent culture.

While the government boasts about economic improvements, including an increase in beneficiaries of subsidized kitchen centers and rice distribution, Jena criticizes the lack of progress in land distribution among the landless, inadequate irrigation, and the persistent issue of widespread unemployment. He holds the upper-caste leadership responsible for these shortcomings and questions the monopoly of talent among the 6-7% Brahmin-Karan combine in a state where 84% of the population is excluded from political leadership.

Jena urges the people of Odisha to question political and governmental leadership, emphasizing the need for courage in addressing the failures of

the past 75 years during which no one from the majority has become a visible political leader of the state. He challenges the prevailing caste system and encourages the youth to dream of a better Odisha, envisioning a prosperous future for the state's centenary.

Ajeya Rout

Trade unionist , writer, editor and left politician based in Bhubaneswar.

ODISHA VISION -2036

Can Odisha be among the Top 10 States of India?

Odisha as a State will complete 100 years of its existence in 2036. It is time to review our progress and set roadmaps for coming days and to realize the dreams of many of the makers of modern Odisha. The challenges are many but a question that always props up in mind is, can Odisha find a place among top ten developed States of India in 2036? Take some of important indicators to know the current position of State of Odisha among 33 States and Union Territories in India.

The indicators are, average life expectancy and IMR-MMR, education, per capita income, urbanization, and industrialization. What is the rank of Odisha among States in India so far as these five indicators are concerned?

Unfortunately, we continue to be in the bottom of the rank in almost all development indicators. Odisha continues to remain a distress migrant worker State with a huge number of people below the poverty line and one of the most backward States in terms of low-quality healthcare and education, low per capita income, minimum wage, pitiable quality of life and without minimum basic amenities for the poor. It also continues to depend on agricultural economy without much improvement in manufacturing and industrial sector despite many natural advantages. Both healthcare and education are State subjects and very vital to development of quality human resources of a State. Poor health and poor quality of education has many ramifications over the economy growth and socio-political progress. The sample registration system report 2018 shows the infant mortality rate in case of Odisha was 40 which is higher than national average 32. It is highest 48 in MP but in case of Kerala, it was 7 and lowest 4 in Nagaland. It is found that backward States having more number of people below poverty line also have poor health and educational infrastructure as poverty has a close link between health and education. In case of Odisha the health and education status of a big chunk of population comprising mostly STs, SCs and OBCs is more precarious than other social groups. The quality of living and availability of basic amenities are widely unequal in India. States such as Kerala, TN and AP are comparatively better than Odisha which ranked near the bottom of the list found in the India Today survey 2016.

The data by sample registration system on life expectancy 2014-18 shows that life expectancy at birth in Odisha is also below national average. It was 75 in Kerala and Delhi, 69.4 in India and 69.3 in Odisha. Despite availability of financial resources, Odisha has not achieved success in ensuring basic human needs such as housing, drinking water, toilets and electricity for a healthy living.

The universal health and education delivery system discriminates against the poor and marginalized sections. The budgetary allocation to these important sectors has been continuously negligible without any target and time frame. The availability of DMF funds has not solved the drinking water problem of people in mining areas.

Similarly, in case of education, the NITI Aayog report on school education quality index among 20 large States has ranked Kerala with a score of 76.63 as the best State, followed by Rajasthan, Karnataka, AP, Gujarat, Assam, Maharashtra, TN, HP, Utarakand and Haryana. Odisha is placed below these top ten States with score of 48.36. The State of UP is the lowest with 36.42 score. Education in Odisha is quantitative, not qualitative. The system is more tilted towards privatization and there is little attempt to improve its quality. The data by the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation shows that the per capita income of Goa was highest among the Indian States and Union Territories with Rs 5, 20,030 GSDP per capita. The other States in the list include Sikkim, Delhi, Chandigarh, Haryana, Karnataka, Pondicherry, Kerala, Telangana and Gujarat. Odisha ranks in 22 out of 33 with Rs 1, 19,075 whereas Bihar is the lowest with Rs 50,735.

Coming to urbanization, the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs data shows that none of the city in Odisha is among the metropolitan cities having million plus population though it has increased from 35 to 53 as per 2011 census. Among the States, Goa (62.2 percent) is the most urbanized and among others, Kerala, Sikkim, Mizoram, TN, and Maharashtra are moving fast towards urbanization. It is told by the Ministry that urban population of Himachal Pradesh, Bihar, Assam and Odisha with 16.7 percent continues to be the lowest.

Similar is the case of industrialization. In spite of many advantages such as a vast sea coast and mineral resources, Odisha continues to remain backward in industrialization. The top ten most industrialized States include Goa, TN, Maharashtra, Gujarat, UP, AP, Telangana, Kerala,

Rajasthan and Haryana. It is estimated that nearly 60 percent of the total factories are in five most industrialized States, like TN, Maharashtra, Gujarat, UP, and AP. On the contrary, Odisha is a major supplier of migrant workers to these States. We have been told that Odisha is a storehouse of mineral wealth; even many strategic minerals such as Bauxite, Chromite, iron ore and coal are available in large quantities but why these resources not being utilized for industrialization is a big question.

Communication and connectivity are most important signs of development. Let's examine the status of the State of Odisha using available data on five important aspects – internet connectivity, road communication, railway coverage, airport and seaport and inland water transport, as these are vehicles of fast economic growth. How do we visualize Odisha in 2036, especially on these aspects? Globally, it is found that more connectivity means more development. India's development must be inclusive of Odisha in a true spirit of federalism. While the world is entering into increasingly online activities and India has become second largest online market behind China, the internet penetration of Odisha is in bottom of the rank among States in a survey by the Internet and Mobile Association of India in 2019. Among the States, Delhi and Kerala were heading the list followed by Punjab, Jammu and Kashmir, HP, Haryana, TN, Maharashtra, Goa and Karnataka. In a move, the Government of Kerala has provided free internet facilities to 20 lakh BPL families. Among the eastern States, Bihar and Jharkhand have been growing faster than others. The lower status and slow progress of Odisha may have many reasons but how to overcome it and move at par with others is a challenge. Though India has the second largest road network in the world behind the USA and currently with an average rate of 30 km road built per day, still the road networking coverage is uneven in India. Kerala has the highest road density and a very well-developed public and private transport system which has been a major advantage for business and public mobility within the State. Odisha is among ten States, like Maharashtra, UP, Rajasthan, AP, Karnataka, TN, MP, Bihar and Gujarat, having longest roads and length of National Highways. But in terms of length of States highways, Odisha is not among top ten States. Maharashtra is on the top so far as road networks that include NH, State highways and district roads are concerned. Other States which feature in the list are Karnataka, UP, TN, Gujarat, MP, and Rajasthan. Road networks are the lifeline of public

transport and delay in building the primary infrastructure has a bearing on public life and livelihood.

Coming to another important link- Railway, it is found that most of the railway establishments in the world are nationalized. Economically developed countries such as the USA, China and Russia are ahead of India in terms of network size. Railway coverage in Odisha has been a matter of concern as the State continues to be neglected by the Centre in expanding the railway network within the States. The fact is that even some districts in Odisha have no railway line. This deficiency has contributed to economic backwardness and regional imbalance in economic growth. The Indian Railways is one of the largest employers in the world which has provided employment to cores of families directly and indirectly. So States having less railway line have lower level of employment and economic activities. The States of UP, Rajasthan, Maharashtra, AP and Gujarat have largest railway network. The State of UP has the largest 8,763 km route. Odisha has just 2,461 km route which is less than Bihar and WB. The East Coast Railway having its headquarters in Bhubaneswar since 2003 has covered almost all parts of Odisha and this has been contributing sizable revenue but the Railway Ministry does not reciprocate in the same way to the railway expansion work in Odisha. The inordinate delay in completion of many ongoing projects and initiation of new projects has been a matter of huge public discontent in the State. There is little or no hope of completion of these projects in the near future due to lack of political will by both the Centre and the State. It has been told that the Khurda – Bolangiri railway line which was planned by the then British Government is long delayed and yet to see the light of the day even after 75 years of independence.

Let's see the status of airports, seaports and inland waterways in Odisha which are emerging as key factors in current days for public mobility, transportation, business, export and import and many other works of economic significance in an increasingly globalized and liberalised environment. Kerala has highest density of international airport among States in India with 4 international airports out of 34 in India. The 10 busiest airports in the country are located in Delhi, Maharashtra, Karnataka, West Bengal, AP, Gujarat, Goa and Kerala. Out of these, four airports are listed among top 100 airports of the world. The Beijing International Airport of China is the biggest airport of the world. Odisha has only one international airport and 18 airstrips.

Odisha has the natural advantage of 480 km coastline which is length wise higher than Karnataka, WB and Goa. The Pradeep seaport is listed as one of the 12 major ports in the country. Added to this, there are more than 200 minor ports in the coastal States including 14 ports of Odisha. Gujarat, TN, AP, Maharashtra and Kerala have higher length of coastline than Odisha and therefore they have more natural advantages but many of their small ports have been developed recently due to political will power and support of the Central Government.

The whole range of areas from Talasara of Baleswar district to Bahuda Muhana of Ganjam district, there are about 15 locations that can be developed into small ports and corridors of export and import linking to two major developed ports of neighbouring States. But the long pending coastal highway is still being delayed. Odisha has been consistently neglected by the Centre and the Central leadership have been apathetic to the development of Odisha whereas Odisha continues to contribute all its natural resources for national development. The seaports have been playing a significant role in the economy of nine coastal States including Maharashtra, Karnataka, Goa, Gujarat, TN, AP, West Bengal and Odisha. Out of these 12 major ports, Maharashtra has two and TN has three major ports which are listed among top 40 global container ports of the world while the port of Shanghai is the largest and busiest port. China has many major busiest seaports in the world. Ports are becoming economic hubs of export and import activities that generate income and employment and impact quality of life.

Along with seaport, the waterway also is a major advantage for communication and transport which is being used by States with having rivers and canals. The National Waterways of 14,500 km has been operational over river system of Maharashtra, Gujarat, UP, Bihar, WB, Jharkhand, Goa, Kerala, Assam, AP, Telangana, Chhattisgarh, TN and Karnataka. But in Odisha though the Mahanadi riverine port and a number of waterway projects have been planned over the river system by the Inland Waterways Authority of India, but none of the project has yet been grounded. The development of seaports and waterways will boost Odisha's economy. Six coastal districts like Baleswar, Bhadrak, Kendrapada, Jagatsingpur, Puri and Ganjam will be directly benefit. The ambitious Sagaramala project with 100 per cent direct foreign investment, and plan for coastal economic zones and highways in the coastal areas may be used to end the continued backwardness of Odisha.

POPULAR DEVELOPMENT MODELS IN INDIA

Odisha yet to be a trendsetter.

Friday, 01 April 2022

The Gujarat model of BJP, Dravidian model of DMK in Tamil Nadu, Kerala model of Left Front and Delhi model of AAP have been very popular development models of recent years and are stated to be worth emulating by others. Every State has to follow its own model for realizing development considering its own strength and weakness. However, though controversial, these models are being claimed as successful in reducing poverty and fostering economic growth and human development.

The Gujarat model has focused more on capital intensive growth with basic infrastructure development that facilitates a smooth corporate investment. In order to facilitate the process, the State Government machinery is being proactively geared up to clear all kinds of investment proposals without delay and the State has offered a host of subsidies and incentives to the corporates so that they cannot face any hurdle in doing business. It has encouraged an industrial economy, export-oriented growth, infrastructure development, such as good communication, road, railway, airport, seaport, power and other facilities that will generate employment and lead to reduction of poverty. The Gujarat model has been referred to the period from 2002-03 to 2011-12 for the effective implementation of neo-liberal economic policies which has been pursued after the nineties in the country. This model has been much appreciated by economist Jagdish Bhagwati as most ideal to be followed by others. It is being argued that the growth of the State GDP will have a trickle-down effect over reducing poverty.

The other three models have lots of similarities in terms of investment in social capital and human development. The Dravidian model has been rooted in its social justice tradition beginning with the Justice Party in early twenties and followed by Dravidian parties. The State of Tamil Nadu has focused its social justice agenda that is inclusive of overall State economic development which is very unique in India. TN is the only State having 69 percent of reservation that is inclusive of all categories of social groups. It has also very well categorized the affirmative action with principles of

distributive justice. It is being told that the emphasis of social development must reach to the sub-nationalities within a nation-state and inclusive of social groups that are historically neglected in many ways which is a major reason of their underdevelopment. The inequality and social discrimination can be addressed in development through fair participation and inclusive representation. The State has very well combined industrialization with social development while following the principles of social justice and has achieved success in all fronts. The State has been consistently arguing for federalism and financial autonomy to the States because without decentralization of power, the development of a State is not possible.

The Kerala model of development has been a matter of discussion because of its social and human development achievements in recent years and its high standards of quality of life are comparable with some of the developed countries. The State has remarkable success in literacy, primary education, healthcare, high life expectancy, low IMR, and low birth rate which are foundations to build quality human capital. The State has been embedded with progressive social and political movements that have boosted political activism and outlined a set of inclusive development agenda such as distribution and redistribution of productive assets, such as land to land less poor, housing and basic amenities, PDS, minimum wage, social security, access to quality education, skill development, social security and a host of affirmative actions for the excluded groups. The State has very well used its internal resources, advantage of a coast, remittance economy, tourism and growth in agriculture. The Kerala experience has demonstrated that focus on high social spending can lead to growth which is more beneficial to the common man that helps in reducing poverty and inequality. Growth is not just about GDP and per capita income but improving quality of life and standard of living of the last man in a historically unequal society is equally important. The model has been well appreciated by economist AmartyaSen and many others who are globally arguing for sustainable social development.

The more recent model of development which is quite nearer to Kerala's is the Delhi's AAP Government model. The model is more focused on quality education of government-run schools, primary healthcare, ensuring basic amenities such as water and electricity free of cost up to a limit and good governance with better public service delivery systems along with empowerment of vulnerable sections such as children and women. The

Government has been neutral over new tax and has not gone for any external borrowing while implementing many of its welfare schemes. It is a good case for other States. In recent times, Delhi has helped taxi and auto drivers, migrants and slum dwellers, school children and women in many ways. The most striking thing is the doorstep delivery of essential services to make ordinary citizen comfortable without visiting offices and ensuring basic amenities for the poor living in metropolis. Though Delhi is a UT unlike other States but still the development model of AAP Government has substantially drawn the attention of development experts at the national and international levels. The APP has used its development model during election campaigns in other States and its recent success in Punjab election proves the appreciation of its model by the voters.

RAPID INDUSTRIALIZATION NEEDED TO END ODISHA'S BACKWARDNESS

Friday, 18 November 2022 |

In the modern world, industrialization is the prime mover of any region's economy. Worldwide, industrialization has paved the way towards economic development. Reports on Odisha's economic status observe that the State remains industrially backward and the sign of improvement is not encouraging. Traditional agricultural societies cannot generate progress in standard of living of a majority of people of the State, which needs rapid industrialization to achieve growth. Just availability of natural resources as industrial raw materials is not enough if it is not accompanied with basic infrastructure for communication and transportation added to availability of skilled manpower. Despite natural advantages, the State has not achieved some basic infrastructures such as standard international airports, sea ports, railway lines, highways, waterways and other links which are foundations for industrialization. In an increasingly globalised economy there has been a growing movement of skilled manpower; and for that purpose, the State must build world-class education and skill development centres to meet the growing need of workers for the industrial sector. The State has to invest in both the sectors to supplement industrialization.

Added to this, the sociopolitical condition of the region must be supportive of industrialization and the local issues that arise must be handled carefully by the government so that the misunderstanding and threat of local fear do not become a factor of de-industrialization. The past experience relating to industrialization in Odisha shows many projects are not grounded on time because of protests by locals and, most importantly, due to mishandling of rehabilitation and resettlement plans by government officials. Many anti-industry people's movements have pushed the State to industrial backwardness. The major reason for protests by locals is some basic issues relating to land ownership have not yet been solved by the Revenue Department in the absence of proper survey and settlement and clarity over land-based rehabilitation and resettlement plans. It is expected that before the launching of any plan, the government must come up with whitepapers for each project with clarity about the interest of locals. Unfortunately, the State Government has mishandled local people's

protests with brutal police operations, illegal arrests, false cases against protesting leaders, denial of proper compensation, undermining environmental concerns without going for a patient hearing of locals' concerns especially relating to their life and livelihood in changing situation while they have been losing their age-old habitations.

For a long time since Independence, the issues of land ownership have not been purposefully solved by the subsequent governments in Odisha. It has also been observed that some upper-class educated Odias have become anti-industry in their approach to development, hypocritically showing nostalgic fondness towards traditional agriculture and glorifying village society though they are mostly urbanite and in no way connected to agriculture. They have been very well-encouraged their sons and daughters with English medium education to settle in most industrialized countries abroad. It is unfortunate that while most democratic and civilized nations are using science and technology for economic development and enhancement of social life, we are very much part of it; but here at home, we still have some sections of people who are actively talking against rational ideas and reforms in public platforms while opposing social changes and progress. There are people imbued with traditionalist ideas also opposing industrialization, application of science in industrial production that leads to growth and development to change the quality of life of the masses. While the majority of people of Odisha have been suffering from backwardness and are dependent on traditional means of production as well as belief in practices of the traditional social system, industrialization is the economic alternative and will pave the way for progressive socio-cultural changes. But many sociopolitical movements in the State sometimes selectively played an anti-industry role in the name of protecting the poor and marginalized which in reality has pushed the poorer sections to further backwardness.

The poorer, marginalized sections of the State are being motivated to continue with traditional agricultural and primary sector economy as the most sustainable way of living while industry and service sectors are globally emerging as alternative sources of livelihood for majorities of people. Unfortunately, intellectuals and opinion makers of the State very seldom advocate for industrialization; rather these days, rational ideas, application of science and technology and industrialization have been opposed in the name of so-called traditions and preservation of traditional agricultural societies. While the whole world is marching forward by best

use of science and technology, Odisha is celebrating its backwardness in TV screens by over-imposing discussions on violation of age-old religious traditions and not creatively engaging people to ponder over the State's poor health infrastructure in tribal areas, quality of life with good health and education, solutions for persistent natural calamities, unemployment and distress migration of vulnerable youths; and, above all, about industrial backwardness. In the present context, there has been a debate over capital ownership as the most important part of industrialization prerequisite of capital. It is evident that globally, almost all countries irrespective of political ideas have opened up their economy to major global players but with restrictions and protection of domestic industry. Till the recent past, over the last fifty years, the Central and State Governments in India were a major promoters of industrialization, but the withdrawal from macroeconomic activities of industrialization and especially disinvestment of the public sector are certainly not going to boost industrialization of backward States such as Odisha. All the major industries in Odisha such as SAIL, NALCO and NTPC have started with Government investments. The governments must not depend on private corporate and rather make use of best possible sources available with them for industrialization.

RAPID INDUSTRIALIZATION NEEDED TO END ODISHA'S BACKWARDNESS-II

Friday, 25 November 2022

Dr Harekrushna Mahtab as Industry Minister of Independent India was eager to see establishment of a number of dams and industries in Odisha. In a letter to the then Prime Minister Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru in 1948, he sought for the help of the Central Government to build dams over the Mahanadi, Brahmani and Baitarani rivers for multipurpose use of their water. He also sought cooperation from the Centre for Industrial Development in the State with help of foreign companies. He was also looking for support for construction of a new capital. Former Odisha Chief Ministers Harekrushna Mahtab and Biju Patnaik and present Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik were in charge of the Union Ministry of Industry, Steel and Mines. And among others from Odisha those who held the same ministry were Nityananda Kanungo, Srikant Jena, Dillip Ray, Braja Kishore Tripathy and Dharmendra Pradhan. But in terms of industrialisation, Odisha is still way behind other developed States.

Why Odisha remains backward in industrialization though it is the most advantageous compared to others having a long coastline and rich mineral resources is a pertinent question. Other minerals-owning States like Jharkhand and Chhattisgarh don't enjoy this privilege. Almost all the coastal States of India are becoming urbanized and industrially developed but Odisha is an exception. Many countries of the world which have got independence after the World War II have excelled in industry and economic growth but this has not happened in India where still there are backward States and regions that have not utilized their natural resources and manpower.

The Annual Survey of Industries 2019 by the NSO reported on the industrial development of the usually backward States such as Bihar, Odisha and Chhattisgarh. In spite of many advantages such as a vast sea coast and mineral resources, Odisha continues to remain backward in industrialisation. Not a single national manufacturing hub is promoted in the State. The top ten most industrialized States include Goa, TN, Maharashtra, Gujarat, UP, AP, Telangana, Kerala, Rajasthan and Haryana. It is estimated that nearly 60 per cent of the total factories are in five most

industrialised States like TN, Maharashtra, Gujarat, UP and AP. It is being reported that during the last 25 years of liberalization, these States have seen visible growth of factories. TN has the highest number of factories i.e. 38,131 till 2018 from 16,617 in 1990, followed by Maharashtra, Gujarat, UP and AP. Odisha is a major supplier of migrant workers to these States. The State has only 3,063 factories. The number is even less than Bihar and Chhattisgarh. In terms of employment, Odisha has engaged about 3 lakh persons whereas TN has engaged more than 25 lakh persons. Kerala which is geographically smaller than Odisha has 7,696 factories. The State has employed 3, 50,000 persons. The economic growth of TN is put together on a port based economy, trade and manufacturing, having well-built infrastructure such as three major ports, 15 minor ports and eight airports with rail and road networks. The minerals are mostly sold out from Odisha for the last 70 years without any value addition. The mineral and metallurgical products, steel and aluminum constitute a major share of the State's total export. They are being shipped to China, Japan, Malaysia, South Korea, Taiwan, USA, Vietnam, Russia, Canada, Iran, UK, Germany, Spain, Australia, and UAE mostly from the Paradip port. But the coastline also remains unexplored. The coastal highway and minor ports have not been developed like other States.

The farmers, fisher folks and forest-based communities of the State remain backward and underdeveloped; still a majority of them depend on traditional ways of cultivation, and mostly paddy is the principal crop. The quality of life and living standard is one the poorest in the country with low wage rate and distress migration. Odisha is not featured among top ten developed States of India. Internationally, its IMR and MMR are just equal to the condition of Ethiopia and sub Saharan Africa. There have been continued huge regional imbalances within the State and persistent inequality in socio-economic status among different ethnic and social groups. In the process of slow growth of industrial and manufacturing based employment, as well as the service sector, the rural youth prefer to migrate to industrially advanced States and metropolises in search of employment as a better option for their future. The trend of migration has been increasing in recent times due to frequent visits of natural calamities that affect the agricultural economy more. It is not emerging as an attractive economic destination; rather it is seen as a labor supplier State. Maybe a countable few Odias are better placed at national and international level but that has not been able to change the overall image of the State.

There is wider scope for rapid industrialization in Odisha which can change both material and social conditions of the majority of people. Many of our historically unresolved social issues such as caste, gender and ethnic based discrimination are closely linked to the feudal agrarian economic system. The landless labourers, sharecroppers, small and marginal farmers and forest dwellers have no future in the ongoing agrarian economy of the State. For the last 70 years, the State has not initiated any agrarian reform to change the feudal mode of production relation as it is found that still the real tillers have no land to cultivate and are deprived of all kinds of State protection.

Social and economic inequalities can be addressed by improving production and growth of all sectors of the economy and not just banking on traditional agriculture. Social justice ideas in our constitution must be reflected in our changing economic systems in order to remove economic and social inequalities and to ensure a decent standard of living of working people. Unfortunately during the last 72 years inequality remains an issue of concern. There are a host of schemes for people living in slums and hamlets but they have failed to ensure the wellbeing of the people by reducing poverty. The political parties in the State fighting elections have no development agenda before the people for the whole State; rather they are routinely giving freebies to get votes. These days, ruling parties are engaged in bribing people with liquor, feast and cash to woo voters. In a modern constitutional State with multiparty democracy, it is the duty of political parties to drive the people towards building a developed society but unfortunately the ruling parties are not serious about the condition of the economy. They are more interested in continuing in power by only managing voters without development. The subsequent State Governments for last 72 years have been more focused on relief and rehabilitation, State charity and welfare model to address the issues of poor and very less attention has been paid to long term visions of economic growth with capital investment such as industrialization based on its many forms of natural advantages and also potential human resource development through quality education and skill development. It is not true that Odisha is not developing at all, but the fact is when there is a comparison with other industrially developed States, its position remains at the bottom of many socio-economic indicators because of its slow growth.

BOOST MANUFACTURING SECTOR OF BACKWARD STATES.

Friday, December 2, 2022

China with economic liberalization policy has occupied the position of being the “world’s factory”, accounting for about 30 percent of global manufacturing production in recent years. The USA, Japan, Germany, and South Korea are among the top five in terms of share of global manufacturing output. The share of India however was about 3 per cent only though it is expected that in the coming days the countries such as India, Vietnam, Mexico, Malaysia and Singapore will perform better.

The political decision of the government of China to allow foreign investment and economic reform in the eighties has resulted in such a growth of the manufacturing sector. It was said that economic development and enhanced living standards are the best defence that has demonstrated the superiority of the socialist system, which balances central planning and open market forces.

Though late, the economic liberalization policy of India is slowly getting more open up and moves to facilitate the manufacturing sector to become a global potential modern hub. India already has a potential IT work force and customer based service centres with many advantages of available natural resources and port facilities for advantageous trade.

The growth of a domestic manufacturing eco-system depends more on basic infrastructure development and skilled manpower which are highly essential. The government has been engaged in building huge infrastructures to meet the growing need of the coming days.

But it is found that the investment taking place in different parts of the country is uneven and non –inclusive of backward states and regions having more number of marginalized sections.

The major manufacturing clusters are coming up in states of Maharashtra, TN, Gujarat, Karnataka, UP, AP and Telangana. The state of TN has the largest number of factories and with 3 major ports, Chennai becoming the industrial and commercial centre with Chennai-Tirupati-Nellor tri-city industrial hub becoming a more attractive destination for manufacturing. The areas of Noida-greater Noida, Yamuna expressway, Gurgaon,

Manesar-Bawal belt with Jewar International Airport are coming up as major hubs for Chinese factories. The Delhi –Mumbai corridor, NH-48, terminates at Chennai traversing through seven states, Mumbai-Aurangabad corridor, Pune industrial area, Ahmadabad, Vadodara-Bharuch cluster, Bangalore –Hyderabad are becoming silicon valley.

It may be good for the states and country as a whole but the ongoing industrial growth is not balanced and inclusive of regions and states that are still lagging behind industrialization. The fact is India is heading towards a situation where we have industrially poor and backward states as well as more industrial advanced states. The poor and backward states will continue to be the suppliers of poor migrant workers to the industrially advanced states; thus the regional imbalance will continue. The country will have few mega business and industrial centers and many regions left out with inherent backwardness. There will not be a balanced growth of backward regions at par with others. This is not Sabka Saath Sabka Vikas. We cannot build a nation with so many differences in economic infrastructure for a quality living.

The chief ministers of different states hold conferences with corporations and there has been a competition among states to attract industries . Now almost all states have started offering as much subsidy as possible to private companies.

In a recent move, the government of Odisha has made a cabinet decision to offer as much as possible relaxation in ensuring inputs for private industry at the cost of the public treasury. On the other hand, state investment for building the public sector has been discouraged with the saying that the state has no business to do business. This competition among unequal states will not be beneficial for poor states. The centre must help the poor states in building public infrastructure such as railway, port, airport, and highways to boost industrial growth. Along with infrastructure, the centre must support the states to build world class quality education and skill development centres to make the youth employable in upcoming manufacturing industries.

The development of infrastructure for industrialization is not the sole duty of the state alone because mostly the Railway, Airport, Sea –post, National Highway, Express Highway, and other communication links are under the legislative and administrative control of the central government.

It is found that the government of India has been investing more on already developed areas and states having relatively more number industries while continuously neglecting the poor states and backward regions which are still struggling with mobilization of capital for infrastructural development especially for the manufacturing sector.

The mineral resource-rich zones of the country such as Odisha, Chattisgarh, Jharkhand, and West Bengal remain industrially backward because only extractive industries have taken place here, mostly mining activities. The freight policy of the central government in 1950s has discouraged mineral-based industries in these states and industrialization has taken place in other parts of the country.

The constitutional provisions have allowed limited resource federalism by which the state ownership over its resources has been minimized through central legislation that has put restrictions over the state's own plan for industrialization.

The nation must pay back to the mineral resource rich states their dues and compensate their loss they incurred over the years due to discriminatory economic policies of the center. Sharing of power and resources is fundamental to inclusive growth and inclusive democracies, which need to be reflected in the investment policy of the governments to bring down regional imbalances.

LET STATE FOCUS ON VALUATION OF MINERALS THAN ROYALTY.

Friday, 07 January 2022

The Annual Survey of Industries 2019 by the NSO reported on the industrial development of the usually backward States such as Bihar, Odisha and Chhattisgarh. In spite of many advantages such as a vast sea coast and mineral resources, Odisha continues to remain backward in industrialization. The top ten most industrialized States include Goa, TN, Maharashtra, Gujarat, UP, AP, Telangana, Kerala, Rajasthan and Haryana. It is estimated that nearly 60 per cent of the total factories are in five most industrialized States like TN, Maharashtra, Gujarat, UP and AP. It is being reported that during last 25 years of liberalization these States have visible growth of factories. TN has highest number of factories i.e. 38,131 till 2018 from 16,617 in 1990, followed by Maharashtra, Gujarat, UP and AP. Odisha is a major supplier of migrant workers to these States. The State has only 3,063 factories. The number even is less Bihar and Chhattisgarh. In terms of employment, Odisha has engaged about 3 lakh persons whereas TN has engaged more than 25 lakh persons. Kerala which geographically smaller than Odisha has 7,696 factories. The State has employed 3, 50,000 persons. The economic growth of TN is put together on port based economy, trade and manufacturing, having well-built infrastructure such as three major ports, 15 minor ports and eight airports with rail and road networks. Why Odisha remains backward in industrialization though it is the most advantageous compared to others having a long coastline and rich mineral resources. Other minerals-owning States like Jharkhand and Chhattisgarh don't enjoy this privilege. Almost all the coastal States of India are becoming urbanized and industrially developed but Odisha is an exception to the national trend.

The possible development by using both the resources has not yet taken place in Odisha. The minerals are mostly sold out for last 70 years without any value addition. The coastline also remains unexplored for its advantageous utilization. The farmers, fisher folks and forest-based communities of the State remain backward and underdeveloped. The subsequent State Governments for last 70 years have been more focused on relief and rehabilitation and very less attention has been paid to long

term visions of economic growth such as industrialization based on its many natural advantages. Odisha is a storehouse of a variety of mineral wealth; even many strategic minerals such as bauxite, chromite, iron ore, uranium, limestone, graphite, manganese and coal are available in large quantities but why these resources are not being utilized for industrialization is an issue. Rather export of minerals to outside States in through-away price that mostly helps the private mining companies having corporate offices outside Odisha. The Odisha Mining Corporation is the only exception in this regard. The mineral and metallurgical products, steel and aluminum constitute a major share of total export. They are being shipped to China, Japan, Malaysia, South Korea, Taiwan, USA, Vietnam, Russia, Canada, Iran, UK, Germany, Spain, Australia, and UAE mostly from the Paradip port. For a long time, though there has been constant growth of mineral production, (Currently the State accounts for 25 per cent of total major minerals production in the country) but the Government of Odisha has not mobilized adequate investments to set up mineral-based industries for its value addition. It seems we are only satisfied with mineral revenue and royalty projected as growth, along with routine demand before the Centre for increase in royalty. The amount of revenue and royalty is a very insignificant percentage of the total value of minerals and metallurgical products and by that the State has been economically exploited by a few corporate bodies with help of Central and State Governments. Even all major infrastructure of the state such as road, railway and port is being used to serve the mining companies at the cost of the development of the people. These extractive industries have no interest in overall development of Odisha as it has been witnessed that the major mining companies have not been even addressing the issues of the locals who are getting affected due to extraction of minerals. They managed to drastically reduce the amount of fine imposed by Shah Commission on illegal mining. Odisha must use its natural advantage to set up mineral-based industries using all its possible investment options including public sector and FDI. The RSP, Nalco and many other industries coming up in different areas of the State have substantially contributed to generate employment and growth of the economy. There must be such industries in other parts of the State, especially in coastal areas to use the port facilities. Next to minerals the other natural advantage of Odisha is its 480km coastline which is lengthwise higher than Karnataka, WB and Goa but the coast having one major port and 14 small

ports has not been fully used for the cohesive development of Odisha. Gujarat, TN, AP, Maharashtra and Kerla have higher length of coastline than Odisha; so they have more natural advantages but many of their small ports have been developed recently due to political will of the State Government with timely support of the Central Government. Ports are becoming international economic hubs of export and import activities that generate income and employment as well as impact in improvement of quality of life of the local people and economy of the State. Odisha has a long range of areas from Talasara of Baleswar district to Bahudamuhana of Ganjam. There are about 15 locations which can be developed into small ports along with coastal highway linking to two major developed ports Visakhapatnam and Kolkata of neighboring States. Odisha's costal districts mostly depend on agriculture and suffer with regular visit of natural calamities. There has been huge migration of youths from costal districts in recent years to outside in search of employment. In order to arrest the unemployment problem and ensure fast economic progress, rapid industrialization must be taken up in Odisha.

MINERALS-BASED UNITS CAN SPUR ODISHA'S ECONOMY

Friday, 14/01/2022

Setting up Minerals-based industries is a natural advantage for Odisha because of its many unique economic features. Ideally, it is expected that Odisha must have more number of minerals based industries but this has not happened till date. By contrast, many other states in India having less mineral deposits but have developed smelting and processing facilities and setup more mineral based industries such as Iron and steel, Aluminum, Copper, lead and Zinc smelting, basic and light Chemicals, Fertilizer and Cement etc. The cement industries are located mostly in southern states. Many of such industries in other states have established with direct involvement of the central Government but the centre has not paid much special attention to the industrial growth of mineral bearing states such as Odisha, in spite of its comparative advantages. Along with power, Iron and steel are the basic industries and have worked as foundation for economic development. Way back we had Bengal Iron works in 1874 and TISCO is the oldest in 1907. In modern independent India, the steel industries were started in early sixties with the help of Russia, Germany and France in Durgapur, Bhilai, Rourkela, Bokaro and Buranpur in the mineral regions of the country. They all have played a major role in the overall development of the area with use the local available natural resources and manpower. Later, Coal India, SAIL, and NTPC like Public sector mining companies have promoted by Govt. And they all have been working very successfully. But the similar public sector initiative have not taken place by Govt. in the later period though it has been very much required. During the current phase the government has taken a reverse move and encouraging more privatization and liberalization. So at this time industrialization is more dependent on international private players and globalized market. Day by day the mineral market become more oligopolistic rather than competitive. The trade of minerals are largely controlled by few corporates.

With the change of time, minerals are becoming the backbone of modern civilization and the globalized economy of the world. Today from iPhone to missiles and medicine, almost for everything we are in need of minerals.

As the quality of life and living standard changes, there has been growing demand for use of minerals, as half of the world trade is in manufacturing goods. India is one among the top ten countries having mining production and mineral resources reserve such China, South Africa, Canada, Russia, Brazil, USA, Venezuela, Congo and Australia. These countries contribute to meet the foremost demand of the world. The economic growth of China is built on the strategic use of mineral resources. China is one of the largest exporter and importer of minerals because of its insufficient local reserve to meet her domestic need. Countries such as Australia have vibrant mining economy because of its large deposit of Gold and Uranium. India imports around 6000 commodities from 140 countries and exports about 7500 commodities to about 192 countries. The largest trading partner of India includes countries such as China and USA, UAE, Saudi Arabia, Switzerland, Germany, South Korea, Indonesia, Malaysia, UK, Nederland and Hong Kong. Chinese mining companies such as China Shenhua Energy are placed among world Mining Corporations such as Glen Core, BHP, Rio Tinto etc. China produces about half of world's steel and imported iron ore.

In India, during the year 2020-2021, the Ministry of Mines reported that the about 90 percent share in terms of value of mineral production comes from 10 states such as Rajasthan, Odisha, Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, AP, Telangana, Karnataka, MP, and Gujarat, Goa and UP. The mineral regions such as Odisha, Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, WB, MP, Bihar and UP must have more industrial development for the use of mineral resources available in the area to generate employment for the local people. It is found that mostly Labour migration is relatively higher from this region to rest of the areas of the country. The backwardness in industrial growth has created regional imbalance as well as lopsided development in the country. The many forms of backwardness of this region is because of historical negligence of planned industrial development. With movement of capital through industrialization, the economic activities will largely contribute to decentralising production and creating demand for local market while minimising distress Labour migration and other related issues in the backward regions. The development of backward states needs basic infrastructure, power, housing, roads and communication, basic amenities for which use of metallic and non-metallic raw materials is required. The neighboring landlocked states such as Jharkhand and Chhattisgarh with minerals products can use the ports of Odisha for transportation by which

there can be development of communication and connectivity of this backward region.

For last seventy years, the central Govt. and the state Governments of mineral-bearing states such as Odisha have not systematically planned much for industrialization centered on use of its own minerals but rather become suppliers of minerals to other states for industrialization. Now even with the liberalized international market it has become more challenging for states to bargain with the international giants for fixation of price and sale. The private investment coming up in backward states for the use of mineral resources increasingly face the challenges of industrialization from many ways. In some places it has become local people verses industry and it is increasingly becoming difficult for the Government to handle the situation. In many countries, the transnational mining companies are detecting terms to elected Governments and making a mockery of democracy by managing election donations. The growth of oligopoly in mineral market is a big challenge to the economies more dependent on mineral resources. They have also setup foundations to manage the environmental lobbies and anti-displacement protests that has been consistently questing the sustainability of local economy and environment from common peoples' prospective. So it is desirable for Odisha to go for rapid mineral based industrialization but without closing eyes to the issues raised by the locals and concerned citizens which are equally important for inclusive growth.

BOOST ODISHA'S TEXTILE SECTOR WITH MODERN TECH

Friday, 09 July 2021

The textile sector has huge prospects in Odisha with adoption of modern technology, use of quality raw materials and improved skill of the workers to meet the demand of growing world fashion industry and emerging direct customers buying online. Odisha is included among 10 major cotton producing States of India and more than 60 per cent of the textile industries are cotton-dependent. Odisha has the natural advantage of availability of raw materials and traditional skill workers which has not been systematically tapped to meet the worldwide export possibilities as well as increasing demand of domestic consumers.

The major textile mills and cotton producing States including Maharashtra, Gujarat, TN, UP, Karnataka, MP, Rajasthan and WB have a rich scope of employment and economic growth where the migrant workers from Odisha and other backward States are employed.

The Department of Industrial and Policy Promotion data shows that five top States including AP, Telangana, Haryana, Jharkhand and Gujarat are most suitable places for doing textile business. The Places such as Vizag, Gurugram, Faridabad, Panipat, Surat, Ahmadabad and Vapi are emerging textile manufacturing hubs. India is among world's largest producers and exporter after China which is the largest manufacturer and exporter of textile products. The other countries in the segment include Germany, Bangladesh, Vietnam, Italy, Turkey, USA, Hong Kong, and Spain. China has about one third of the world's export of textile while in recent years Bangladesh and Vietnam have done better with increase in manufacturing and export due to the advantage of domestic labour policy and current change in international trade practices.

India is one of the largest producers of fiber that includes cotton, silk, wool, jute and other man-made fibres. The textile industry in India is still unorganized and continues in small-scale operation. It is time to shift to modern machinery and techniques at a greater scale to thrive in the competitive world market. The success of China is more linked to its low-cost production by use of hi-tech machinery and quality raw materials

along with labour policy and above all, an open market approach to investment.

Countries such as Spain and Germany are more engaged in manufacturing of textile machines such as spinning, weaving dyeing etc. The USA is more into medical textile, protective equipment and industrial fabrics and mostly non-woven or not knitted items such as carpets, home furnished fabrics, medical products, electric conductive fabric and diapers. Italy has been focusing on e-textiles such as electronic components woven with fabric.

In India textile sector is one of the biggest employers after agriculture. The agriculture sector has been overburdened so far as employment is concerned. The textile sector in India must have to expand to accommodate the surplus labour force from agriculture by modernising both sectors. Textile is labour-intensive and can employ more people with its wider expansion.

The major advantage with India is the availability of quality raw materials specially jute, cotton, wool, and synthetic fiber. The textile industries in India are mostly facing the issues of labour unrest and shutdowns for a number of political and economic reasons which need to be addressed by the Government with a suitable policy.

It is reported that around 600 textile mills were closed due to the strike by the trade unions. The Government of Odisha, Handloom, Textile and Handicraft Department has not changed its traditional approach to the development of the textile industry of the State in spite of the huge potentialities in the sector. Unfortunately, textile in Odisha is being seen as a caste based occupation and traditional cottage industry where as the approach to its development is more welfare beneficiary-centric without addressing the main economic cause of its underdevelopment.

There has been no substantial investment and macro planning to change the production process by use of technology and application of modern knowhow. There are about 65,000 weaver households in the State having traditional skill but the Government approach must be changed to cope with new developments happening globally in all sectors including textile.

The Directorate of Export Promotion and Manufacturing, Government of Odisha data shows that the share of handloom, handicraft and textile together is not even one per cent of the share of value of exports of the State. More than 90 per cent of the exports of the State to about 100

countries of the world are mainly minerals and metallurgical products. But long ago, Odisha was a major exporter of textile products. The move of the State Government must be to do away with the traditional approach to strengthen a caste-based occupation to build a modern manufacturing sector by inviting open investment, new technology and inducting skill and exposure among the workers of all social groups.

It must learn from other States to make best use of its raw materials and manpower available and make a roadmap in line with global trend in textile sector inviting FDI. Odisha has opportunity in production of cotton, jute and silk. India is second largest producer of silk. The sericulture industry in the State has all potentialities to engage large numbers of people in activities such as plantation of the host plant to rearing of the silkworm and its extraction. Currently, about 12,000 hectares of land used for seri farming in the State mostly engages the ST population. The Ministry of Textile has made special grants under the provision of the Scheduled Caste sub-plan and Scheduled Tribe sub-plan for promotion of textile but unfortunately, the Odisha Government has no such scheme to engage these communities. Similarly, the weavers and cotton and jute farmers largely belong to the OBC who need to be supported to grow raw materials for textile industry and effort should be made to set up manufacturing units in the areas such as Kalahandi for cotton and jute in eastern coastal part and silk in scheduled areas to engage the local people both in production and processing. There is also a need for building infrastructure and amenities centres and hubs for research, training, marketing and linking the stakeholders.

DEVELOP STATE'S BUDDHIST HERITAGE TOURISM

Friday, 02 July 2021

With the increasing expansion of modern travel facilities around the world, the tourism sector has emerged as one of the most visible sources of economic activity. Heritage and historical monuments sites are great assets which can be used for economic activities for locals. The historical and natural advantages of different locations of a State can be developed to attract different kinds of tourists, including heritage and religious tourists of different faiths. Odisha as the ancient land of Buddha has such tremendous potential to promote Buddhist heritage tourism which can attract lakhs of tourists from all over the world, especially from countries with Buddhist believers of South-East, and East Asia.

Buddhism has historically played a role in promoting tourism among South–East Asian countries. Globally, countries such as France, Spain, USA, China, Italy, Turkey, Mexico, Germany, Thailand, UK and Japan were the most visited countries of international tourists.

Coming home India Tamil Nadu, Maharashtra, UP, Delhi, WB, Rajasthan, Kerala, Punjab, Bihar and Goa were the top ten States in receiving more number of international tourists. Bihar's Bodh Gaya and Nalanda are the most attractive destination of international visitors. Bihar has 3.5 crore tourists of both domestic and foreign tourists in the year 2019. India receives less than two percent of the global tourists.

However, India is among top ten countries having the largest Buddhist population while the others include China, Thailand, Japan, Myanmar, Sri Lanka, Vietnam, Cambodia, South Korea, and Malaysia. Despite potentialities, Odisha has not yet fully utilised its vast treasure of tourist potentials specially its Buddhist heritage.

The plan of the Government of India in collaboration the World Bank and Japanese Government for building a Buddhist Circuit to promote places connected to Buddha and Buddhist heritage has not included Odisha in its plan. The Chief Minister of Odisha has requested the Centre to be part of the plan. Tourism as a subject must be placed in the Concurrent List by which both the State and Centre can jointly execute the plans. The heritage

assets will boost the travel and hospitality segment in a big way. It also helps in revisiting and reviving our inspiring past memories of the region that was once well connected to other parts in the globe through maritime trade and Buddhism. The visit of Buddhist scholars, believers and many others in large numbers will have a wider impact over the progressively changing social-cultural life and quality of living of the people. The multi-cultural values and international exposure will strengthen our age-old secular ethos and pave the way for access to the scope of education, trade and other economic linkage with most advanced Buddhist countries. The heritage tourism includes visit to sites of remains of Buddha's tombs, Puspagri University, the Kalinga war field in Dhauli, and many more structures which have been excavated. Historians and archaeologists have traced that Odisha has a written history of some 2300 years from the days of Kalinga war in 261 BC.

Kalinga was thickly populated and early forms of people's democracy were from of governance of the communities. There were Janapadas, the People's Republic . Buddha's Dhama/teachings were the belief of the people of the land.

Though late but the Archeological Survey of India's excavation work has explored hundreds of Buddhist sites from different parts of the State. It is said that during the period from 6th century BC to 15th-16th century AD various sects of Buddhism prevailed here as evident from the archeological and historical findings. In the past, Kalinga played a major role in spread of Buddhism in the South-East Asia. It is found that from Baleswar to Ganjam in coast and in central-west Odisha including Dambarugada of Boudh, Subarnapur, Ganiapali, Bargarh, Parimalgiri, Balangir, and Sambalpur besides in a number of other places, the remains and structures of Buddhists are available.

The places include Khadipada, Soro in Baleswar, Kupari in Bhadrak, Ratnagiri, Udayagiri and Lalitgiri in Jajpur and Tarpur and Naraj in Cuttack district, Kuruma near Konark of Puri and Banpur in Khurda district etc.

The most interesting site at Ratnagiri was discovered in 1905 and later around 1960 the three places Lalitgiri, Udayagiri and Ratnagiri excavation revealed many new areas of spread of Buddhism in the area. These three sites form the diamond triangle. Rantagiri has a well built archaeological museum. The past heritage sites can also be connected to present modern Buddhist places of tourist interest such as the Dhauli Peace Pagoda and

Jirang monastery in Mohana of Gajapati. These important places need well connectivity through road, railway and air services and most necessary is making available of hospitality infrastructure to take care of the comfort of the visitors.

These places must be ideally most peaceful from the security point of view of the visitors. The law and order of the locality and public behaviour must be conducive to visitors. The best of the local quality foods, cultural events and art and craft should be made available to visitors. There is also a demand for qualified well well-mannered tourist guides having proficiency in English and other languages which can properly explain things and help the visitors. They can be attached to hotels and tour operators. It is also highly required to give much emphasis on the preservation, restoration and maintenance of these heritage assets of our human civilisation. The State's universities must undertake research and documentation work to link with the heritage that will attract scholars from all over the world and make Odisha a knowledge centre. The State Government must invest in building infrastructure and inviting private and public investors including FDI to promote travel agencies, good hotel and restaurants in the locality while building good roads, railway line and international airport connectivity on priority. Odisha's Buddhist sites must be linked to other States in north India having more number of heritage sites. The Government of Odisha must act first to use its possibilities in removing its persistent backwardness in all aspects including tourism.

RELIGIOUS, HERITAGE TOURISM TO BOOST ODISHA ECONOMY.

In recent years, the government of Odisha has been spending a lot to develop cities and encourage tourism, including temple renovation and beautification all over the state. The major projects taken up are Samaleswari temple, Baripada temple, Maa Tarini, Maa Bhadrakali, Akhandalamani, Taratarini, Balabhadrajew, Sri Gopteswar, Koraput, Lingaraj, Jagarnath Puri, and Konark Heritage corridor. These places are famous for devotees and a hub of religious tourism. In many ways, tourism here involves economic interest and a source of local livelihood. The most ambitious project of the state government in Puri is named as ABADHA (Augmentation of Basic Amenities and Development of Heritage and Architecture). It is good to make Puri a world-class heritage city that will help Odisha in many ways. Puri has the potential to be one of the major tourist destinations for all categories of tourists.

As a matter of composite culture, the other non-Hindu place such as Gurudwara, Church, Mosques, Dargha, Math, Budha Viar, Pidhas of Adivasies, and Alekha Dharma Tungies also deserve equal attention for their renovation and beautification. The state government must support to meet the aspiration of believers of different faith. Odisha has the historical advantage of Buddhist heritage tourism which can be explored by targeting international tourists mostly from Buddhist countries. Odisha must not miss the opportunity in developing the diamond triangle of Lalitgiri, Udayagiri and Ratnagiri in Jaipur and Cuttack districts. These three sites form the diamond triangle. Rantagiri has a well-built archaeological museum. The past heritage sites can also be connected to present modern Buddhist places of tourist interest such as the Dhauli Peace Pagoda and Jirang monastery in Mohana of Gajapati. These important places need good connectivity through road, railway and air services and most necessary is making available hospitality infrastructure to take care of the comfort of the visitors in these spots.

This trend of temple renovation has been encouraged in many ways by governments with packages of support and subsidies to temples for AARTI, and free Prasad distribution under schemes of central government.

About 25 temple trusts in north India have been supported up to Rs1.5 crore each for the purpose. The centre also launched the PRASADAM scheme for temples, Darghas and Churches. The Seva Bhoja Yojana scheme has been introduced to reimburse the central share of CGST and INGST on items for Prasad offered for free by religious institutions including Temples, Gurudwara, Mosque, Church, Math etc.

The government of India's Chara Dham project to connect Yamunotri, Gangotri, Kedernath and Badrinath through an all-weather road network and railway lines will promote religious tourism among Hindus. Already Varanasi is the world's most popular pilgrimage site that attracts millions of devotees. The other places such as Golden temple in Amritsar, and Palitana of Gujurat attracts Sikh and Jain devotees.

Travel for spiritual purposes has become one of the most growing events worldwide. Mecca, Vatican City, Jerusalem, Saxony in Germany, Basilica in Mexico, Bethlehem and many more religious and heritage places attract a good amount of travellers from all over the world that includes both spiritual as well as non-spiritual visitors. Such growing travels have wider economic implications over the economy of the countries having such places.

The state of Andhra Pradesh has temple renovation under the Nadu-Nedu programme to provide better facilities to devotees such as accommodation, queue lines, tonsure hall, Prasadm centre and many other requirements.

The TamilNadu government has planned for the renovation of 1000 temples with an estimated budget of Rs500 crores and increased the Annadanam /free meal schemes in about 800 temples. As a supportive scheme to temples such as new Gosala /cowsheds are being established near the temple to provide shelter to the cattle donated to the temple.

The Karnataka government has plans to mobilize NRI funds for temple renovation work. Banks such as Indian Banks and State Bank of Patiala have come forward to operate e-Hundi electronic transfer machines to make easy transfer of donations from devotees. It has been observed that a good number of NRIs are taking interest in renovation of temples and in building new temples . Recently, a NRI doctor has donated Rs1 crore for building a Jagarnath temple in Jajpur district.

Though the number of atheists in the world has been growing day by day but still millions of people carry their faith and belief into practice . It is being believed that a religious pilgrimage is meant for salvation or spiritual enlightenment and for varieties of religious reasons that need to be materialized in life time of an individual. It is the duty of the government to make best use of the situation without bias and affinity to any religion as a matter of constitutional morality of the secular state while respecting the religious sentiments of the believers.

While the government of Odisha is spending hugely on renovation and beautification of temples, it is equally important to make such places free from all forms of discrimination based on caste and gender or any other basis in the name of tradition that debar people of same faith without having a free and dignified entry to such spiritual places. The management and function of such institutions must be inclusive of all social groups following the principles of inclusion and equal representation and participation of all devotees irrespective of their economic and social status.

In order to encourage more devotees as well as tourists, these places must be ideally most peaceful from the security point of view of the visitors. The law and order of the locality and public behaviour must be conducive to visitors. The best of the local quality foods, cultural events and art and craft should be made available to visitors. There is also a demand for qualified well-mannered tourist guides. The State Government must invest in building infrastructure and inviting private and public investors including FDI to promote travel agencies, good hotels and restaurants in the locality while building good roads, railway line and international airport connectivity on priority that can draw a range of economic activities beneficial to the local as well as the state as whole.

LET ODISHA FOCUS FASTER URBANIZATION AND INDUSTRIALIZATION.

Friday, 21 January 2022

The continued economic backwardness of Odisha can be overcome with rapid industrialization and urbanization. It is found that the economically developed States of India are also most urbanized and industrialized such as Tamil Nadu and Kerala. The industrialization process of a State depends on political will and patronization of Government without which it is almost impossible. Already, Odisha has missed many opportunities and a further delay in industrialization for any kind of reason will have wider ramifications over the overall development of the State. Dr Harekrushna Mahtab as Industry Minister of Independent India was eager to see establishment of a number of dams and industries in Odisha. In a letter to the then Prime Minister Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru in 1948, he sought for the help of the Central Government to build dams over the Mahanadi, Brahmani and Baitarani rivers for multipurpose use of their water. He also sought cooperation from the Centre for Industrial Development in the State with help of foreign companies. He was also looking for support for construction of a new capital. Former Odisha Chief Ministers Harekrushna Mahtab and Biju Patnaik and present Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik were in charge of Union Ministry of Industry, Steel and Mines. And among others from Odisha those who hold the same ministry were Nityananda Kanungo, Dillip Ray, Braja Kishore Tripathy and most recently Dharmendra Pradhan. But in terms of industrialization, Odisha is still way behind other developed States. Odisha has enough scope for establishing forest-NTFP and agro based, sea food, food processing, chemicals and petro chemicals, textile, apparel, tourism, electronic manufacturing and mineral based industries. But during last seventy years, none of these sectors has been focused to the desired extent. Many countries of the world which have got independence after the Second World War have excelled in industry and economic growth but this has not happened in India where still there are backward States and regions that have not utilized their natural resources and manpower. In case of Odisha in spite of planned economic intervention through Five Year and Annual, still a majority of poor people lives in tribal and rural areas of the State. These people are being forced to live in a subsistence economy

without any major change in their income and asset utilization. Agriculture, forest and fishing sector are not being modernized with application of technology and input amenities such as irrigation, credit, marketing, storage and processing facilities. A majority of the people follow a land-centric feudal mode of production and socio-cultural values based on traditional economic relationships. The sharecroppers, agricultural workers, NTFP collectors, fisher folk and small producers are living in hopeless condition. For generations together, their quality of life and standard of living have not changed much as well as their social status. Landlessness and low wage along with illiteracy have made their life unhappy. The new generation of educated youths from marginalized sections are looking for new kind of employment opportunities to come out of poverty and backwardness. A sizeable section of youth has been migrating to industrially advanced States in search of livelihood. It is proved that the much hyped free food and other freebies schemes out of public money are not going to generate employment and growth; rather they are having a disturbing impact over work culture and self-respect of people for a dignified living.

The so-called schemes for poor have not contributed to put on check the growing distress migration of both skilled and unskilled unemployed youths. Experience from other developed States shows that only rapid industrialization can change the economy of the State and transfer the State economy. This will positively change the dependent exploitative economic relation that continues to marginalize the poor people of the State. The percentage of urban population in Odisha was half of the national average. The State has not invested much in building new cities and towns. The emerging cities around the State such as Vizag, Kolkata, Ranchi and Raipur have become corporate destinations and Bhubaneswar is known for religious pilgrimage city. The long coastline between Digha and Vizag remains largely unutilized for economic activities. So along with industrialization, Odisha must proceed towards urbanization with slum free cities. There must be high priority on affordable quality housing and make available basic amenities such as toilet, drinking water, and electricity for each household. All panchayats must be connected with good all-weather roads and internet, mobile connectivity and public transportation system. The basic infrastructure must be built by the Government to save time in travel and for easy conveyance. In order to develop quality skilled human resources, health and education are most important areas which

must be available free to each and every citizen without discrimination. The whole process of urbanization will contribute to change of quality of life and in building a healthy and enlightened society as alternative to traditional caste-based male-dominated village society that perpetuates division and discrimination in human society. The urban life in modern cities coming up in industrial locations is relatively progressive in many ways.

COASTAL HIGHWAY 516-A - OVERDUE FOR ODISHA.

Centre neglecting Odisha from its opportunity to become global hub.

October 30 ,2020

The natural advantage for Odisha is its 480K.m. of coastline which has not been explored for its fullest utilization in the interest of the people of the state. Today connectivity infrastructure become lifeline of contemporary development and non-connectivity become one of major reason of persistent socio-eco backwardness but in spite of popular demand for costal high way and public promise by central Govt. in 2015 accompanied with clearance by the state the project has not made any progress. The inordinate delay in grounding this plan helps sustain continued backwardness of coastal Odisha and deprives its people from their meaning full economic participation in national growth. Both the centre and state have been responsible for such delay in neglecting a backward state.

There are tremendous potentials of port-based high-value economic activities in the areas and opportunities of eco-tourism by developing communication of road, railways and airline connectivity . In the whole range of areas from Talasara of Balasore district to Bahuda Muhana Ganjam district there are about 15 locations which can be developed into small ports and corridors of export and import hubs linking with two major developed port areas of neighboring states. This will pave the ways for industrialization in the areas especially for manufacturing units and agro-based industries. The existence of eco-hubs such as unique Chilika lagoon and Bhitarkaniaka sanctuary and others likely locations and heritages can be fully developed as epitome of tourist destinations of international standard with all modern facilities to attract the people from all over the world. This can be further developed as destinations for health care centers, educational institutions and corporate offices linking people globally to generate employment and bring change in quality of life of the local people suffering since generations in spite of development of science and technologies.

The coastal areas of Odisha includes undivided Balasore, Cuttack, Puri and Ganjam along with Koraput and Sambalpur formed the modern Odisha in 1936 but since 85 years of its statehood have not changed the inherent backwardness as even today Odisha remain the poorest state and identified as a major contributor of distress migrant workers to India and outside . The state is also not yet substantially reduced the poverty level of its inhabitants as well as quality of public life. Not only distress migration or poverty but also in the field of health and education the state performed very miserable in comparison to other developed states of the country. There has been also traditional approaches to management of disasters such as flood and cyclone, which is a persistent disadvantage with the people of coastal areas of the state that routinely visits very year in the absence of application of scientific solutions and unresolved long pending structural socio-economic issues of feudal nature in spite of constitutional governance. The leaders of modern Odisha who have been also largely belong to the coastal areas have been taken of a charity approach, relief distribution, rescue and rehabilitation as intervention to repeated disaster management. Though this humanitarian approach is good in shortterm but in long run there must be paramagnet solutions by the Govt. Since its inception the need of major public investment in connectivity such as roads, railway line, canal and industrialization in coastal areas has always being treated with less priority. It is a fact that whatever development happens to day it is because of very few initiatives such as Paradeep express highway, Paradeep port and other coming up seaports and very few industries linking to mineral exports to utilize the advantage of huge mineral deposits of the state. Though both the mineral resources and sea coast are two natural advantage for the state but these two have not been focused in state development model as priority sector investment in both the centre and state's economic policy for its fullest utilization in the interest of the people of the state.

As a result of slow industrialization, lack of growth in manufacturing sector, service and tourism sector, urbanization, and very little application of science and technology in approach to development there has been very little employment opportunities have been created so the youths of the coastal areas are largely migrating in distress to different parts of the globe in search of employment and livelihood. They have been denied an opportunity of work here in their own state to remove the economic backwardness of their own area and to change the quality of life of the

people of their native soil. Since generations it has been told that Odisha has enough natural resources but there has been very small plan of investment to use all the natural advantageous conditions by the subsequent elected Govt. The post –independent India with a unitary stricture and federal character in constitution have never followed the principles of federalism in letter and spirit and regional imbalances continued in the absence of financial federalism . The states having natural resources are exploited for overall development of the country as whole by neglecting the interest of the backward states. The states are not allowed with financial autonomy and for utilization of their own strategic resources for the people. Odisha has been facing such continuous negligence by centre since its inception a state because of its political approach towards centre which has been always in a compromising relationship in getting dues from centre; say is royalty of minerals or demand for special category state. Therefore the most stable state Govt. of more than twenty years must change its approach of state investment in charity work and put all efforts in building connectivity all over the state including coastal highway to change the traditional Odisha identity as a migrant worker state to a developed state for which costal highway is one of the strong opportunity which must not be delayed. The fate of coastal highway must not be like Khurda-Bolangiri Railway line which was planned by the British but not yet full filled even after 75 years of independence.

LET ODISHA'S FARM SECTOR BE MODERNIZED.

For long time, the foremost visible issue of Odisha is its dependency on other states to meet its domestic consumption demand. The state imports inland fish, meat, egg, vegetables, potatoes, onion, wheat, dal, fruits, banana, sugar, and edible oil, besides many more consuming products to feed its 4 crore plus population. The state Govt. has no control over the market price and quality of the produce. To minimize this import dependency, the state must improve its agriculture production and storage facility by ensuring application of modern farming. The present image of Odisha as a consuming state must change to a producing state. The change is much needed to ensure food security and to raise the nutrition level of the state.

The other important issue getting more attention during COVID-19 is the plight of migrant workers . Along with huge under-employment, there has been a persistent increase in distress migration of labourers to outside. Odisha remains one of the major suppliers of migrant worker along with Bihar, UP, MP, Rajasthan, Assam and WB. A sizeable workforce of the state, about 30 Lakhs vulnerable migrant workers, are working outside the state and data shows that this number has been growing in recent years. Advantageous migration as such is a boost to the domestic economy through remittance but distress migration is undesirable. Covid-19 has very well exposed the vulnerability of migrant workers. Majority of our workers here are low-paid and unskilled. About half of the population is employed in seasonal agriculture as workers and cultivators among whom a substantial number are small producers. It is highly essential to shift our existing surplus Labour force in farming to non-farm activities. It will be economically good to keep less number labour force in agriculture by application of modern ways of farming using innovations of science and technology. The approach will change the agriculture scenario of the state while boosting production and improving the quality of life of people engaged in agriculture. The growth of non-agricultural sector will generate employment and self-employment which can arrest the growth of inter-state migration.

Globally India is featured among top 10 agricultural-producing countries such as China, Brazil, Russia and USA. Odisha lags behind in application

of technology in comparison to other agricultural producing states. Data on agriculture economics shows that there is a very small percentage of people engaged in agriculture in developed countries but here the percentage is quite high. Similarly, the application of fertilizer, pesticide and modern agricultural appliances is also very less in Odisha in comparison to others. Odisha must follow the best practices of the global trend.

A major chunk of farmers in the state are STs. Learning from the development of other tribal states shows that the over dependency of STs on agriculture and forest in Odisha is one of the reason of their continued backwardness; so they must be supported to increase their participation in non-agricultural activities such as services, business, manufacturing and industry sector which has been emerged of late as largest sources of employment. The Census data 2011 says the number of tribal cultivators has reduced by 10 percent while the number of STs in the population of agricultural Labour has increased in the same rate. The tribal mobility in search of opportunities to non-tribal areas has also increased.

The ongoing self-glorification of traditional agriculture and the selective campaign of Jal, Jamin and Jungle must stop and priority should be on modern farming. The STs, one-fourth population of Odisha, are left with no choice but to continue with backward agriculture and forest based livelihood to live in a subsistence economy. They continue to constitute large portion in the state BPL box without major positive change in their income, scope of employment and quality of life. They must be included in the market economy to play a role in capital formation by expanding their economic activities. The other area is to bring change in the cropping pattern. During the year 2019-20 around 52 percent of the gross cropped area was used for production of cereals, 22 for pulses, 7 for oil seeds, 8 for vegetables, 4 for fruits and 6 percent for other crops. Agriculture must not be dependent on seasonal single crop “paddy” only, but it must not delay in adopting other areas such as fishing, dairy, animal husbandry, fruit orchards, vegetables, pulses and agro-forestry with equal importance. Now the question is why the potentialities of the state to increase production in agriculture and non-agriculture sector have not been fully explored to its desired extent? May be the less application of technology and scientific know how in production and soil and water management, and also lack of capital investment have been some of the major reasons which are not yet addressed by the state since long. While the world is moving towards

knowledge society and the priority must be on use of scientific knowledge and technology. The state must be politically mobilized into a homogeneous social and economic unit to bring benefit to all its people. Our political mobilization for Odisha's nationalism must be socially inclusive of its number of sub or smaller nationalities, languages, faith and believe systems existing within its political, administrative and geographical region. Disrespecting or undermining diversity/differences or inequality may lead to disintegration. Odiya nationalism must not be religious or caste/ethnic or language based; rather it should be secular and most inclusive and accommodative based on principles of fraternity and dignity with modern worldview. The over glorification of mother tongue will not be helpful in brining nationalism or economic growth; rather it will push the state backward. The Govt. of Odisha must encourage quality education and teaching of languages such as English, Spanish, French, Chinese and other language useful to connecting Odisha with international job market.

In a constitutional federal setup like ours, political will of regional Govt. is key to social progress and economic growth. All over the world development become possible because of the unswerving participation of modern state led by political parties in facilitating the production process by making available basic inputs and in building a conducive socio-political and administrative environment for mass economic activities. It is the duty of state Govt. to make available basic inputs of production and bring prerequisite administrative reforms to make easy of doing business and build economic inclusion.

PROMOTE SERVICE SECTOR TO COUNTER ECONOMIC BACKWARDNESS.

Tourism and Banking potentials need to be explored.

In an increasingly globalized economy, the service sector has been emerged as major source of employment along with industry and manufacturing. It is evident worldwide that with growing technological application, modern agriculture sector has absorbed very less manpower in comparison to other two sectors. The continued backwardness of Odisha with extreme poverty and distress migration can be minimized with expansion of its much promising service sector which has not been explored in spite of many possibilities and natural advantages. The state Govt. must encourage adequate investment from all possible sources of both private and public to meet the challenges. In recent years the service sector has contributed more share in state gross domestic product though it is a good sign but it is not growing visible in comparison to other states. The sub-sectors in service sector includes trade, repairing, hospitality industry, tourism, banking, transport and communication etc. The Labour force survey data shows that about one-fourth of the workers of the state are engaged in service sector and enough possibilities is there to employ more with its adequate expansion. It is reported that trade and repair is the third largest employer after construction and agriculture. Odisha has huge surplus Labour in agriculture which need to be shifted into service and industry sector but in the current situation the service sector can employ more. The challenges of land acquisition, environment and displacement issues are relatively less challenging in service sector as it is being looked into in case of mining and industry.

Let's see the two vital areas of service sector such as tourism and banking which are quite relevant to the economic development of Odisha.

Tourism is one of the most promising area of economy of the state due to many existing natural features. The long coastline, beaches, forest, wild life sanctuaries, mountains, caves, rivers, lake, lagoons, dams and reservoirs, historical monuments, heritage and especially Buddhist monuments and temples in the state are unexplored sources of major modern economic activities. The Govt. must learn from states such as Rajasthan and Kerala those have attracted more number of domestic and international tourist

and have made tourism as its major source of economic activities. Odisha can be developed into a Buddhist pilgrimages centre to attract people from China, Korea, Japan, and people from many other countries interested in Buddhism and its heritage. The Govt. must plan to develop these places with adequate connectivity and hospitality infrastructure of international standard to meet the emerging need of the tourists. Connectivity and communication are primary need to promotion of tourism. The poor connectivity network and communication links are major reason of the underdevelopment. The airport, railway line, bus roots and river water ways need to be connected to all parts of the state especially to areas of economic activities. Along with this the health and sanitation and law and order, social environment, issues must be addressed with equal importance for the overall protection of domestic and international visitors.

The other important areas of service sector is finance and insurance amenities where the state has not yet reached to all its citizens to ensure a better service. Financial inclusion has been viewed as important means to enhance economic growth and counter income inequality by increasing access of the poor to formal financial services. This has been getting momentum with initiative of G20 countries, including China and India, since 1999 as finance sector reform agenda to counter global economic crisis. There are areas where there is no connectivity and financial services specially the people in interior parts and mostly from marginalized section have no access to financial inclusion. There are 18 number of public sector banks and also 18 number of private sector banks, also with a cooperative banks network in the state but still the number of branches have not covered a vast majority of rural population who are being deprived of getting modern banking facilities in their areas. Usually they have to travel a substantial distance to access banking services. Many of them are deprived of availing benefits of various Govt. schemes and entitlements. Currently the state have nearer to seven thousand Panchayats but only close to six thousand bank branches. The finance and insurance service have huge scope of employment as well as access to financial inclusion can boost the economy by making available the credit facilities to all. These days digital connectivity become essential for banking activities . There is a growing need of internet and broadband connections to make people empower with communication and information. It is being suggested by many that financial inclusion is very relevant to State like Odisha having a vast majority of poor and illiterate poor who mostly depend on casual

Labour and informal sector employment. In order to fight poverty, access to institutional financial service is very important which can play a critical role in generating employment and income at micro level. It will also contribute in arresting the exploitative private money lending which is rampant in the State. They largely depend on traditional sources to manage their finance with all risk and vulnerability. Money lending has been a major problem in rural and tribal area of Odisha which has been very much exploitative with higher rate of interest and in this process people get dispossessed from their productive assets such as land. In Odisha there is law to prevent money lending in tribal area by money lenders but this problem still continues in the absence of institutional finance service. Most of the small and marginal farmers and landless sharecroppers are compelled to take loan from private money lenders to meet the agricultural activities and other needs and during harvesting seasons they pay it back with very higher rate of interest. The PMJDY has given emphasis to open branches in hilly, tribal and difficult areas which the State Government should give priority. Added to the financial literacy, rural connectivity and power supply have been a major issue in opening branches. The State Government along with other international and national agencies and private companies should help the banks in expanding new branches in interior parts of the State by building basic infrastructure and other required facilities and at the same time, promote financial literacy among the masses.

IMPLEMENT AMBEDKAR'S IDEAS ON ODISHA RIVER WATER USE

Friday, 16 April 2021

The nation paid homage to Bharat Ratna Dr B R Ambedkar on his 130th birth anniversary. Leaders cutting across party line referred to Dr Ambedkar's pioneering role in Constitution making process and his important contribution as Chairperson of the Drafting Committee and later as the first Law Minister of independent India. Ambedkar contributed in many ways through his struggles and thoughts to expand democracy, not just in political sphere but also in social and economic spheres. His political, economic and social thoughts and struggles continue to inspire, guide and influence our nation.

Dr Ambedkar's economic thoughts are based on the principles of socialism, equality and State ownership over all means of production. He argued for nationalisation of land and other means of production.

He was suggesting for the fullest utilisation of natural resources and human capital to fulfil the material needs of the people where modern State has to play an active role in taking economic policy decisions.

Many of his economic ideas are reflected in our Constitution's preamble, fundamental rights and Directive Principles.

He as a trade unionist and Labour Minister, played a major role in bringing labour rights legislation to regulate eight working hour and ensuring benefits of minimum wage, social security, insurance, equal wage and maternity benefits for women workers and banned child labour. He argued for one State, one language and said linguistic provinces would make democracy work better than a mixed language province. He was always in favor of federalism which gives legislative, executive and judicial power to States in managing the governance of the States.

In recent times while the States are demanding financial autonomy and power to manage natural and financial resources, the discourses developed by him have become more relevant for resource-rich poor States such as Odisha.

His insightful proposals were based on information and scientific analysis while mostly targeted to public good with equity.

Dr Ambedkar visited Odisha as the Labour Member in Viceroy's Executive Council to the Government of India. In his presidential address at a conference of representatives of Central Government and Government of Odisha, the central provinces and eastern States held at Cuttack on November 8, 1945, he explored the possibilities of developing Odisha's rivers to control flood while managing water for its best multipurpose use for the people.

He made valuable opinion relating to the development of Odisha based on available information in those days. He was worried after realizing the socio-economic suffering of the people in those days.

He identified flood, drought, famines, deterioration in health, malaria, malnutrition, vitamin deficiency and above all, low income and poverty as the major issues of Odisha and these issues remain as a challenge before the State.

He identified lack of internal communication links within the State either by railway or by canal to connect the vast hinterland with sea coast as one of the reasons of backwardness. He said Odisha has natural resources, minerals, forest products and precious possession of vast water wealth. The delta comprising three districts Cuttack, Puri and Baleswar can be traversed by a network of distributaries arising mainly from five rivers, Mahanadi, Brahmani, Baitarani, Budhabalanga and Subarnarekha for multipurpose use of water in all seasons. The poverty and backwardness of Odisha can be changed by using best method of utilisation of water resources.

He was critical about the Odisha Flood Inquiry Committee report in 1928 and the subsequent reports in 1937 and Odisha Flood Advisory Committee report in 1939 with involvement of eminent engineers such as Adams William and M Visvesvarayya, on their approach to counter flood without a water management plan.

Because the plan of only building embankments is not helpful in conservation of water, there is a need of building small reserves to store the water flowing in the rivers, he opined. Water being the wealth of people its distribution and conservation is highly essential from the point of view of public good. He suggested to construct dams in rivers at various points

to conserve water permanently in reservoirs and these reservoirs can serve many purposes such as generating electric power.

The power can be helpful in running factories to make Odisha industrially developed. Another important area was navigation which was equally important and can supplement the railways.

He told in spite of railways, the importance should be given to canals by reviving old canals and make new one like Germany and Russia those which have used their water resources in best possible ways for multiples gains.

While supporting the scheme of canal, he said historically canal played an important role in British India and the East India Company invested public budget for development of canals. Odisha has one such canal having its multipurpose use but after 1875 the focus was more on railway replacing canal navigation. It impacted agriculture and overall economy and changed the nature of public investment.

He proposed that it is possible to connect Chandabali to Sambalpur by a navigable inland waterway by construction of three dams at seven mile above Naraj, Tikarpada and Sambalpur.

It will be an affordable, cheap and convenient artery for passengers and goods traffic from sea coast to Sambalpur. He was equally concerned about submergence of land and its impact.

Finally, the conference decided to undertake a survey of the Odisha's rivers to prepare projects for unified and multipurpose development like flood control, navigation, irrigation, drainage, soil conservation and power development. Adviser to the then Governor of Odisha B K Gokhale also spoke on the meeting in support of the proposal and said Odisha is the most backward part of India and this irrigation project will bring multipurpose development for the State. Even today, the natural advantage of Odisha with river systems, as a perennial source of water wealth, has not been fully tapped and managed for the development of irrigation which is a major reason of underdevelopment of agriculture sector of the State. The development of agriculture will pave the way for industrialization where the water management will play a key role in producing power for the industry. The available hydropower will boost the small-scale industries specially the agro-based industries for balanced sectorial growth in the State. The utilization of natural resources and

manpower in a scientific way will increase production, employment and income in the State.

NO INCLUSIVE ODISHA WITH BIAS TOWARDS DALITS.

19/08/2022

The recent death case of a 9-year-old Dalit student, Indra Meghewal, in Rajasthan on the ground of untouchability practice in school must be seen as a national shame. Azadi Ki AmrutMahostavto mark 75 years of our freedom must seriously engage us to honestly introspect about the status of freedom from untouchability practice in our villages. How far the dedicated efforts of our socio-political movements by Gandhians, Marxists, Socialists, Rationalists, Ambedkarites and others have impacted our social life and helped initiate social reforms. The most important is what impact has been made by our post-independence constitutional provisions and laws such as PCR and POA Act against untouchability. There is no denying the fact that untouchability remains a challenge to our inclusive democracy and social federalism.

As per 2011 Census Scheduled Caste population of Odisha is 72 lakh covering about 16 lakh households mostly inhabited in rural parts of the State. There are 94 sub-caste groups identified as Scheduled Caste who are practicing Hinduism as their religion and a very insignificant number belong to Sikhism and Buddhism. About 2.77 per cent of the total population of the State embraced Christianity, as the second major religion of the State and a major chunk of Christian population belongs to Dalit communities but they are yet not recognized as SCs. When the first scheduled caste list for Odisha was prepared in 1936 there were only 54 communities identified as SCs which has been doubled during course of time and many other communities are still on line to get included in list of SCs in Odisha .So the actual number of untouchables in Odisha is still not clear as all untouchables are not yet included in the official list.

Untouchability in many cruel and inhuman forms continues as a social reality in rural parts irrespective of religious identity and a sizable population remains socially victimized everywhere. Historically they are forced to provide service to the rest of the castes in the upper ladder of the structure. Untouchability is the main problem of Dalit communities which is not just social but very much affecting economic and political participation also. Untouchability practice still continues unabated in rural

villages and being enforced in new forms and discourses as a religious value, social custom to maintain caste pride and purity.

There are various forms of untouchable practices persistent in villages even in the most inhuman and vulgar form such as manual scavenging that disrespects human dignity. The most condemned cases are atrocities against Dalit communities that range from rape, murder, house burning, social boycott, destruction of house, property and crops, physical and mental assault to organized mass violence against innocent women, children and elders in community to subjugate the defence-less communities in village.

Dalit nowhere in Odisha are allowed to enter into village temples though they are officially forced to write Hindu as their religion to get caste certificate. There are reports about schools in caste Hindu dominated village where Dalit children are not allowed to seat with other fellow students during midday meal and in some places even forced to seat separately or on the back row of the class. Nowhere Dalit women being allowed as cook for mid-day meal preparation in spite of Supreme Court directives. Unfortunately our teachers in educational institutions discriminate against Dalit children.

The Aanganwadi centres, classrooms, hostels, playgrounds are still not a pleasant place for all communities. The most progressive teachers' associations in Odisha have not raised their voice against the age-old discriminations against human beings based on caste in our educational institutions; rather many of the teachers are shamelessly arguing in favour of our so-called great social customs. Our most glorified villages are not a place of equality for all, especially for those who are denied a dignified access to place of worship, cremation ground, water bodies and place of commons at par with other fellow villagers.

The Home Department of the Government of Odisha annual reports speak of district-wise and crime-wise figures of about 2000 cases registered in different police stations. The real figure could be ten times more as it is a fact that many of the cases do not get a place in police record and there are a good number of cases that end up with amicable settlements in police stations with pressure against poor and illiterate victims of atrocities.

The State Government officials due lack of training and awareness never bother to follow the constitutional mandate, Acts and Rules and programs

that are targeted for abolition of untouchability. It is not the caste society rather an elected democratic Government, its wings like legislative, executive and judiciary, media, civil society remain largely insensitive to the centuries old inhuman social suffering of communities. This is reflected in non-functional of dedicated intuitions of government to protect interest of Dalit, non-registration of FIR, non-payment of compensation, delay in trial, and long delay in justice delivery. The police, local Government officials, advocates, media, NGOs mostly from upper caste remain insensitive and unaccountable to the victims and to the whole criminal justice administration and society at large. This historical injustice remains truly unaddressed in spite of protest by many.

Though education is one of the important means to bring larger change in life of Dalit and society at large but even 75 years after independence the primary education remain a distance dream for a major section of poor and socially marginalized sections in the village. The way privatization and communalization of our school system are being encouraged with active government patronization, it is sure to lead to social disharmony and unending caste and religious conflicts. Abolition of untouchability should be a national agenda before all of us to promote equality among all.

SCS STILL THE MOST NEGLECTED IN ODISHA.

Institutional mechanism is not effective.

The social groups whose development is more linked to radical social change are the Scheduled Castes (SCs) in Odisha. The Government of India Scheduled Castes Order 1936 had identified 54 sub-caste groups of Odisha as SCs but during last 70 years, the number of sub caste has increased in State and currently till 2015 it is 95 while some sub –caste groups are still in queue to be enlisted as SCs. It is told that in comparison to other States the SC list of Odisha has included a few non-deserving castes because of political considerations and not following the original criteria of untouchability while identifying the SCs. It has subsequently diluted the benefit sharing among SCs of the State. But largely a majority of these communities are socially distinguished and economically poor.

As it is revealed from various periodic Government reports, the last 70 years of constitutional governance has failed in many ways to ensure a proportionate share in development to the people belonging to the Scheduled Castes (SCs) who comprise around one-fifth of the population of Odisha. Now the question is how long it will take to bridge the socioeconomic gaps among various social groups while many recent reports such as periodic Labour force survey by NSSO 2019-20 shows a rise in poverty and also related reports indicate increase in many forms of inequality, including discrimination and atrocities against SCs.

Let's see the situation of SCs in Odisha by using various Government data on specific issues such as atrocity, poverty, landlessness and employment status. It is a fact that the core issue of SCs is linked to their low caste identity by birth that decides their status. In spite of many legal measures and social reform movements, still the practices of untouchability and caste based atrocities are rampant in rural areas. The Home department, Government of Odisha, in its annual white papers has reported thousands of such cases of atrocities while equal amount of such cases remain unreported for various reasons. The two important protective legislations that primarily address the issues of atrocities are PCR Act -1955 and SCs and STs POA Act 1989. For last 10 years there were about 20,000 reported cases booked under these two Acts whereas about 10,000 cases are pending for trial in special courts and most shockingly the annual

conviction rate has been between 0 to 3 per cent as revealed in the NCRB data. The Prisoner statistics says that the presence of inmates from SCs were disproportionately in higher number. Why the conviction rate is so less? Is there any study or discussion by the appropriate bodies? The Government of Odisha has paid around Rs 20 crore to 1,883 atrocity victims as monetary relief in the year 2020, and has engaged 700 full time legal retainers and hundreds of public prosecutors to provide free legal aid to victims. The Government made operational three exclusive special courts at Balasore, Balangir and Cuttack added to the existing 92 designated special courts for speedy trial of atrocity cases.

As part of all India approach to reduce untouchability and caste discrimination, inter caste marriage between non-SC Hindu and SCs are being promoted with cash incentive of Rs 2.5 lakh to couples of inter-caste marriage and last year the State Government has spent around Rs 20 crore for 978 couples. As per legal provision of the POA Act, the matter of atrocity cases needs to be discussed in the State Assembly, but in spite of presence of 57 SC and ST MLAs in the House out of total 147, there is no review to arrest the growing of atrocities.

Not just social discrimination, the SCs are also reeling under acute poverty as 42 per cent of SC households are featured among the people below poverty line (BPL) and the poverty ratio among SCs and STs is much higher in comparison to other social groups. Their children are prominently featured among dropouts and child labourers and adults are among migrant workers in current Government's data. There have been targeted anti-poverty schemes in operation for last so many years but mostly used as advertisement of Government.

The SCs' livelihood and development are connected to ownership over land, access to quality education and equal opportunity to access employment.

What is the land ownership status of SCs in Odisha? The agriculture census on land holding speaks more in details. A vast majority of SC households depend on land for livelihood, mostly as agricultural workers, sharecroppers and very few are small and marginal farmers owning less than minimum economic holding. About 20-30 per cent of the rural SC households have no record of rights over homestead land to construct a permanent house of their own. In spite of land settlement laws such OGLS Act and OPLE Act, still a sizable number of family lives inside coconut

groves, bank of rivers and village ponds, former landlords' land , and un-surveyed lands which is not yet demarcated and not being allowed a legal possession. Many of them are deprived of PMAY benefits though the scheme attaches priority to housing for SCs. There has been provision since 2013 to purchase private land for PMAY beneficiaries if Government land is not available for settlement but the Government of Odisha has done nothing in this regard. The OLR Act has provision of settlement of ceiling surplus land, Bhoodan land, waste land and many other categories of land with landless SC families but what is the status now? Long back, the State Government had made promises to make the State landless free. What changes has the department made in ensuring land to landless families including SCs? There are thousands of homestead-less families routinely languishing in Revenue offices. The sharecroppers have been suffering for so many years without any rights at par withland owning farmers. Majority of the SCs hamlets have no basic amenities such as drinking water, toilet, electricity and all-weather linking road which is largely linked to land entitlements. The Census 2011 revealed that not even 1 per cent of rural SC households was in salaried jobs in Government, corporate and private sector. The much propagated job reservation has only helped accommodate the SCs in selective class 4 and class 3 jobs while class-2 and class -1 jobs still remain unfilled . Experience shows that the job reservation policy of the Government always has to pass through judicial scrutiny and dilution which has obstructed these sections of people from getting their legitimate share. The benefits of reservation in education and jobs remain vacant or unfulfilled and largely diluted and distracted. There has been no review of The Odisha Reservation of vacancies in post and services (for SCs and STs) Act 1975 by the department. These days, there is a growing trend of outsourcing, contractual appointments and privatization, which has been further debarring sections of people from quality education and meaningful employment. A vast majority of Dalit population still languishes as casual workers of unorganized sector without benefits of Labour legislations. The emerging political trend shows the withdrawal of the State from its responsibility towards the vulnerable sections including the SCs and at the same time encouraging the market economy to make the rich -richer and the poor become poorer.

Currently, the costly quality technical education has become unreachable for SCs and other poor which has a bearing on their access to salaried jobs. The caste based hate campaign by a few so -called meritorious social

groups against reserve category also has created an undeclared social exclusion in the private job market. Even that affected the technically qualified SCs in getting access to job market. Social barriers are a major stumbling block for self-employment of SC youths in rural areas. It is found that distress migration is quite high among rural SCs. The current liberalization phase witness the most flourishing business, trade, industry and mining sectors in the state but these private owned sector is socially non-inclusive to majority of deprived social groups including SCs. Odisha's economic growth is not possible with this kind of continued social and economic exclusion of a sizeable historically neglected mass.

Is institutional mechanism for SCs effective in State?

The makers of modern India want to build a casteless society with abolition of untouchability and all forms of caste-based discrimination and atrocities against SCs and others. As a matter of historical reparation towards justice and equality, there have been special provisions and affirmative action policy which address the continued social injustice while ensuring participation and equal opportunity for development of all social groups including the SCs. But the present socio-economic scenario of the State of Odisha shows a discomfoting picture as majority of its people are in extreme poverty and backwardness where the SCs are more disadvantaged and vulnerable among the social groups. The last 70 years of constitutional rule and institutional mechanism have not created much impact; rather when the SCs are struggling for change, the new liberal economy has put new challenges before them.

It is time to relook the changing socio-economic conditions and re-strategies many of our constitutional promises and its implementation and also to evaluate the work of institutions existing to carry out the mandate of the constitution in building an egalitarian society. Take for example the major institutional mechanism of Government in primarily working to ensure the protection, participation and development of the SCs under the guidance and leadership of mostly the elected representatives of SCs. Currently, the State has 24 SC MLAs in the Assembly and three MPs in in Lok Sabha from reserve constituencies. No one from SCs represent in Rajya Sabha from Odisha. There are also Zilla Parishad Chairpersons from SCs as per their percentage. As per constitutional provisions, there are dedicated institutions such as the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, National Commission for SCs, National Commission for

Safai Karmacharies and National SCs Finance Development Corporation, to name a few. The State level institutions include Department of SCs and STs Development, where it is told in the constitution that the Minister heading the department must belong to ST (Article- 164). Besides, there is the SCs and STs Finance and Development Corporation, SCs and STs Research and Training Institutions, Odisha Scheduled Caste Advisory Board headed by Chief Minister with all SC MPs and MLAs as its members (The Odisha scheduled caste welfare Advisory Board Rules 1957) and State Vigilance and Monitoring Committee to monitor cases of atrocities. While the Chief Minister is the chairperson of the committee, at the district level, the Collector is the chairperson. Last but not the least, there is the SC and ST MLAs House Committee in the State Assembly for overall implementation of various policies.

Added to institutional mechanism there is a budgetary provision since 1979 as Scheduled Caste Sub Plan which speaks about a population percentage wise proportional share in budget for the development of SCs with separate account heads in demand grants. It is further told that the funds are non-divertible and non-lapsable and must primarily be targeted to generate employment to counter poverty and unemployment. It is to bridge the gap in socio-economic development to bring their level at par with other social groups of the State. Therefore the public institutions having budget, and armed with protective laws and Acts, have a greater role to play in upgrading the socio-economic condition of the SCs and make all efforts to fulfill the constitutional promises. It is the primary role of different institutions and statutory bodies mostly represented by elected SC leaders to monitor the implementation of various policies, laws, Acts, schemes and programs for the protection, participation and development of SCs of the State. But how far these institutions are effective in discharging their job while they are being handsomely paid out of public treasury is a matter of discussion. It is time to evaluate the role of these institutions in ensuring justice and equality to SCs of the State.

ODISHA SHOULD TAKE A LEAF FROM KERALA'S BOOK

Friday, 25 February 2022

It seems the inclusion of Scheduled Castes (SCs) in the development of Odisha is not a priority of the Odisha Government as it is evident that, leave alone central schemes, there is not a single dedicated scheme solely out of State funds under the provision of Scheduled Caste Sub Plan focusing development of SCs. Majority of SCs in Odisha are historically victims of the practices of untouchability. Besides, they are poor and landless. Many of them are distressed migrant workers. It has been widely understood that without the State's intervention to change their socio-economic condition, it is difficult for them to stand on their own. Though they constitute almost nearly one-fifth of the population of the State but they have been deprived of funds in State Budget proportionate to their population for development. Leave aside job reservation in Government which covers only a very microscopic number of families among them, a vast majority of them, about 99 per cent of the families, are struggling to make a living against all odds. In this context, let's discuss about schemes for SCs in Kerala which has achieved highest rank in social development indicators among the States. The SCs constitute about 9.1 per cent of the total population of the State and STs constitute almost 1.45 per cent. The total area of Kerala is 38,852 sqkm with about 590 km coast line and a majority of its population are in urban area. By contrast, the total area of Odisha is 1, 55,707 sq km and the State has 480 km coast coastline. Kerala has had a long history of progressive socio-political tradition that is rooted in ideology of social equality and social justice promoted by social reformers such as Ayyankali (1863-1941), Narayana Guru(1856-1928), and powerful social movements such as Vaikom Satyagraha against untouchability (1924-25) with involvement of M K Gandhi and E V Ramaswami. Later the Left Front Government led by EMS Namboodiripad, the first Chief Minister of Kerala launched land reform, literacy, universal primary education, panchayati raj system and progressive literary and science education movements, which contributed immensely to building an inclusive social development. The three major institutions evolved in Kerala laying focus on SCs development are the Scheduled Castes Development Department, Kerala State Development Corporation

for SCs and STs and Kerala State Commission for SCs and STs. The many unique initiatives of the State Government include a host of schemes covering from nursery education to employment in abroad and business sector and radical social reform agenda such as employing Dalits as priests in temples and promoting inter-caste marriage. The most striking attempt is the social reform struggles in Kerala during last 100 years, which changed the history by appointing 5 Dalits as temple priests in Government managed temples under Travancore Devaswom Temple Board (TDB) in 2018. In 1924 the Dalits and OBCs were even not allowed to walk in the roads in the vicinity of the temple and in 1936 the then ruler of Travancore had allowed Dalits and OBCs to enter into temple. The TDB follows a recruitment process adhering to the norms of reservation for SCs and OBCs while conducting exams and interviews to recruit priests for its 1252 temples in south and central Kerala having about more than 2,500 regular priests getting salary and pension while they are instrumental in generating an annual revenue of about Rs 400 crore. The Hindus constitute 55 per cent of the population of the State and 26 per cent are Muslims and 18 per cent are Christians as per 2011 census. Almost all scheduled castes are Hindu in Kerala. Not just socio-religious reforms, the Government of Kerala has laid focus more on education that includes nursery to higher professional and technical education. Considering the share of SCs in health education which is comparatively poor, the Government of Kerala has decided to allot a majority of seats to students from SC communities in Palakkad Medical College established in 2014 where out of 100 students 70 belong to SC. The Palakkad district has the largest scheduled caste population. The fund for this purpose was allocated from scheduled caste component plan. The college is under the management of State Scheduled Caste Department affiliated to the Kerala University of Health Science. The State has developed a scheme to finance SC and ST families to purchase land both in rural and urban areas for housing and suitable agricultural activities with 6 per cent rate of interest and repayment within 8 years. In order to ensure basic amenities schemes for self-sufficient village, SC habitations having more than 50 families are being provided about Rs 1 crore grant under local MLA supervision. The scheme ensures all basic facilities, connecting roads, toilet, drinking water, electricity, drainage line, and waste management, renovation of house, bio gas plants and IGP for the villagers. In the matter of self-employment, some of the schemes to boost self-employment includes foreign employment loan

scheme to those who go to abroad for employment with 6 percent rate of interest and repayment within 3 years and encouraging start-up entrepreneurship through credit to mini industrial ventures. It is the responsibility of the State to make the youth employable and take care of their education and coaching for jobs and also provide travelling allowances for job seekers to attend interviews and exams from village Panchayats. There is also a scheme called Advocate grants to SC and ST lawyers to purchase law books, dress, and pay room rent, and BAR council enrolment fee. Kerala has produced the first President of India and first Chief Justice of India from Dalit communities. The social development programme includes marriage assistance scheme to poor SCs and STs, treatment grant from the relief fund of the Minister for SCs, Dr Ambedkar Media Award, book publication grant for publication of literary works of SCs, social solidarity fortnight celebration, a Centre of knowledge places near SC habitations and Centre for research and education for social transformation for a just, equitable and caring society.

MAKE SCs RELIGION-NEUTRAL; AMEND ORDER 1950

Friday, 03 September 2021

Recently, the Dalit Christians and Muslims have staged protests all over the country demanding Scheduled Caste (SC) status. They have argued that the Constitution Scheduled Castes Order, 1950 must be religion-neutral to include them among the SCs.

They are of the opinion that change of faith has not contributed much in upgrading their earlier caste identity and social status; rather they continue to suffer segregation as before. As per the SCs Order, they have to be within Hindu, Sikhs and Buddhist fold. Though untouchability is abolished by law, affirmative measures have been implemented by the Government from time to time to protect the SCs from suffering humiliation and indignity.

The Right to Religion is a Fundamental Right and secularism is the basic character of our Constitution. Every adult has a right to choose his/her faith. The Constitution has provisions of protection against discrimination based on caste, religion, sex, or place of birth, based on which affirmative actions are being intended as reparation.

During the British rule in India, an attempt was made to identify untouchable communities in the Census of 1931 under category of depressed classes. Later under Government of India Act, 1935, a list of SCs was prepared based on criteria primarily considering social barriers where untouchability was the main reference. The Government of India (Scheduled Castes) Order, 1936 says that no Indian Christian shall be deemed to be a member of a SC. In Bengal, no person who professes Buddhism or a tribal religion shall be deemed to be a member of SC.

Because largely it was understood that the concept of caste and outcaste is very specific to Hindu social order and it has a mention in religious texts such as Atharva Veda and Manusmriti which speak about division of Hindu society into castes with caste-based occupations along with rules and sanctions against social relations to that effect. The other non-Hindu religions have no such official division and this concept of social hierarchy and untouchability find no mention in their scriptures such as the Quran

and Bible. So the first SC list prepared by the British Government had limited it to untouchables within Hindu fold. Dr Ambedkar did not find any fault with the order and later he converted to Buddhism in 1956 with his large followers by denouncing SC status.

The independent India followed the British path as the Constitution SC Order 1950 confined the SCs to Hindu religion only, whereas in case of STs, religion was not a barrier to their ST status. The amendments in the SC Order were made in 1956 to include the Majbhi Sikh and in 1990 to include the Dalit Buddhists in SC fold.

The Dalit Christians and Muslims who constitute a bigger size within their own faith groups have been demanding inclusion in the SC list though they both have already acquired space under backward classes' entries as OBCs and SCBCs. But they are trying for a legal link to come back to their old social root to get assimilated with other socially homogeneous groups under the broader category of SCs. Along with Hinduism, India is home to three major religions, Buddhism, Jainism and Sikhism. Historically, conversion has taken place in India for a number of historical, socio-economic and political reasons. Both upper castes, intermediary castes and Dalits have converted to Islam, Christianity, Sikhism and Buddhism. But experience in India shows that conversion to any religion has not contributed much in upgrading the social status of the Dalits. The age old Indian social system has influenced the social system of non-Hindu religion too. It is because most of the upper caste Hindus, converted to other religions, have not changed their attitude towards Dalits even though primarily conversion has been used to change social status and as a protest against discrimination, indignity and unequal treatment.

With changing socio-economic scenario, more than religion, the Dalits within religious minority are looking for their participation in ongoing development process and to become a part of the governance system through scope of reservation. Therefore, they want to be a part of any of the existing reserved category in the absence of a direct scope of reservation for minority.

Dalit Christians and Muslims have been experiencing discrimination and segregation even within their own faith group as it has been reported that there are separate burial grounds, churches and mosques for them. Though untouchability is not there like in the Hindu society, but still visible social discrimination is still prevalent when it comes to managing religious affairs,

social relationships and matrimonial ties. The upper caste converts dominate in religious affairs, health and educational institutions. Even these institutions serve the interest of the marginalized sections in the least. Legally there are six notified minority communities in India, namely Muslims, Christians, Buddhists, Sikhs, Parsis and Jains, which constitute 19 per cent of the population of our country. It is estimated that Dalits constitute a major chunk of the minority population. The Jains and Parsis are exception to the issues of caste-based social discrimination.

Justice Rajindara Sachar (2006) and Justice Ranganath Mishra (2007) have detailed in their reports about the status of religious minorities in India. The Dalit Christians and Arzals among Muslims are most vulnerable. It is said that a majority of them are still in caste-based occupations; landlessness is very high in their groups and their hamlets lack basic amenities for a dignified living. Their share in governance, public sector jobs, education, business and other segments is quite insignificant which is disproportionate to their population. In recent years, there has been feeling of growing insecurity and alienation among them due to rise in religious fundamentalism, and organized violence against Muslim and Christian minorities in Gujarat, Odisha, UP, Chhattisgarh, MP and many other parts of the country. There have been reports of mob-lynching, burning of Churches and forcibly preventing people to practice and propagate their faiths. The protective legislations for SCs and STs such as POA Act and Civil Rights Act are not applicable to them though they face the same discrimination not because of their faith rather more because of their caste identity. The religion neutral inclusion in SCs will increase their number and also will lead to increased share in reservations. It will bring more inclusiveness among the diverse historically deprived sections to access affirmative action policies of the Government.

DALIT MUSLIM ISSUES ARE NEGLECTED MOST.

25 September 2020

In recent times the issues of Muslim minority has been discussed much over the issues of their citizenship but many more important socio-economic issues have been left out while focus has been more on religious identity issues. The issues of participation in employment, business, education, health and access to basic amenities, ownership over land, and most important participation in governance has been ignored since long in spite of two major landmark Commission reports on Indian minority in post-independent India. The first commission was headed by Justice Rajindara Sachar (2006), former chief justice of Delhi High Court and the second was headed by Justice Ranganath Mishra, former chief justice of India (2007). Both reports are an eye-opener to public about the status of religious minorities in India but very less has been discussed among its stakeholders. Among the religious minorities of different religion, the situation of Dalit Muslims is worst as they are prosecuted minorities among minorities because of their caste-based social identities and they continue to suffer in spite of change in their faith while almost disconnected from their social groups by legally loosing status of Scheduled castes. The SCs status is not legally religion-neutral and have been restricted to Hindu, Sikh (1955) and Buddhists (1990) only till date. The Dalit Muslims are also socially alienated from the major Dalit population of India commonly identified as scheduled castes in three religious groups. After OBC reservation many of Dalit Muslims are included in OBC category in different states.

Islam is the second largest religion of India. Studies by many such as ISI, New Delhi (2010), Abdur Rahman, Denial and Deprivation, (2019), Dalits in the Muslim and Christian communities, National Commission for minorities, GOI, Report by Satish Deshpande and Geetika Bapna, Department of sociology, University of Delhi (2008), and the various said commission reports found that the Muslim society in India is not homogeneous as they divided into four major social and economic classes under the influence of caste system in India. The so called foreign ancestors, aristocrats and nobility, and indigenous converts, artisans, cultivators and people involved in unclean activities or known as Arzals similar to the status of Dalits in Hindu Verna system. They can be called

as Dalit Muslims and Pachamanda Muslims. In Indian society the Ashraf, (Sayyads, Sheikhs, Mughals, Pathans) are the land owners, civil and religious leaders. And Ajlafas (mostly similar to Hindu Sudras/OBC) positioned in the middle mostly artisans and occupational groups such as barbar, tailor, weavers etc. The Arzals are the lowest like their Hindu counterparts. The Arzals are the Dalits of the Muslim community. They constitute a separate most deprived group within the Muslim society. Similarly, the untouchables/scheduled castes converted to Christianity are called as Dalit Christians. The change in religion has not contributed much to upgrade their social and economic status in the new religion and even within their own religious fraternity rather they continue to face the same discriminatory treatment in social life and majority of them engaged in age-old unclean occupations such as scavenging, washing, Dhobi, cleaning, Halalkhor, and occupations being seen as people of low social status. These issues are not being discussed much in the plea of internal issues under the carpet. Land lessness is very high among these communities as well as they are being deprived of basic amenities such as homestead land, good housing, drinking water, toilets, electricity and sanitary facilities in their hamlets/Muhallas which are segregated in case of Dalit Muslims. Usually the Govt. schemes very seldom reach to these ghettoized hamlets because of its outskirt locations and the discriminatory attitude of the governing elites. The condition of elders, women and children in the family is very miserable. They cannot enter into any petty business because of their social and religious identities but they are only selectively allowed to do few jobs since generations together. They have offered with more holy education but very less has been done for their schooling and economic development and also for socialization and secularization. Inter-caste/jamaats marriage are rare and often leads to social tension because of social hierarchy among Muslims. The suffering of Dalit Muslims they are not being protected by civil rights laws or any kind of affirmative actions of the Govt. which are to some extent available of scheduled castes. Religious laws are predominantly followed in socio-cultural spears of life rather than constitutional values and laws. Family, marriage and personal relations are more guided by religious notions and concepts of purity and superiority. Constitutional provisions of liberty, equality, dignity and fraternity are mere words of books which are not being translated and introduced into social life. The issues of Dalit Muslims are not being discussed much by the Muslim elites and still it is under the carpet. There

may not be report of prevalence of practice of untouchability against Dalit Muslims but caste-based social discrimination and derivation is very much continuing without much radical change. The Kaka Kalelkara Commission of 1955 and Mandal Commission of 1980 have very well recognized the issues of social and educational backwardness among major Muslim groups /castes and recommended to include them in OBCs. The implementation of OBC reservation though late but placed Muslims as socially and educationally backward classes and also placed under OBCs to avail reservation in education and jobs but it is not based on religion rather on their social and educational backwardness. The states such as Kerla (12%), Tamilnadu (3.5) , AP(4%), Telangana (4%) and Karnataka (4%) , Manipur (4%), Bihar, West Bengal and Uttar Pradesh, have made specific percentage, in bracket, of reservation for Muslims as backward class and most backward class. But in Odisha there is no minority commission and backward caste Muslims are not identified either as OBC or in SEBC list whereas Dalit Christians are included in the SCBC list in the state.

Why reservation in education and employment being preferred as a means of intervention for improving some ones social and eco status because reservation has contributed to change hereditary caste-based occupations and make socialization of public employment by bringing caste diversity into it. Modern Education exposes to rational thinking, global outlook and build world view within an individual by injecting sense of dignity and self-respect which Jyoti Rao Phule and Dr. Ambedkar and Sir Syed Ahamad Khan, founder of AMU, Hamid Dalwai (1932-1977) founded Muslim Satyasodhak Samaj, Maharashtra, were always advocated for western liberal education. In recent times worldwide affirmative action has been accepted as a policy discourse to ensure equality by creating equal opportunity in spear of education and employment, which cannot be created by market forces but by state alone through constitutional and legal provisions. Inclusive democracies must be reflected in inclusive Governances and in a caste divided society the governance must be socially inclusive of different social identities by recognizing diversities as well as making space for all including the historically prosecuted communities such as Dalit Muslims.

In Odisha though minority constitute 6 percent of the total population of the state where Muslims are more than two and half percent and about 10 lakh population but Muslim communities has not been identified in the

OBC or SEBC list and the state Govt. has not setup any minority commission to look after the issues of minorities including Muslim minorities. There is no dedicated minority department with minister from minority groups in the state and also there is absence of any minority financial corporation to encourage self-employment among minority youth. A secular regional state Govt. with equal distance from left, right and centre has been generously spending out of state budget to build temples, mosques and Churches in the name of beautification and religious tourism promotion. People of different religion both Hindu and Muslims and others are supported for pilgrimage. There is no allocation for upgrading of Madrasas for a better quality education of Muslim children and Urdu language the way Sanskrit is being promoted. But almost all parties have minority cells to satisfy the minority political leaders as party agents. But there has been no state-sponsored programme for minorities.

90 YEARS AFTER POONA PACT

Separate electorate issue for Dalits still relevant.

Friday, 24 September 2021

After 90 years of the Poona Pact on September 24, 1932, while looking at the electoral systems of the country, a debate over separate electorates or reserve seats in joint electorates still holds worth. The Poona Pact was an agreement between caste Hindus, represented by Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya of Hindu Mahasabha and depressed classes (DCs) represented by Dr Ambedkar. The pact was about representation of DCs in legislatures of British India. Not just social reform but Dr Ambedkar was convincingly advocating for political power and a political solution to issues of the untouchable, then named as DCs, later officially called Scheduled Caste in 1936, and now Dalit as popular socio-political identity.

DCs need political power for removal of untouchability was the opinion of two members, such as Dr. Ambedker and R Srinivasan of Madras Depressed Class Federation, while representing DCs in round table conference of London in 1930.

In a memorandum, they both demanded for the guarantee of equal civil rights, safeguard against social prosecution, free and compulsory primary education, adequate representation in legislature, council of ministers, public services, and special departments for DCs. Along with this there was demand for universal adult suffrage and most important, the separate electorate. Now, what is this separate electorate? It is an arrangement to elect the DCs leaders to legislatures by the DCs voters only without depending on caste Hindu voters.

The then British Prime Minister Ramsay McDonald proposed communal award on August 17, 1932 to Muslims, Europeans, Indian Christians, Anglo-Indians, Sikhs and DCs of India for their representation. Along with separate electorate, the DCs were also awarded with the right to vote and contest in the general unreserved constituencies.

It was proposed that special DC constituencies for twenty years to be framed in selected areas having concentration of DC population. Out of total 1,508 provincial legislatures, 71 seats were allotted to them. The move of the British Government especially for DCs was vehemently opposed by

Gandhi with apprehension of further social and political segregation of Hindu society and the possibility of increasing bitterness among caste Hindus and DCs. He was not in favour of recognizing DCs as a separate community for political purpose.

He visualized the possibilities of bloodshed as he said “the untouchable hooligans will make common cause with Muslim hooligans and kill caste Hindus.” Gandhi’s understanding was that the problem of the untouchable are socio-religious and there must not be any separation of untouchable from Hindu society as his main apprehension was separation may weaken the domination of Hindu political power. He expressed his dissatisfaction to the British Prime Minister and went on a fast to death in protest against the communal award for DCs. In order to save the life of Gandhi, the Hindu leaders such as C Rajgopalchari and Dr Rajendra Prasad, BS Moonje, and Sir Tej Bahadur Sapru and on the other side, DC leaders such as Ambedkar and PG Solanki supported separate electorate and M C Rajah, P Baloo and B J Deorukhar supporting joint electorate met in a conference at Indian Merchants chamber Hall, Bombay on September 19, 1932.

Finally, as a solution to Gandhi’s apprehension and Ambedkar’s demand, the leaders came to a pact. The pact recommended that all the members of the DCs registered in the general electoral roll in a constituency will elect a panel of four candidates belonging to DCs for reserve seats by method of single vote. The four persons getting highest of votes in primary election shall be candidates for the election by the general electorate and this has to be followed for both provincial and central legislatures for ten years.

Based on this, the Government of India Act 1935 made provision of 151 seats reserved for SCs in provincial legislative Assemblies, 19 seats in federal Assemblies, 6 seats in Council of States.

The election held in 1937 had created an opportunity for the SCs to elect their community leaders. There were double-member or multi-member constituencies along with general unreserved seats.

In the election of 1937, out of 151 SCs seats, Congress contested in 139 seats and won 78 seats and other parties and individuals contested in 137 seats and won 73 seats. There was no candidate to contest in 26 seats out of which Congress could win 14 while the non-Congress won 12.

There was lower level of literacy and lack of political awareness among both caste Hindus and SCs, even in some constituencies caste Hindus did not cast their vote to SCs candidates. The SCs had no political parties of their own except Ambedkar's Independent Labour Party which captured 10 seats out of 15 seats in Bombay Legislature.

There was an alliance of Congress and the Depressed Classes League in Bihar. Ambedkar commented that the huge victory of Congress in SC seats was result of manipulation with caste Hindu votes, splitting of SCs votes and lack of interest of SC voters in electing their own leader.

The main two objectives of Poona Pact were defeated in 1937 election as in many seats there was no primary election to elect a panel of four candidates. The non-involvement of caste Hindus in electing SCs.

Leaders were also quite visible. But the pact moved the issue of representation to a different height and SCs were emerged as a formidable political force. Gandhi with all seriousness had formed the Harijan Sevak Sangha with GD Birla as president and Amritlal V Thakkar as general secretary. It started its mouthpiece "Harijan" and organised Harijan Padajatra. The representation of SCs followed in viceroy's executive council and Constituent Assembly. Dr. Ambedkar, Jagajiban Ram and Jogendra Nath Mandal became members in council and 31 SC members got place in Constituent Assembly.

The pact nonetheless paved the way for joint electorate with reserve seats which has been in practice now and accordingly, 131 seats in Parliament and 1,169 seats in Assemblies are reserved. But still the dispute is going on. Who decides the candidates for elections in reserved seats? Are the SCs electing the leaders of their own choice to make them accountable towards their community or are they forced to vote candidates decided by caste Hindu political parties. During last 90 years, the political literacy has increased as well as socioeconomic development but still caste issues remain unresolved.

QUOTA ROW: SUB-CATEGORIZATION NEEDED FOR DISTRIBUTIVE JUSTICE

Friday, 27 August 2021

The Indian social system has many layers of inherent inequality. India with huge diversity has adopted a policy of reservation to strengthen inclusive democracy through balanced representation of all sections of people. Though it is difficult to ensure absolute equality in all spheres but there must be a scientific approach to reach to the most deserving ones in lowest rung to ensure inclusive distributive justice.

It has been revealed that the benefits of reservation in Central Government jobs and Central educational institutions for OBC under Central list have not reached to a major section of communities within the list as a handful of dominant castes within OBCs have grabbed the lion's share. Justice G Rohini headed Commission set up in October 2017 for the purpose of studying the OBC reservation benefits across castes in its consultation paper shared that less than one per cent of the 40 OBC castes have availed 50 per cent of reservation benefits whereas 20 per cent of the communities listed in 983 entries could not avail any benefit. 994 entries have a share of below 3 percent. There are 2633 entries in the Central OBC list. The panel has studied 1,00,000 admissions in last three years to Central educational institutions and 1,30,000 recruitments in Central Government that have taken place during last five years under OBC category. The Commission has yet to submit its report and recommendations for a sub categorizing of OBC reservation aiming to fair distribution of available State-owned opportunities. It is suggested that the 27 percent of reservation will be subcategorized to cover all communities in the list as relatively forward, backward and most backward based on the benefits they have already availed.

There is no legal restriction over the sub-categorization in nine States including Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Bihar, Jharkhand, Karnataka, West Bengal, Haryana and TamilNadu which have already adopted the practice to ensure distributive justice. They have provided more space to relatively backward communities. Also, some States have accommodated minorities within BCs reservation based on social demography. Karnataka has classified OBC reservation into five categories and TN and Kerala have

provided reservation to specific caste groups such as Vanniyar, Ezhave, Nadar and Muslims within the BC reservation.

The State of UP is in path of such move with recommendations of Justice Raghavendra Kumar report in 2018. Way back the issue was raised by LR Naik, a former MP and Dalit member of the Mandal Commission, in support of most backward among OBCs as land-owning OBCs are more powerful than others mostly engaged in caste-based occupations.

The idea is the most backward classes whose marginalisation is more visible must have protection from the dominance of powerful BCs to avoid unequal competitions.

The move of the Government will affect the dominant OBC sections having more access to political visibility but definitely it is going to be more beneficial for the marginalised sections among OBC. The creamy layer criteria based on economic consideration and other criteria have already put restrictions on access of rich and publicly visible sections to such benefits.

The issues of sub -categorisation is also equally being discussed in case of SCs and STs reservation because it has been told that though SCs are a socially homogeneous group based on the criteria of untouchability but the list has not been strictly followed in many States while identifying the sub castes within SCs and it is found that many of the non-deserving castes entered into SCs list through manipulation. As a result, in a competition among unequal the most vulnerable sections within SCs are being deprived of getting the benefits of reservation. The States such as AP, Tamil Nadu, Punjab and Bihar have made legislations to sub-categorise the SCs reservation with a purpose to reach the more deserving communities. Bihar has made provisions for MahaDalits and TN has made provision for 3 per cent quota in favour of the Arundhatiyars caste within the SC quota. Many other States have supported the move while asked by the Supreme Court and some States have opposed it. It is suggested that the States must go for scientific survey to get the correct picture of representation of various sub -castes in jobs and educational institutions in order to identify the more vulnerable sections.

States such as Nagaland, Manipur and Meghalaya have made provision of reservation for specific tribes and the tribal reservation is more than fifty percent because of their demography. Nagaland has made 52 percent

reservation for indigenous STs and 15 percent for backward tribe of Nagaland. Meghalaya has separate reservation for specific tribe such as Khasi, Jaintia and Garo and other STs.

Some time back, a declaration by AP Governor for 100 reservation in all posts of school teachers in scheduled area was declared unconstitutional. However, it has been experienced that reservation policy serves as an instrument of building inclusion, distributing public opportunities, and sharing responsibility of nation building based on values of democracy, liberty, equality and fraternity. It is helping to bring different castes and tribes to work together for common goal and contribute to strengthening fraternity as fellow citizens of the country. It has contributed to abolish caste-based occupations, caste-based discrimination in public places through social mobility of different castes and most importantly created equal opportunity in matter of public education, employment and governance.

Reservation has not affected the quality; rather it has proved that States having reservation for a long time have made success in education, administration and governance. All southern States are the best examples in this regard. Though reservation is not a solution to the larger issues of poverty and unemployment but it has created a scope of participation especially in Government jobs and educational institutions for historically deprived sections.

VENTURE CAPITAL FOR UPCOMING ENTREPRENEURS OF SCs.

September 23 ,2020

The Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment has launched Ambedkar Social Innovation and Incubation Mission under venture capital fund for SCs that aims to support 1000 start ups with a budget of 19,320 Lakhs over next four years. The venture capital setup for this purpose in 2016 with a fund size of Rs 500 crore has supported 118 companies to the tune of Rs 444 crore. The Ministry said that the identification process involves Department of Science and Technology, Technology Institutions and Business Management Schools of the country. This is to support the first generation of SCs businessmen using modern technologies as primary means of innovation and arrange support for them in form of hand holding, guidance, and mentoring along with providing equity support up to Rs30 Lakh over a period of 3 years.

Though the very idea is not new and the target is very minimal but definitely it will help many upcoming entrepreneurs in setting up their business through support of the Govt. It is a fact that SCs and many other marginalized communities have been historically deprived of getting involved in business sector for number of reasons and the most visible causes are lack of venture capital and social acceptance in caste society. After independence, many attempts have been made to fill the gaps in many sectors including business and in order to build an inclusion and social diversity in business, the most prominent economic sector of the country, by arresting caste-based monopoly of few communities in business. The SCs though constitute almost one-fifth of the population of the country but they have very insignificant share in country's wealth which has been monopolized by a few dominant castes that helps in the concentration of wealth in the hands of few and persistently contributing to increasing inequality rather than making equal distribution of national wealth among different social groups for building an egalitarian society as visualize in the constitution of our country. These days SCs are visible in politics, Govt. jobs and educational institutions because of the policy of affirmative action under the provision of the constitution and similar affirmative action is also highly required in private sector business also

because these sector is the largest employment giver and through this move along with gainful employment the SCs participation in business can help in promoting their social status from job seeker to job provider. Representation of SCs in business can be ensured through their meaningful participation in the economy and social life. Economic development will influence social development and strengthen democracy, unity and integrity among fellow citizens.

Way back, the National SCs and STs Finance and Development corporation was setup in 1989, later bifurcated in 2001 only for SCs, with authorized capital of Rs1500 crore and National Safai Karmacharies financial development corporation has setup in 1997 with an authorized capital of Rs710 crore to promote self-employment among SCs and most vulnerable section of SCs that is scavengers and these institutions have state branches but these institutions have failed to create desired impact during their long time existence in states. It is found that these institutions often suffer due to lack of adequate capital fund and dedicated staff to carry forward the mission and above all there has been lack of political will to implement the action plan and involvement of the people for whom these plans have been targeted. The accountability, function and impacts, of these institutions have never been discussed in public domain and the existing available infrastructure and experiences are also not being linking to new initiatives as the polices have been more dependent of ruling parties and their own understanding of issues of economic development and participation of the marginalized communities.

There are number of private initiatives such as Dalit Indian Chamber of Commerce and Industry that helps in growing business among marginalized sections who are historically being denied a space in business but they have very limited presence to bring a desirable impact which only Govt. initiatives can do in creating wider impact.

Leaving aside dedicated institutions and schemes as said above, there has been general provisions made in Reserve Bank guidelines on credit policy for SCs and other marginable sections such as STs and women but these provisions are never being properly planned, implemented or monitored. There has been no accountability by banks to such policies of inclusion as a constitutional mandate on path of achieving economic equality with growth. The financial inclusion policy says about priority sector leading and credit provision for SCs along with opening of branches in rural and

backward areas to build access but the reality is something else in states such as Odisha. The state-level bankers committee never take up issues exclusive to SCs and other marginalized sections who have been not enough competent to avail their rights and available opportunities for them created out of public fund by Govt. Mostly the private and public financial institutions are largely managed and owned by the traditional dominant caste people in the country and have hegemonic control over decision making bodies. In spite of policy and guidelines the financial inclusion policy have not been properly implemented for building inclusion in business which can contribute for self –employment and inclusive growth. So any special scheme of venture fund by Govt. for the higher economic participation of SCs of the country will contribute to inclusive growth under the growing market economy and go on the path of redistribution the available finance capital of the country . This will not only help in economic growth and employment but also largely contribute to reduce continued caste based social inequality that exists for many centuries in our social life. The backward states such as Odisha with one fifth of SCs population and having potentiality of natural resources must make such efforts to promote young upcoming entrepreneurs from the state by using the central schemes as opportunities for employment and growth while ensueing the participation of the unrepresented sections.

LET ODISHA'S MARGINALIZED SECTIONS GET FISCAL BOOST.

(Self –employment schemes of special National financial institutions)

Friday, 10 September 2021

The Constitution of India has made provision for the holistic development of marginalized sections such as SCs, STs, OBCs, Minorities and others because of their historical social, educational and economic backwardness. Reservation apart, there are exclusive National Finance Development Corporations for SCs, STs, OBCs and minorities with paid-up capital for economic activities, targeting generation of self-employment among these social groups.

These institutions are the National Scheduled Castes Financial Development Corporation (1989), National SafaiKarmachari Financial Development Corporation (1997), National Scheduled Tribe Financial Development Corporation (1989), National Backward Classes Finance Development Corporation (1992) and National Minorities Development and Finance Corporation (1994).

These institutions have been mobilizing finance from Government and private sources and are operating through State channelizing agencies to finance various activities such as business, trade, transport, microfinance and most importantly professional job-oriented education at low interest. The Central Government has also made provisions of reservation in public contract, departmental purchase, dealers and distributorships and has set up venture capitals for promoting business among these social groups. The institutions have been operating through State channelizing agencies for almost last three decades.

In the context of inclusive development of Odisha, the obvious question is how effectively these institutions are functioning in State of Odisha? Their recent annual reports have projected a very poor performance. Ideally, the State must have to utilize all available Central schemes under these institutions but in reality the State has failed in implementing the schemes for the benefit of the poorer sections. Many States such as Kerala, TN and Nagaland have more channelizing agencies and several have

exclusive financial agencies for specific social groups but Odisha has no such arrangement. Unfortunately, Odisha's routing agencies have been almost ineffective in terms of allocation of matching funds and reaching out to the targeted beneficiaries of the schemes.

The issues are not being discussed in proper forums without a proper review. The State has been losing its due share from the Centre which is affecting the development of the State, especially its marginalized sections.

The State channelizing agencies are almost non-functional without adequate budget, staff and dedicated leadership to carry forward the mission of the institute. The departmental officials going there in deputation with additional responsibility have no role and are functioning most ineffectively without accountability. The performances of the institutions have not been reviewed regularly.

Many of the Central sponsored schemes are not being implemented without any accountability. It has been happening due to lack of political will of ruling parties and bureaucratic apathy and above all, lack of awareness among people and beneficiaries of schemes. It is time that the State Government must come up with a policy for business to make it inclusive of all social groups. The rights over equal opportunity in matter of public employment also attract the role of Government in ensuring self-employment for all sections of social groups in accessing scope of employment in business sector too.

Business is one of the largest sectors of self-employment of our economy but for many historical reasons and continued discriminatory socio-religious systems, a number of social groups are not able to thrive in the sector. They were historically denied rights over land, education, capital and access to business. The business sector is the monopoly of a few dominant classes. Access to credit is an important economic right of every individual without which economic development especially self-employment and entrepreneurial promotion is not possible.

In terms of financial services, Odisha is very poor with less number of bank branches in providing banking service to all. There has been no effort by the State to promote financial literacy and banks are violating Reserve Bank guidelines while dealing with marginalized section borrowers. Bank officials are discriminating against the customers of marginalized

communities. The subsidy money provided by the Government through banks is not reaching to the beneficiaries in time.

The lopsided development of past few decades have already resulted in growing penury among the people dependent on primary sector, besides distress migration, unemployment and chronic poverty. The business, mines and industries in the State have created jobless growth and whatever employment opportunity has been created, it is being monopolized by a few privileged sections without having a fair share for the marginalized. The nature of unemployment varies from region to region and also is different among economic classes and social groups of the State because of huge regional, social, caste and gender disparities. The State Government reported in 2019 in the Assembly that 1, 31,000 Government jobs were lying vacant in the State. The 2011 census on household with salaried jobs says only 0.20 per cent of SC and 0.12 per cent of ST households in the State have salaried jobs in private sector. The self-employment initiative has emerged as one of major options to counter growing huge unemployment while improving the marginalized sections' participation in business. It is expected that the Government of Odisha will provide adequate financial support to upcoming entrepreneurs by taking a proactive role.

ADARSH GRAM YOJANA IN ODISHA

Prime Minister Adarsa GramaYojana far behind target in Odisha-I

Friday, 19 November 2021

The Constitution of India has made provisions to ensure equality in status and opportunities to all its citizens. The Government of India has been implementing many schemes to address the inequality among social groups and between rural and urban areas by making special provisions for the weaker section of society especially SCs and STs in rural areas. But for last seventy years most of our development schemes under the policy of affirmative action are centered round individual beneficiaries whereas there is also a need for integrated development of the habitations to benefit the entire community. It is found that SC population is not geographically concentrated in a particular area; rather it is relatively scattered by contrast to ST population which generally lives in contiguous pockets. So the habitation development approach has included both SCs and non-SC population in the rural areas. Scheduled Castes sub-plan approach has been applied since 1980 to bridge the gap among SCs and rest of the population through budgetary provisions, but it has yielded the desired result on multi-caste habitations where SCs still suffer with the problem of integration with others. The Prime Minister Adarsa Grama Yojana (PMAGY) is one of such schemes conceived in 2009 on a pilot basis to bring benefit to a multi-caste village having more than half of its population belonging to SC. The Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment is the nodal executing agency of the scheme. The identification of villages for the scheme is done on the basis of 2011 census. It is identified that there are about 46,844 villages in the country having more than 50% SC population and 75,941 villages having over 40% SC population, out of total 6, 49,481 villages in the country. Cooch Bihar in West Bengal is the only district having 50% SC population and three districts of Punjab are having more than 40% SC population. The State of Punjab has 32% of SCs which is the highest proportion of SCs in the country followed by Delhi (27%), HP, WB, UP, and Haryana having over 20% each. Odisha with about 18% of the SC population has 2,728 villages with more than 50% and 4,523 villages having over 40% of SC population. There are a total of 53,135 villages in

the State. The PMAGY in its pilot phase has selected 1,000 villages from States of Tamil Nadu, Rajasthan, Bihar, Himanchal Pradesh and Assam and in the next phase in 2014-15 about 1,500 villages across 11 States including AP, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Haryana, Karnataka, MP, UP, Telangana and Odisha. It has selected 175 villages from Odisha. Further in 2018-19, it has decided to cover all villages having population of 500 with more than 50 per cent SC population and all the eligible villages by end of 2025. It is reported that about Rs 350 crore as Central assistance was released to the State till 2019-20. The scheme is more focused on convergence of all Central and State schemes and providing additional support of Rs 21 lakh to each village to fill up the critical gaps including the administrative expenses. It has set up monitoring committee at the Central, State, district and panchayat levels for its effective execution involving Government and non-Government actors and by pulling financial sources from Government, PSUs, CSR funds and all other possible sources. The PMAGY is primarily targeting the integrated sustainable development of multi-caste habitations with large SC presence within a period of three years. The scheme aims to build social and physical infrastructure of basic amenities while ensuring social inclusion by complete abolition of untouchability, discrimination and caste-based atrocities from the village which must be the first step in the path of building an ideal village. The weaker section of the village must have sense of security, equality and dignity like fellow villagers and they should no way feel inferior to others. It is found that though many of the villages have good infrastructure built out of public fund, but that amenities and services are not being used by the SC communities of the village because of untouchability practices. So, this integrated scheme has been well planned to bridge both the gaps of non-availability and access and by that, narrowing the gap between SCs and rest of the population. It is also said that the other social disabilities such as gender-based barriers and alcoholism must also be abolished and special care and social security measures must be taken for women, children, girl children, senior citizens and people with disabilities (PwDs). As part of the scheme, the villagers will be aware about the Constitution and their constitutional and legal rights, and fundamental civic duties as citizens. As per the scheme, the Adarsa Gram must be connected to the nearest major road and have street lights, electricity connection to each household, post office, internet connectivity, bank and Bharat Nirman common service centre apart from adequate

housing with no homeless families. The village must be free from dry latrine and open defecation and replaced by sanitary toilets, drain and water disposal systems along with water harvesting structure and water bodies and adequate safe drinking water tap at the doorstep. It must have tree plantation, bio gas, solar energy and smoke less Chula. It must be targeted to achieve universal adult literacy and 100% enrolment and retention of children at elementary stage and reduction in IMR, MMR and malnutrition with support of schemes such as ICDS, SSA, MDM and NHRM. The most important aspect of an ideal village is economic development of all, especially the BPL families. Adequate programme should be planned for strengthening means of livelihood, food security and employment generation for a dignified living. There must be effort to apply technology in production and skill development of youths and working population. The village should have people's organizations such as village committee, Mahila Mandal, Youth Club, SHG and children's club comprising all social groups to take up all the village development works in a transparent manner. It is good that in a recent development the Ministry of Tribal Affairs has announced to adopt such scheme is 36,000 tribal villages in the country. Unfortunately, the Government of Odisha has been delaying implementing of such a dedicated Central scheme for socioeconomic transformation of villages.

SAANSAD ADARSA GRAM YOJANA AT SNAIL'S PACE IN ODISHA-II

Friday, 12 November 2021

During last 70 years of constitutional governance, there have been efforts by the Government to minimize the gap between rural and urban areas and also to improve the access of marginalized social groups to public utility of the villages. The reality is a vast majority of rural population has been deprived of basic amenities in the absence of adequate public infrastructure. However, despite five-year annual plans, schemes and dedicated departments, still there have been efforts to fill up the gap. Prime Minister Modi in 2014 on the birth anniversary of Loknayak Jayaprakash Narayan has introduced Saansad Adarsa Gram Yojana (SAGY) which has been implemented by the Ministry of Rural Development. The SAGY aims to realize the concept of ideal village visualized by Mahatma Gandhi and the scheme is to be led by the Members of Parliament in their own constituencies and States. It is said in the guideline that the MPs of both the Houses will motivate the communities to implement not only physical development activities but also to impart the values of equality and human dignity against the many forms inequality and social discrimination in the villages. The scheme guideline drafted by the Union Ministry of Rural Development reaffirms its faith in Gandhi's idea of an ideal village which he discussed in 1937 and 1942 in his famous journal "Harijan" and also in his correspondences with others.

Gandhi had given much priority to cleanliness and sanitation of the people of the village and proposed to ensure house of worship, common meeting place, good road, playground and theatre hall, common grazing land for cattle, co-operative dairy and school with industrial education for all village. Gandhi also imagined that the ideal village must be self-sufficient in production of grains, vegetables, milk, Ghee and its own Khadi. He also added that the panchyats will settle the disputes and there must be compulsory education and harmony among different communities and complete abolition of untouchability. He said to reconstruct the villages with all facilities of cities so that it may be easy for anyone to live there. After so many years of independence still many of our structural issues have not been resolved to the desired extent. It is good that the scheme

aims to ground the vision of Gandhi into reality. Taking a cue from Gandhi the scheme has also adopted many contemporary ideas and emerging new challenges while giving thrust to participation of people from all sections in village in decision making process of development and governance. It has made provisions for ensuring empowerment of the poor and marginalised households in the village on principles of social justice including gender equality with pro-active steps for inclusion and integration of socially excluded groups, especially SCs and STs.

The scheme proposes to have a cattle hostel, drinking water pipeline to each household, drainage, CCTV in public places, smart green schools, E-library, adequate solar street lights and extensive use of broadband connectivity and networks as part of an ideal village. With the holistic idea of building an egalitarian society, the scheme spells out the importance of reviving the values of dignity of labour, spirit of community service, voluntarism, self-help, mutual cooperation and self-reliance which are slowly fading away with emerging challenges of individualism, growing caste and religion based identities and capitalist mode of economic changes. It is good that the scheme has to be implemented by all MPs irrespective of their party affiliation because elected peoples representatives have a great role in building an ideal society which must start from their own constituencies where they have been enjoying the support and confidence of the people as well as command over local administration as elected representatives. Let's see how it works here in the State of Odisha having 21 Loksabha and 10 RajyaSabha MPs representing the State from BJD, BJP and Congress. Ideally, the State should have 155 ideal villages by 2024 if each MP adopt five villages of their choice. These ideal villages can be model school for others to follow and slowly expand to all other villages of the State. It will improve the socio-economic condition of the poor and change the overall social and economic environment which has been the cherished dream of the villagers. But why in spite of available schemes, resources and institutions, we lack leadership to ensure advancement to all its people. Unfortunately, the Ministry of Rural Development report says the identification of villages in Odisha has not been completed yet for such an important Central scheme while many other States have such as Manipur, Kerala, Chhattisgarh, TN and UP have almost completed their second phase SAGY-II identification. Why the MPs from Odisha are not serious about such initiatives while the other States are performing well?

As it is the responsibility of the MP to identify suitable GP for developing an Adarsa Gram having population of 3,000-5,000 in plain areas and 1,000-3,000 for hilly and tribal areas. The MPs have a major role in the whole process from identification to facilitation, monitoring and to fill up the critical gaps in grounding the scheme through convergence and mobilizing resources from existing State and Central schemes and also from other sources such as CSR fund and from own MPLAD also. The scheme can become successful with active involvement of Panchyatraj institution, district administration and the elected representatives, specially the MPs. The Ministry of Rural Development is the nodal agency for the implementation while the Chief Secretary of the State heads the empowered committee for its execution. There is also a provision to include the civil society members and experts in such committees and award best performers those who have proved best in practice. It has been observed that many Central schemes such as SAGY have been neglected by not only the State Government but also by the MPs of different parties.

ATROCITIES AGAINST SCs AND STs ON RISE

Odisha among the top 5 states with highest cases.

Friday, Sept 02, 2022

National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) in its annual report Crime in India 2021 captures the trends of crime in our country. The report contains crime against vulnerable sections such as women, children, senior citizens and SC's and ST's and others. As it is mandatory with the central government (as per POA Act, 1989) to separately record the crime/atrocities against SCs and STs perpetrated by non-SCs and non-STs for review and monitoring, the data of crime against SCs and STs has been reported separately. These atrocities are primarily linked to the caste and ethnic-related issues with the victims belonging to the SCs and STs and the perpetrators belonging to non-SCs and STs, i.e., mostly dominant caste and social groups of society.

It is reported that a total of 50,900 cases were registered for committing crime against SCs and 8,802 cases were registered for committing crime against STs in the country. It shows a consistent increase in the crime rate. In comparison to the year 2020, in 2021 the atrocities rate has increased by 6.4% in case of ST's and by 1.2% in case of SC's. The nature of cases reported include rape of women and children, attempt to rape, sexual harassment, acid attack, assault on women with intent to outrage her modesty, stalking, voyeurism, kidnaping and abduction, riots, robbery, arson, criminal intimidation, intentionally insult or intimidate with intent to humiliate, occupy/take possession of lands belonging to SCs and STs, prevent/deny or obstruct usage of public places/passages, forced to leave the place of residence or social boycott and practices of untouchability.

The States having maximum number of cases include UP, Rajasthan, MP, Bihar and Odisha and these top five state account for more than 70% of the cases of atrocities against SCs and the top five states having more than 75% of the total atrocities cases against STs includes MP, Rajasthan, Odisha, Maharashtra and Telangana. In atrocity cases against both SCs and STs, the state of Odisha has featured among top five states having more number of cases.

There are a total of 70818 cases of atrocities against SCs and 12159 against STs pending for investigation at the end of the year 2021, and a total of 2,63,512 cases of SCs and 42512 cases of STs placed for trial in the courts. At the end of the year more than 96 percent of the total cases were still pending for trial. Though the charge- sheeting percentage was more than 80% but the conviction rate was below 40%. This shows the status of our criminal justice administration specially access of vulnerable victims to speedy trial and justice.

It has been a matter of deep concern for the state of Odisha which has a sizeable population of SCs and STs. But the rate of crime and atrocities against SCs and STs is no way less than that in the states of UP, Rajasthan and MP. The report says atrocities against SCs in Odisha shows an increasing trend during last three years - in 2019, number of cases registered was 1886; in 2020, the number increased to 2046, and in 2021 the number of cases further increased to 2327. The same was the case of STs as reported number of cases registered were 576,624 and 676 for the year 2019, 2020 and 2021 respectively. Till the end of the year 2021, a total 2692 cases of atrocities against SCs and 802 cases of STs were pending for investigation by competent authority, and 16355 cases of SCs and 5852 cases of STs were pending for trial in different designated special courts of Odisha.

Why such an increase in the cases of atrocities against the poor and marginalized, mostly the working class people of a backward State such as Odisha? It is also being argued by social activists and researchers working on implementation of POA Act, 1989 that the reported data by the Home Department were the cases registered in different police stations of the State while there were equal number of cases that are underreported due to a number of reasons, as it is not easy to get the cases registered due to non-cooperation by police and many cases are being settled under pressure by influential people of dominant castes and by mostly those belonging to ruling parties. Poverty, illiteracy, landlessness and economic dependency of the marginalized, especially the SCs and STs in Odisha makes them more vulnerable to atrocities. Unfortunately, the institutional mechanism to monitor such cases of crime and atrocities against SCs and STs in the state has been dysfunctional as the state vigilance and monitoring committee under the chairmanship of the chief minister has not been formed and hence no review meetings for a long time, as is the fate of district committees headed by the district collectors.

On the other side, lack of organization at the grassroots as self-defence mechanisms to provide security against organized atrocities has been largely absent due to lack of proper information about legal mechanisms. The rise in economic distress, landlessness, unemployment and low income along with untouchability practice make their life miserable and defenseless. There are also instances of false cases being registered against the poor and the marginalized SCs and STs to harass them and also to force the victims to withdraw the atrocity cases. The NCRB in its Prison Statistics India 2014 reports that the percentage of SCs, STs, Muslims and Christians inmates is proportionately higher than their national population percentage. It shows the vulnerability of the socially and economically marginalized groups in our continued criminal justice administration and their access to justice. A study on women prisoners by the State Commission for Women, Odisha, revealed that about 63 per cent of women belong to SCs and STs and other backward Communities and a majority of them are economically poor and illiterate. The present scenario of criminal justice administration is extremely discouraging without a timely and fair trial to ensure justice. The provisions of the legal aid and justice delivery system have not served much to the marginalized section of our country, including backward states such as Odisha. Many of the innocent SCs and STs in south western parts are being jailed with accusations of left extremist involvement without a scope of representation to prove their innocence. The legal-aid authority and prisoners welfare fund has failed to cover major prisoners to ensure minimum humanitarian aid to the poor victims. Their sufferings have been manifold with a damaging impact on their family life. The long delayed process of judicial trials for the illiterate poor has been an excruciating experience. While taking forward the agenda of economic growth and social development, the state government must seriously look into the age-old issues of crime against humanity to build a socially inclusive Odia society.

75TH YEAR OF INDEPENDENCE

Caste, communal violence continues to wreak havoc

Friday, 03 June 2022

While celebrating the 75th year of our Independence, one major discomfort we encounter is the growing incidents of caste and communal violence that have taken place in recent times in different parts of the country. The violence has impacted a large section of poorer people of our society who otherwise mostly belong to the socially marginalised and economically exploited sections. It is observed that mostly the illiterate unemployed youth of marginalised sections who are being motivated by communal crowds for the purpose.

The growing caste and communal violence in various parts of the country is mostly being engineered by communal and fundamentalist outfits. The nature of violence includes organised killing, mob lynching, honour killing, house burning, damaging property, brutal physical attack, rape, mass attack over hamlets, abuse in public places and attack on people having different opinions and dissent. The violence has wreaked havoc for thousands of families and led to loss of earning members and distress migration.

Our youth and children are being motivated to become identity conscious with reorientation about past and our history is being retold in caste and communal line so that we can have more conflict and polarisation of society on caste and communal line. Our youth and intellectuals are being encouraged negatively to get engaged in unproductive debates and discussions in social media. The whole process is affecting productive engagement of nation-building more rationally at par with other developed nations. As countries are engaged more in conflict over traditional faith and worship and religious differences, they still remain backward in many ways and are in grip of civil war with huge loss of human life and property. History shows that in any society violence has a long term ramifications over work culture and production relations that ultimately affect the growth. It divides the working population and spreads a culture of hate.

The NCRB reported that in 2020 there were about 60,000 atrocity cases committed against the members of SCs (50,291) and STs (8,272). Along with this, the religious minorities, mostly Muslims and Christians, women and children, are prominently featured among the victims in the crime

reports. It is reported that attack on religious minorities, SCs and STs is on the rise with cases relating to beef eating and its business , food, dress, inter-caste and inter faith marriages, and conflict over place of worship and rituals. The conversion of religion of low caste people has not contributed much to change their social status.

Majority of the violence cases have a strong caste angle as the so-called low castes among Hindu, Pasmanda Muslims, Mazhabi Sikhs, Dalit Christians and Tribals were featured as the worst sufferers. The NCRB data on prisons says our jails are crowded with SCs, STs and Muslims in large number disproportionate to their population percentage. With increase in number of incidents of violence, there have been thousands of cases pending for trials and mostly, the poor people are languishing in jail as convicts and under trials in the absence of a robust criminal justice administration.

It is being observed that in a number of cases of violence, the local police have not been proactive by initiating timely action to avoid the conflicting situation. According to jurisprudence and constitutional morality, the spirit of law must be to protect the weak and poor, the deprived and marginalized section of our society, while dealing with cases relating to violence against them but experience shows that police have not played their role to protect the weaker sections such as SCs, STs, women and religious minorities. It is also noticed that the Government offices, mostly police stations, have small temples in their campus and the photos of gods and goddess are being displayed in the office walls. It contradicts the secular character of the State administration whereas ideally Government offices and specially police stations must be free from such display. Rather the photos of our national heroes, State icons and national flag may be displayed as a mark of secular nationalism. It is suggested that the Government may proactively go for the formation of peace committee involving people from different socio-religious groups including social activists of the area to maintain peace and social harmony among the people. The local committee should discuss the Constitution of India, especially the Preamble, fundamental rights, directive principles of State policy and most important, the fundamental duties mentioned in the Constitution. Our educational institutions and Government offices must have regular sessions over constitutional values and morality and every citizen must try to cultivate it into practice in their family and public life. The Government must instruct local administration and police stations for

monitoring caste and communally motivated provocative speech and discussions being delivered during public meetings by dominant caste and communal outfits and also impose a full ban on carrying of weapons during religious processions and rallies to avoid any kind of violence and unwanted situation. The growing incidents of violence are building a potential threat to our secular ethos, social justice ideas and constitutional democracy. The idea of modern India as a nation emerged during the struggle against all forms of inequality and discrimination for establishing liberty and equality. The Preamble very well explains the character of India as a country that keeps us united in spite of diversities and differences. Any kind of domination and forceful imposition for a monolithic religion, language, food and cultural practices may be detrimental to the real spirit of secular nationalism and social harmony.

ENACT CENTRAL LAW TO EXECUTE SC, ST SCHEMES EFFECTIVELY.

Development Action Plan for SCs and STs under budgetary provision.

December 30, 2021

In the early nineties, the then Planning Commission observed that the annual budgetary spending of different ministries and departments did not reach to all section of social groups, especially the SCs and STs. As per 2011 census, the SCs and STs constitute about one- fourth of the population of our country but ironically, the development of this segment of population has been historically neglected for number of reasons. So, in order to make them include in Government's plan developmental spending, a special component plan outlay within the total state plan expenditure on the basis of their population percentage was made. Unfortunately, such an important plan of the Govt. that is directly connected to the development of the marginalized groups has not been grounded effectively even after more than 30 years of its operation. There is no foolproof mechanism to track the funds allocation and their utilization by different ministries and departments. However, every year there has been notional allocations following the criteria of population percentage of SCs and STs. Some years back, the special component plan has been renamed to scheduled caste sub plan (SCSP) and scheduled tribe sub plan (TSP) and recently they were further named as Development Action Plan for SCs (DAPSCs) and Development Action Plan for STs (DAPSTs). However the change of name has not brought any change in its implementation process.

The replacement of the planning commission with NITI Aayog in 2015 has changed the role of different stakeholders and the implementation process. In the new arrangement, the Ministry of finance, MSJE and MoTA have a major role to play along with NITI Aayog.

The NITI Aayog (social justice and empowerment division) have issued guidelines for earmarking of funds for DAPSC and DAPST but mostly these Govt. bodies has been playing more an advisory role in the whole process of monitoring the implementation in absence of legislative backing

to fix accountability. There has been a demand by many Govt. and non-Govt. organizations, people's movement and elected representatives for a long time to enactment a suitable central legislation to make the provision meaningful but things are getting delayed in the absence of political will of the subsequent Government.

The three states such as Karnataka, AP and Telangana have enacted legislation in their states for better monitoring of these sub-plans. The AP SCSP and TSP (planning, allocation and utilization of financial resources Act 2012 and the Karnataka SCSP and TSP (Planning, allocation and utilization of financial resources)Act 2013 are being seen as a right step to ensure its effective implementation. However the central Govt. has been delaying the process.

In this context the 17th Loksabha parliamentary committee on welfare of SCs and STs, comprised of 30 MPs from both the houses, in its recent report noticed number of anomalies in the implementation of the plan. While examining the schemes under Allocation for welfare of SCs (AWSC) and Allocation for welfare of STs (AWSI) under different centrally sponsored schemes and central sector schemes the committee headed by its chairperson Dr. KiritPremi Bhai Solanki, MP, has recommend that all state Govt. should be instructed to submit annual reports giving details sector wise and scheme wise financial and physical targets achieved for better transparency and accountability.

Many of the schemes have failed to deliver desirable result due to lack of effective management among Ministries, NITI Aayog and state Govt. The committee has taken note of non-allocation of funds under AWSC in proportion to the SCs population by states such as Assam and Jharkhand. Referring to a report of CAG, it has observed that funds earmarked for development of SCs and STs have been diverted for other purpose. Though finance ministry has instructed to all concern that the appropriation of funds from SC and STs Heads to other head is barred. The funds in some cases have been diverted to such institutions which are no way related to the development of SCs and STs. The most shocking part of it was the unutilization of fund throughout the financial year and return of funds. The committee has also observed that there has been notional allocations with high budget but the real spending is very less. There were also delay in release of funds affecting timely implementation of schemes and funds remain largely unutilized. It is denial of rights of

development to SCs and STs by denying them of their due share in budget. It has bearing on livelihood and living standard of the people since the schemes mainly address issues of poverty, livelihood, education, employment and basic amenities of SCs and STs.

In recent time, the Govt. of India has started an online e-utthaan under Public finance management system (PFMS) to track the spending but this is more as generating data without addressing the real issues. Therefore, the advisory, guideline and executive instructions which are not being followed by ministry and states in true spirit must be replaced by central legislation to mitigate the issues of non-implementation and the violation of provisions. Along with the legislation, the Govt. must encourage social audit by community organizations and involve people at each stage of the disbursements i.e. from planning to impact assessment for the realization of the objective. The state Government and elected representatives of SC and STs especially MLA and MPs holding positions in different monitoring bodies, must play a proactive role to ground the plan. The CSOs must play the role of a watchdog along with PRI and local development administrations.

MANUAL SCAVENGERS DREAM FOR DIGNITY

Scheme GARIMA of Govt. of Odisha.

The Govt. of Odisha Housing and Urban development Department has announced a scheme named GARIMA, for the wellbeing of the sanitary workers engaged under Urban Local Bodies, with technical backing from Urban Management Centre, Ahmadabad supported by Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation.

After the JAGA mission with collaboration of TATA Trust for providing land to land less slum dwellers, this announced scheme is for the urban poor but primarily targeted to a small section of the sanitary workers who have been engaged in cleaning toilets, septic tanks, sewer, garbage pits and other waste treatment work.

The plans shared in the scheme is very much required for the wellbeing of the sanitary workers who have been placed in the lowest ladder of our socio-religious and economic system for centuries together without much desirable change in their life and livelihood. But for a number of reasons, unfortunately for last seventy years of constitutional Governance has been witnessed a systematic attempt for non-implementations of constitutional provisions, laws and schemes for the protection and development of the marginalized section of our society including the most vulnerable sanitary workers. These Sanitary workers are also being called in different names such as SafaiKarmacharies, Mehentaras, Beheras, and Sweepers and their habitations are known as Harijan Sahi and Mehentar Basti or slums in urban areas. They all belong to a particular community who have been treated as untouchable in social life by all other social groups and identified as most vulnerable community among the scheduled castes of the state. Historically, manual scavenging has been practiced as a hereditary caste based occupation and forcibly imposed upon this community which they have been bearing since generations. Along with the whole family, women are engaged in a large number with this occupation as they customarily clean the roads, colonies, drains, hospitals, educational institutions, offices and all most all public and private places. They have been working in most hazardous environment, unhygienic, without protective equipment and devises such as mask, gloves, boots etc. Many of them die in road side manholes, sock pits, waste pits while on job but many of such cases though

reported in media but remain unrecorded officially and never discussed in public domain by CSOs as matter of grave concern even also suffer large institutional apathy within the existing problem redressal mechanism. They are found as prone to TB , skin and verities of water-borne diseases due to long-time exposure to dust, human waste and unhygienic working condition and usually, they are being paid lower wages without social security benefits while engaging themselves from early morning to late mid-day without break and holidays. They have been suffering all kinds of social segregation and indignity because of their occupation.

In recent days the privatization of sanitary work in the cities has further reduced their status from regular Govt. employees to private casual workers. Whatever benefit was available earlier have been withdrawn. Now almost all the urban local bodies in the state have employed them through contractual appointment by private contractors violating all Labour laws. A sizable section of the sanitary workers are manual scavengers. The prohibition of employment as manual scavengers and their rehabilitation Act 2013 defines manual scavengers as manual cleaning, carrying, disposing or otherwise handling in any manner human excreta in an insanitary latrine or in an open drain or pit into which it is disposed of or on a railway track or in such other spaces or premises. Manual scavenging is violation of the right to human dignity. But still this inhuman practice has been going on in parts.

The most important concern is not just the economic development of sanitary workers but about their social dignity. The dreams of the makers of modern India was in favour of abolition of caste based occupations and uphold the idea of the dignity of Labour . As part of national commitment in line with constitution of India along with National Commission for Scheduled Caste , there has been a special panel the National commission for Safai Karmacharies since 1993 and also the National Safai Karmacharies Finance and Development Corporation since 1997 with a share capital of Rs600 crore specially to look into the very specific issues of the people engaged in Sanitary work. The NSKFDC has dedicated schemes for skill development, study loan and rehabilitation programmes for self-employment with loan facilities with lower rate of interest and subsidy. The NSKFDC has been pulled resources from number of sources including, Govt., PSU, private and CSR funds. The Odisha SCs and STs Development Finance cooperative Corporation is the nodal agency in the state for implementation of such schemes. But there has been no visible

impact on the wellbeing of sanitary workers which needs a serious review by available statutory bodies.

The central Govt. under the national action plan for total eradication of manual scavengers and their rehabilitation has been implemented by the Ministry of urban development but without any target and time limit it has been continuing. The prohibition of employment as manual scavengers and their rehabilitation Act 2013 is in place for abolition of manual scavenging as a correction against historical injustice against these community and given them an opportunity to live with dignity as fellow citizens of the country under the protection of the constitution.

There is provision in the section 13(1) (c) of the Act for allocation of residential plots and financial assistance for the construction of houses but unfortunately this has not been implemented by the state Govt. though a majority of sanitary workers are land less. As per the rules, there must be a state level and district-level survey committee under the chairmanship of the district magistrate to identify the workers but the state Govt. has no data about these workers. Why in spite of constitutional mandate, laws, programme and dedicated institutions their condition has not improved to the desired extent?

The fact is there is no need of new schemes for few economic benefits of few but what is required is the effective implementation of the laws and already existing host of schemes by Govt. The most important issues are non-implementation of laws and schemes and also not just economic welfare but dignity of the sanitary workers living with social discrimination in everyday life since generations and dreaming to live with equality and dignity.

SANITARY WORKERS ARE MOST NEGLECTED IN ODISHA.

Urban bodies as principal employers must intervene to ensure their wellbeing.

Friday, 07 August 2022

Sanitary workers are not like other workers of any occupation but they are also one of the most vulnerable communities among scheduled castes in India. Scavenging or sanitary work is still prevalent as a customarily caste based occupation in India. As per 2011 census the population of Hadi community in Odisha was 2.5 lakh who are largely engaged in sanitary work. They are also called by different local names such as Mehenter, Behera, sweeper and scavengers. With increasing urbanization, most of them have migrated to urban locations to get engaged in sanitary work and largely concentrated in cities. In the recent past, the Government of India has identified about 60,000 manual scavengers from 18 States including Odisha. Though legally manual scavenging is banned under the Prohibition of Employment as Manual Scavengers and their Rehabilitation Act 2013, it is still in practice in many places of Odisha. Both men and women of the community are being engaged in this occupation and the State Government is the largest and principal employer. In a caste-ridden society of India sanitary workers are looked down upon in the caste hierarchy and they are the most socially discriminated community both in rural and urban areas only because of their caste and caste-based occupation. They clean toilets, and clogged drains by entering manholes, carrying and cleaning, disposing off all kinds of waste, garbage, and disposal of dead animals, and carcasses, including human excreta. They all start work early in the morning only to keep our houses, all public places, hospitals, schools, stations, bus stops, roads, and cities clean to maintain sanitation for a healthy and clean life. Despite modernization, this particular community people are routinely engaged in large numbers with this most hated occupation which has no social respect in public life. Some of them also additionally do drum beating, leather work, shoe making and bamboo work. But despite all their dedicated service to mankind what they have been getting? What is their socio-economic status? Almost all of them live in slums for generations without homestead land and even struggle

every day to access basic amenities such as safe drinking water, electricity, toilets and a house for the family. Their houses in slums routinely face eviction drives as unauthorized habitations, without a rehabilitation plan. They have been always pushed into the outskirts of the cities and displaced again and again either in the name of expansion or beautification of cities without a permanent solution to their land and housing rights which must be recognized as basic human rights to live a life with identity and dignity. The Prohibition of Employment as Manual Scavengers and their Rehabilitation Act 2013 is in place to abolish manual scavenging as a correction of historical injustice and indignity and to establish the right to live with dignity as a fundamental right under the Constitution. There is a provision in Section 13(1) (c) of the Act for allocation of residential plots and financial assistance for construction of houses or a ready-built houses to sanitary workers. As per the rule, there should be State-level and district-level survey committees under the chairmanship of district Collectors with representatives of community including women, but the Odisha Government has not yet implemented it as nowhere there is such a committee. Their literacy rate is comparatively lower than other social groups. Their children become rag pickers, child labourers and largely dropouts. There has been no major change in their life even with 75 years of intuitional interventions, protective laws, and a host of schemes while we are celebrating Azadi Ki AmrutMohachab. Why so? It is because the popular clean drive project of our Prime Minister has not been inclusive of the concerns of sanitary workers? In almost all urban bodies in Odisha, sanitary work has been slowly getting converted into privatization and contractual appointments and surprisingly no one has been getting minimum wage and even workers with 25 years of experience are not being treated as semi-skilled or skilled workers because sanitary works are not the skillful one. Many of them get less than minimum wage for eight hours of hard work and no extra wage for overtime. The principal employer has no role to ensure minimum wage of these vulnerable helpless workers and Labour department has a monitoring mechanism for these workers. The kind of work they have been doing is most hazardous as they are more prone to TB, skin diseases and water borne diseases due to long exposure to dust, polluted water, wastes and unhygienic places. It is the duty of the employer to provide all kinds of protective equipment, rest and holidays and sickness leave but this has been undermined and there has been violation of all kinds of Labour laws. They must have protective equipment

such as masks, gloves, boots, helmets and all kinds of such instruments while on the job. It has been frequently reported that some of them die in roadside manholes, soak pits and waste pits while cleaning. Unfortunately, such deaths largely remain unrecorded by urban bodies; there is no data base. The trade unions, civil society organizations and other such social identity based bodies have made very little intervention to change the socio-economic condition of the sanitary workers. As part of national commitment in line with the Constitution of India along with the National Commission for Scheduled Castes (NCSC), there is a special panel since 1993, the National Commission for SafaiKarmacharis (NCSK), and the National SafaiKarmachari Finance and Development Corporation (NSKFDC) since 1997 with a share capital of Rs 700 crore to look into the specific issues of scavenger communities. The NSKFDC has declared schemes for skill development, SwachaUdamiYojana, sanitary marts scheme, construction of pay and use toilet, study loans for students, and rehabilitation programme for self-employment with loan at lower rate of interest and subsidy but it has covered very little. The Odisha SC and ST Development Finance Cooperative Corporation (OSFDC) is the nodal agency in the State for implementation of such programmes for the SafaiKarmacharis. In States like Karnataka, there is also a State commission for SafaiKarmacharis under the provision of the State Act to ameliorate their condition. The various public sector and private corporations are also contributing out of their CSR funds to the NSKFDC for rehabilitation work. But it is most unfortunate that the State of Odisha has been neglecting the cause of sanitary workers without any visible effort for correction of continued historical injustice against sanitary workers of the state.

AFTER DANA OF K'HANDI, NOW KABIR OF SATYABADI

Friday, 16 October 2020

After Dana Majhi, an Adivasi of Kalahandi who travelled for 10 km with body of his wife on shoulder in 2016, this time it is Kabir Bhoi, a landless Dalit labourer of Satyabadi block of Puri district, is in news for similar miserable plight. He carried his ailing wife on a trolley for 90 km from Sakhigopal to Cuttack because he had no money to pay for an auto rickshaw and also, a Government ambulance was not available for him.

But despite his extreme hardship, unfortunately, he lost his wife Sukanti Bhoi under treatment at the SCB Medical College and Hospital, Cuttack.

His daring act to save his wife against enormous social apathy puts a question mark on condition of civic life of the poor and marginalized during the Covid 19 pandemic. The women, children and elderly of poor populations are the worst sufferers in an insensible health governance system of the State that lacks equity in access to public opportunities.

In this context, the issues are manifold which includes access to the available treatment facilities at CHC and medical college and hospital, and transport facilities for patients such as ambulance, dedicated ambulance services of 102, and the unrestrained fare of available private transport during pandemic.

Why the poor were not getting vehicle for such emergencies? Why such distress condition that forces poor people to take drastic steps? These are the questions to think about. In spite of populist schemes by the Government for the poor, SCs and STs, a vast majority of them continue to be in a pitiable condition without basic minimum for life.

Kabir Bhoi of Puri and Dana Majhi of Kalahandi are symbolic representatives of our collective failure to transform our society into an egalitarian social order. The scope of access to available equal opportunities in public health sector is still a day dream for a majority of masses in the State. The vertical and horizontal inequality in all spheres based on regions and social groups continues unabated. There has been no effort to build sufficient public health infrastructure to make it universally

accessible; rather privatization policy has been injected in health sector to make healthcare marketable for profit without human concern.

In multiple forms of unequal society like ours the public services provided by the Government are also inequitably available to its members.

Especially in a backward State such as Odisha with huge poor population, the universal access to quality health facilities can only be ensured with State investment but unfortunately, the State allocation has been minimal to address pressing health issues. Health is not just about treatment but also includes related logistic facilities for patients and above all, public accountability of health system.

Coming to the status of the victim, this writer has many times visited a number of Dalit hamlets in Satyabadi block and witnessed their miserable condition specially their vulnerability to access homestead land and basic amenities.

Hundreds of Kabir Bhois of Satyabadi live inside coconut groves without a homestead land for a house and continue to live without facilities of basic amenities for a dignified living. Practices of untouchability and social discrimination are rampant in these areas. Mostly many of the inhabitants are sharecroppers and engaged as daily wage earners to meet their bare daily need. They have been facing the brunt of natural calamities routinely every year. They are the worst sufferers but just meagre receivers of relief and rehabilitation package of Government.

The lack of basic amenities such as safe drinking water, toilets, electricity, housing and other sanitation facilities along with lack of adequate nutritious food are some of the prime reasons of their continued underdevelopment and poor health condition.

Poverty and social discrimination in rural villages pushed many of youths from Dalit communities towards distress migration as an option in search of livelihood. Economic misery apart, another main issue of their inherent backwardness is their caste based social identity which has prevented them to all kinds of social access to public privileges in society enjoyed by others.

The behaviour of majority of our Government doctors, medical staff, health workers and paramedical staff towards poor is one of the worst, without human concern. They perhaps forget that they are paid out of

peoples' fund to serve the public without discrimination based on socio-economic conditions of the patient.

REMEMBERING A FORGOTTEN HERO OF MARGINALIZED COMMUNITY.

Padmashree Mohan Naik crusader of social Justice.

Mohan Naik was born on June 3, 1921 in a family of scavengers in Berhampur municipality of South Orissa. His father Bijuli Nayak and mother Annapurna Nayak were sweepers in the municipality. He was prevented from studying in school because of his caste. There was also the pressure for earning to run the family kitchen, as a result of which Mohan was compelled to join the Berhampur Municipality in the capacity of a sweeper. Unexpectedly, he came in contact with Mr. Eswara Sahoo, a school teacher. Then he got admitted to the Municipality ME School. After finishing ME School, Mohan took admission in Khalikote collegiate school. He was a good student; versatile in essay writing, debate competition and poetry composition. He was not only a versatile writer but also an orator. During Holidays when other students were busy with playing, he visited the untouchable hamlets and motivated the Dalit communities to get organized. He also encouraged Dalit parents to send their children to school and travelled almost all parts of Ganjam. He was always contemplative about the untouchability practices of Hindus. Once, in 1937, he was prevented from entering the Kali temple in Berhampur and from that day onwards he made a vow not to visit any Hindu temple and resolved to fight against the unjust practice of the caste Hindus. He perceived that temple entry is not merely religious but the right of the untouchables and he fought for the temple entry rights of the untouchables.

Mohan came in contact with Master Sanaya Pantulu, a Brahmin social worker, who was running schools in an untouchable hamlet for children. But there was no teacher because the caste Hindu educated people were not agreeable to teach the untouchable students. Sanaya Pantulu developed intimacy with Mohan like a father vis-a-vis his son and encouraged him for his good work. In 1920 Mohan got introduced to Thakarbapa who was working with Hind SevakSangh founded by Gopal Krushna Gokhle. Harijan Sevak Sangh unit was setup in Ganjam district with Mohan Nayak as its secretary. He was only 17 years old.

On 18th December 1938, Mohan formed Berhampur Harijan Sangh involving youths to fight against untouchability. He got support from his brother-in-law Mr. Damodar Naik. It was the need of the hour to unite all Dalit people to fight against untouchability. An organization was formed in the name of Berhampur Harijan Sangh in this regard. He started conducting awareness meetings and mobilized the Dalit community. The organization had done lots of work among Dalit communities in Berhampur town.

Mohan had strong inclination towards creative writing and literature in general. His fiery writings always provided fuel for eradication of untouchability. He conceived of an idea to publish a magazine in support of his social activism and took the message to the public. He started a magazine under the title Harijan. It was an eight-page hand written fortnightly. He used carbon copy to make about 16 copies of each issue. He was arrested in August 1939 for publishing this magazine without the permission of the British Government. The police seized a half-rim of paper, 2/3 dozen carbon copiers, pencils and blades. The police imposed the press act and Indian Security Act and filed a case against him. The SDO, Berhampur gave his judgment after four month. The order was either pay Rs.25/- as fine or to be jailed for 14 days. Mohan was aggrieved and went to jail in protest but his grandmother paid the fine. He came to know of this when he returned back from the jail. Mohan's grandmother vehemently opposed the publication of Harijan. Whenever she saw any piece of paper or carbon in the house, she just threw it into the dustbin because of the fear of reprisals. Mr. Naik in his student days was rusticated from the school. The school headmaster suspended him with the fear that his presence in school might disturb and pollute other students. The district education officer of Ganjam Mr. Krushna Chandra Mohanty called on Mohan and put in a condition that if he wants to study he has to leave the Congress party. But he did not agree to this proposal and was compelled to leave the school when he was in class nine and thereafter devoted full time for social work. In 1939, the Second World War began. To stir up the non-cooperation momentum with the British government, all the Congress government resigned in their respective states including Odisha. He was arrested on August 9 and arraigned on the charges of distributing leaflets against the British as a supporter of Quit India movement. He got injured in Berhampur jail on January 26 along with other freedom fighters while they were trying to host the Indian flag in the

jail premises. He was in jail up to March 1945. Harijan League was one of the premier organizations of Dalit communities in Orissa in 1942. The four freedom fighters laid the foundation of the organization when they were in Berhampur central Jail. They were Mohan Naik of Ganjam, Kanduri Mallik of Jagatsingpur, Santanu Das of Jajpur and Purnananda Samal of Cuttack. Eventually, Mohan was awarded with the honour of Padmashree for his outstanding contribution to society in 1969.

He got elected from Berhampur constituency, as a Congress member of the state Assembly in 1951. He was also a district board member in 1945. In 1957 and in 1962 he got elected as member of Loksabha as a Congress candidate. In 1967, he was also elected as Congress candidate from Gopalpur constituency. He was vice president of Utkal Pradesh Congress. He was a minister in Nandini Satpathy cabinet in 1976 and also continued as a minister with Binayak Acharya as Chief Minister. He was member of the Prof. Malkani Committee and was travelling all over India to submit a report on the situation of the scavengers. He was vice-president of Utkal Balaseva Sangh along with Radhanatha Rath as President. An orphan center was set up by him at Nimakhandi near Berhampur town in 1952. Besides, he also set up a hostel for Dalit children at Dhanamarasahi. The Sevak Bhawan founded by him provided education for Dalit and tribal children. He set up a printing press in 1964 for publishing the Sevak magazine. He died of Cancer on September 23, 1983 in Berhampur.

TRIBUTE TO DALIT FREEDOM FIGHTER UCHHABA MALLIK, NIMAPADA

(26.6.1885 to 16.9.1942)

Dihabari, Nimapara, a nondescript village in Puri district of Orissa is about 30 km away from Bhubaneswar. Uchhaba Mallik who laid down his life on 16.9.1942 in police firing was an active freedom fighter in 1942. His son Gajendra Mallik was also a freedom fighter. A colony set up by ONGC in 2002 is named after Uchhab Mallik at Dihabari. Nimapara police station situated in Nimapara town is the silent witness to the British rule and oppression. In front of the police station, a Sahid Smruti Stamba was built in 1992 in memory of Uchhaba Mallik.

Uchhaba Mallik was born on 26/06/1885 at village Dihabari in Nimapara Tahasil of Puri district. His father's name was Kapil Mallik and mother's name was Sumati Mallik. He joined in the peasants' movement in 1935 and he was an agricultural labourer and marginal farmer. At the age of 52 he died in police firing at Nimapara police station when he participated in a rally and blocked the police station as part of 1942 movement.

Nimapara is situated in the delta of four rivers - Prachi, Bhargavi, Dhanua and Kusabhadra and it is in a distance of 20km. from the principal world famous sun temple Konark. The rivers were being used as the through fares of communication up to the early eighteenth century in the coastal areas of Orissa and boats were the mode of transportation. There are these visible relics of Buddhist sculptures which anyone can find in Nimapara. It is closer to the famous Buddhist cave Khandagiri and also the Jagannath temple in Puri.

Communities like Chassa, Khandayat, Bauri, Gouda, Kandara, Pana and Hadi are residing in Nimapara. They solely depend on agriculture for their survival. The economy mostly consists of paddy cultivation, betel plantation, coconut plantation and marginal fishery. Dalit communities are landless communities and mostly work as daily wage labourers in agricultural activities.

The revenue systems adopted by the indigenous rulers at different times before the British rule was oppressive and exploitative and the British administration in no way was an exception to this. The then Jamindar

/landlords and Matha Mahantas; the religious heads of Mathas, were quite supportive of the British administration and the Britishers were also supportive of the Jamindars in their exploitation.

In practice, the Jamindars and Matha Mahantas were the real owners of the land and they were also Ex-officio heads of the revenue system. People had no right over water bodies and trees in their village. The tax collectors were inhuman and oppressive during tax collection days.

Mr. Dagial, British government settlement officer reported about the exploitation and oppression in his report of 1922 to 1932 to the then government. This area was in frequent threat of drought, cyclone and flood which always broke the backbone of poor people, as they were totally dependent on agriculture for their livelihood. The money-lending system was quite inhumane with multiple interest rates charged for the loan by the Mahajans and the debt trap was like a vicious circle that ended up with landlessness, poverty and marginalization. In 1918, drought/anabruti(water scarcity) led to famine and the impact of First World War contributed to the increase in price of food grains and other essential commodities. In essence, understanding of freedom struggle was a struggle against the oppression of Jamindars who were the local agents of the British, it was more of a struggle for rights over land, water bodies and forest, village forest. The anti-British struggle was directly linked with freedom from bondage and from the oppression of the immediate ruler.

Dalits were in the bondage of caste oppression. Untouchability was rampant. Dalit, Bauri, Kandara, Pana, Hadi were treated as subhuman. The rulers used them and their pathetic economic condition to subjugate them in perpetual bondage and under the mercy of the upper caste people. Uchhab Mallik was a rebellion from his yearly youth. Once a local Jamindar sent one of his officials (Piada) to collect the tax but Uchhab refused to pay the undue tax amount. The piada come back and reported to the Jamindar about the refusal of Uchhaba.

The Jamindar summoned Uchhaba and wanted to punish Uchhaba for his insolence and asked his henchmen to catch hold of him but they failed to subdue him. He warned that if anyone tried to accost him he would be as good as dead. Thus, none dared to capture Uchhaba and finally, he came back freely. Uchhaba was a hero of his own community and invariably used to raise his voice against injustice.

The famine of 1918, publication of Oriya daily Samaj in 1919, formation of Utkal Sammilani and formation of Utkal Congress committee with Gopabandhu Dash as its President in 1921 had created good impact over the area. Gandhiji came to Orissa in 1921 and started the Salt movement in 1930 which also created good impact in the area because a good number of people participated in the movement. The then congress workers and their activities, like campaign against untouchability, anti-drug, anti-alcohol campaign had been creating a favourable impression on the people and more particularly on the Dalit communities which inspired ordinary people like Uchhaba to join in the freedom struggle. There were lot more names like Banchhanidhi Sethy, Muralidhar Kandi, Lokanath Bhoi; those who joined in the freedom struggle from Dalit communities. Nimapara has a good tradition of struggle and a good number of freedom fighters from Dalit communities who had actively participated in the struggle. Also, Mr. Biswambara Naik led a popular Dalit struggle against the exploitation and injustice of Resinga Matha Mahanta.

Keshab Bhoi of village Bishnupur (1910 to 1950) also participated in the 1942 freedom struggle. He was illiterate and an agriculture labourer. He got seriously injured with a police bullet and was jailed in Puri for a fortnight. Sana Mallik of Chanarapada in Hansapada (b: 1901 to d:7/10/1988) was an agricultural labourer. He actively participated in the 1942 movement. He too struck by a police bullet along with his son Rajiv Mallik. He was jailed for 15 days at Puri jail. Krushna Behera of Dihabari, Hansapura (b: 1903 to d: 6/05/1983) was jailed for two years in Puri jail. He was a peasant and actively participated in the 1942 movement. He too was injured in police firing but subsequently recovered. Biswambara Nayak of Kumbharapada participated in the Peasant movement, Narottam Sethy (b: 1907 to d: 6/09/1885) of village Chanarapada was jailed for 15 days at Puri and participated in the 1942 police station gherao movement. Also Gajendra Sitha of Sirikerenda participated in the Salt movement in 1935 and was jailed in Puri for 15 days. Mr. Abhiram Mallik, who is related to the local freedom fighters association and also Yuba Swadhinata Sangrami, a state-level association of freedom fighters having an office in Bhubaneswar, told that the conditions of the Dalit has not yet changed a minute in the village. During informal interaction, the reiterated narrated the same woes and tribulations for which Uchhaba Mallik had sacrificed his life. Abhiram Mallik, son of Gajendra Mallik is the Secretary of Yuba Swadhinata Sagrami. Today, he is preoccupied with devoting his time to

public service. He has been instrumental in setting up schools, and coir training centre for women in this own panchayat.

(Source: Dalit freedom fighters of Odisha, 2006 by Manas Jena)

INSTITUTIONAL MECHANISM FOR SCs IN THE STATE NEEDS EVALUATION.

30 July 2021

The social groups whose development are more linked to radical social change are the scheduled castes in Odisha. The Govt. of India Scheduled castes order 1936 had identified 54 sub-caste groups as scheduled caste in the state of Odisha but during last seventy years it has increased by state Govt. and currently the number has reached to 94 while some sub –caste groups are still in queue to be enlisted in scheduled caste list of the state. It is told that in comparison to other states the SCs list of the state of Odisha has included few non-deserving castes in list because of political considerations and not following the original criteria of untouchability while identifying the SCs of the state. It has subsequently diluted the benefit sharing among SCs of the state. But largely majority of the communities that are included in the list are socially distinguished and economically poor in the state. The makers of modern India want to build a caste-less society with abolition of untouchability and all forms of caste-based discrimination and atrocities against SCs and others. As a matter of historical reparation towards justice and equality; there have been special provisions and affirmative action policy deal with to address the continued social injustice while ensuring participation and equal opportunity for development of all including the SCs. But the present socio-economic scenario of the state of Odisha shows a discouraging picture as majority of its people are in extreme poverty and backwardness where the SCs are more disadvantaged and vulnerable among the social groups. The last seventy years of constitutional rule and institutional mechanism have not created much impact rather when the SCs are struggling for change, the new liberalised economy have put new challenges before them.

Despite many efforts of Govt. and others, about one-fifth of the population of the state continues to face social discrimination and lags behind socio-economic development. There have been continued untouchability practices and caste-based atrocities in the rural villages against these section of people by economically, politically and socially dominant castes. The Home Department, Govt. of Odisha in its annual white papers have reported thousands of such cases of atrocities while an

equal amount of such cases remain unreported for various reasons. The SCs people hamlets are still lack of basic amenities for life though there have been number of schemes being announced and implemented. The post-independent land reform laws have Promised Land for housing and livelihood remains a distant dream for lakhs of landless families among SCs. Their children are prominently featured among dropouts and child labourers and adults are among migrant workers in the current Govt.'s data. The benefits of reservation in education and jobs remain vacant or unfulfilled and largely diluted and distracted. These days growing trend of outsourcing, contractual appointments and privatization further debarred these section of people from quality education and meaningful employment of organized sector while a vast majority of them still languish as casual workers of unorganized sector without benefits of Labour legislation and limited trade unionism.

The emerging political trend shows the withdrawal of the state from its responsibility towards the historically vulnerable sections including the SCs and encouraging the market economy forces to take over the economy of free play in a continued unequal social condition where still the society is divided in caste line and continue with many forms of caste bias and discrimination that deprived a major section of people even in realization of their basic human dignity and constitutional rights as a citizen of this country.

It is time to re-look into the changing socio-economic conditions and context to re-strategies many of our constitutional promises and its implementation and also to evaluate the work of institutions existing to carry out of mandate of the constitution in building an egalitarian society of equal citizenship and opportunities for all including the SCs. Take for example the major institutional mechanism of Govt. primarily working to ensure the protection, participation and development of the SCs under the guidance and leadership of mostly the elected representatives of SCs. Currently, the state has 24 SCs MLA in assembly and 3 SC MPs in Loksabha. No one from SCs represents in Rajya Sabha from Odisha. There are also Zilla Parishad Chairperson from SCs as per their percentage. As per constitutional provisions, there are dedicated institutions such as the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, National Commission for Scheduled Castes, National Commission for Safai Karmacharies, and National SCs Finance Development Corporation.

The state-level institutions include the Department of SCs and STs Development, where it is told in the constitution that the minister heading this department must belong to ST (Article- 164), SCs and STs Finance and development corporation, SCs and STs Research and Training institutions, Odisha scheduled caste advisory board headed by chief minister with all SCs MP and MLA as its members and state vigilance and monitoring committee to monitor cases of atrocities with Chief Minister as chairperson and at district level collector is the chairperson with SCs elected members of the district as its members and the SCs and STs MLAS house committee in state assembly to the overall implications of various policies.

Added to the institutional mechanism there is a budgetary provision since 1979 as a scheduled caste sub plan which speaks about a population percentage-wise proportional share in budget for the development of scheduled castes of the state with separate account heads in demand grants. It is further told that the funds are non-divertible and non-lapsable and must be primarily targeted to generate employment to counter poverty and unemployment. It is to bridge the gap in socio-economic development to bring their level at par with other social groups of the state. So the public institutions having budget and armed with protective laws and Acts have a greater role to play in upgrading the socio-economic condition of the SCs and make all effort to fulfil the constitutional promises. It is the primary role of different institutions and statutory bodies mostly represented by elected scheduled castes leaders is to monitor the implementation of various policies, laws, Acts, schemes and programme for the protection, participation and development of SCs of the state. But how far these institutions are effective in discharging their job while they are being handsomely paid out of public treasury. It is time to evaluate the role of institutions in ensuring justice and equality to SCs of the state.

NONFUNCTIONAL STATUTORY BODIES ATTENTION NEEDED

Implementation of provisions for protection and welfare of
SCs and STs in Odisha-Govt.

August 28, 2020

The idea of India is envisaged in the preamble of the constitution by makers of modern India which has visualized to build a society of democracy, equality and Justice for all its citizens. There are special provisions are placed for SCs and STs to ensure the realization of their fundamental rights through participation in governance in matters relating to their protection, participation and development. Since the days of constitutional governance, a number of statutory bodies have been constituted under the provision of the statute to look after the protection and well-being of these sections but unfortunately, it is being observed that the Govt. of Odisha have paid very less attention to the formation and functioning of such committees that are primarily dedicated to serve the interest. Take for example, the three important, the state Tribal Advisory Council (TAC), State Scheduled Caste Welfare Board (SCWB), and State vigilance and Monitoring Committee (SVMC) which are constituted under the chairmanship of Chief Minister of Odisha to review and monitor the protection and welfare of SCs and STs, are almost non-functional. Mostly the elected people's leaders and higher level Govt. officials are the members of these bodies which are supposed to meet regularly to review the implementation of various protective laws and developmental programs for SCs and STs as well as to monitor the progress and to take decisions beneficial to their cause at appropriate time.

Article 164 of the constitution says that in the state of Odisha, there shall be a minister in charge of the welfare of STs, SCs and BCs and Article 244(4) speaks about TAC in states having 5th scheduled areas. Similarly, as per the provision of SCs and STs POA Act 1989, there shall be a state vigilance and monitoring committee under the chairmanship of Chief Minister. There is also provision of standing committee under the chairmanship of the minister SCs and STs Development under Odisha Reservation of Vacancies Act 1975. But it has been observed that for the last so many years there has been no regular meetings of these bodies

though it is mandatory to have minimum of two meetings in a year. SCs and STs constitute almost 40 percent of the population but their issues are not being addressed with seriousness even the elected members from these communities constitute a sizable portion of the legislative bodies holding important positions in Govt. are not much concerned about this though it is desirable that they must take a proactive role and activate their party's SC and STs cells specially assigned to address issues of STs and SCs of the state but unfortunately no such discussions are available in public domain.

A number of Govt. reports revealed that the socio-eco situation of majority of SCs and STs in Odisha have not changed to the desired extent in terms of social transformation and economic development because every day the caste based atrocities are being occurred in different parts of the state, poverty and distress migration persist as before which further widening the social and eco gaps among different social groups and contributing to increasing inequality in all spear of social life.

The protective legislations against practices of untouchability and atrocities such as PCR Act 1955 and POA Act 1989 are not being reviewed at state level. In the year 2018, the state has witnessed 1810 reported cases of atrocities against SCs and STs ranging from rape, assault on women and children, murder, rioting, attempt to commit murder, hurt, house burning, arson, physical assault, and many more forms of heinous crime and unabated practices of untouchability in many forms. The NCRB report for the year 2018 says that 10,000 numbers of atrocities cases have been pending for trial in different courts of the state where as the conviction rate was only 3 percent. The survey revealed that about hundreds of different forms of caste and ethnic-based untouchability practices, social segregation, have existed in rural villages. It includes residential segregation, seating separately in child care and PDS centres, during mid-day meal in schools, separate hostels for students, separate bathing places, drinking water sources, cremation grounds, two glass system in tea stalls and eateries, not allowed in saloons and public places, temples, honour killing to prevent inter caste marriage and many more. Students and employees from these communities have been facing institutional discrimination. The people are not treated with dignity in local Govt. offices such as Police station, Tahasil, RI offices, Block offices, Panchayat office and Banks in rural areas. Very often they face extortion, humiliation and negligence in dealing while they make any claim for their rightful dues and entitlements under different Govt. laws, schemes and provisions.

Similarly their discrimination participation, developmental issues and scope of employment within Govt. spear not being discussed in inappropriate forums. It is a fact that most SCs and STs hamlets are deprived of basic amenities such as safe drinking water, toilet, electricity, housing and connectivity which are linked to health and hygiene during this COVID-19 pandemic situation. But no special effort has been made to address the specific issues of these sections' vulnerability.

The structural poverty and distress migration issues are more visible among these communities. The incidence of poverty is very high as reported in Odisha Economic Survey 2018 in 42 percent of SCs and 64 percent of STs Households were under BPL which it is extremely higher than the state average of 33 percent (2011-12). Agriculture census and SECC 2011 very well established the fact that a vast majority of SCs population are landless and without Record of Rights over their homestead land in possession. Though almost 85 percent SCs rural household depend on agriculture for livelihood as sharecroppers and agricultural workers. Agriculture in Odisha being seasonal in nature due to lack of irrigation and have been prone to regular natural calamities, flood, cyclone, erratic rainfall, drought etc. have a direct bearing over the life of the people in agricultural who are usually lowest paid as minimum wage and they have no social security measures in spite of social security laws since 2008.

Added to resolved issues of the agriculture sector, the state has been witnessed ineffective implementation of reservation in the education and service sector which have deprived them from their participation in service and industrial sector. The jobs available in social sector suffers with limitation of social exclusion in recruitment of rural service providers such as Aganwadi, MDM cooks and contractual appointments. There are 1.45 lakh cook cum helpers and 29 900 women self-help groups engaged in MDM scheme operational in the state since 1995. There are thousands of contractual jobs being created in rural areas to facilitate effective service delivery system where SCs and STs have an almost very insignificant presence. This is denial of right to participation and realization of development. But unfortunately in this kind of sorry state of affairs, the Institutional arrangements for intervention has been increasingly dysfunctional due to lack of political will and mass movement by the deprived communities for realization of their rights and entitlements as citizens.

GRABBED TEMPLE LAND MUST BE FREED FOR PUBLIC USE

Friday, 17 June 2022

All over India most of the temples have landed property and wealth. Conservatively, it is estimated that there are about 24 Lakh temples in the country. The State of Tamil Nadu has the highest number followed by Maharashtra. Lakhs of acres of land has been under the ownership of these temples managed by trusts under the provision of Temple Endowment Act, framed some time back in 1863 and followed even after independence.

However, it has been observed that these temple lands have been hugely unused, encroached and even illegally transferred in the absence of strong supervision by authorities in charge of such land affairs. With change of time, the demand for land has increased in the temple areas due to growing urbanization and multiple business purposes, paving way to suspicious and surreptitious activities of land mafias, builders and estate brokers to grab the shrine land. The apathy and inaction of the State has been criticized from various quarters with a demand to restore and regain the land of the deities and make best use of the land, including for religious purpose.

The land grabbing cases are being reported from almost all States, including Odisha, which has a sizable number of temples having land. There are about 18,000 temples in the State having land. The Comptroller and Auditor General of India (CAG) in his report in 2020 on general and social sector tabled before the Assembly says that out of total 12,767 acres of land of 13 temples, about 4,500 acres of landed property of six temples were under encroachment. The Debotter land of Dhenkanal featured in top under encroachment. The inaction and failure to trace and track the land occupied by the encroachers risk the property of its ownership getting changed over a course of time or it becoming legally and administratively difficult to recover the encroached land.

Similar complaints are being reported about other temples including the Lingaraj temple land of Bhubaneswar and Shri Jagannath temple, Puri. Around 60,426 acres of land recorded in name of Lord Jagannath has been identified in 24 districts of the State. Added to this, more than 395 acres

have been identified in the States of West Bengal, Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh, Chhattisgarh and Bihar. These lands have been in possession of encroachers for decades. The Government of Odisha has made amendments in law to facilitate the settlement of land to eligible people.

There are hundreds of poor landless families in Puri and Khurda districts who are staying over temple land for generations without a record of rights. Their cases may be considered for a rightful settlement. During the period between 2001 and 2021, about 387 acres were settled. The Odisha Government has planned to sell 35,000 acres of land of Shri Jagannath temple and the funds will be deposited as income of the temple.

In many cases it is found that the temple priest groups, royal families, trust members and other communities related to temple land are in possession of the land and many of them also illegally have sold out by misusing their social positions and trusteeship. The Supreme Court in a judgment on September 6, 2021 said a priest cannot be treated as land owner or Bhuswami and the revenue records will not have the name of the priest. Pujaris do not have ownership rights as temple property belongs to deities, the court ruled.

The Madras High Court in a judgment in 2021 while recommending strong action against the encroacher also said that every inch of temple land either under encroachment or under illegal possession of lessees even after the end of lease period without the rent must be recovered at the earliest.

Many of the State Governments such as TN, AP, Karnataka, Maharashtra, Bihar and Odisha have started the recovery of the land and the plan for utilisation of the huge unused land for development purposes. They have brought changes in the earlier laws which were only allowed farming to earn revenue for temple maintenance. These States have made a move to make necessary amendments in State laws to allow easy process of sale, transfer and development of such land for public purpose, especially for health and education purposes.

It has been suggested by land rights movement groups that the temple land may be distributed among historically deprived landless poor for housing purposes but almost all State Governments have denied diverting the temple land for other purposes. The AP Government has denied distributing the temple land among the landless poor; rather the State

Government has decided to purchase private land for distribution among the landless.

The Bihar Government has started the process to dispossess the priest from illegal possession of temple land and make the land free for its use for public purpose, though the move of the Government was opposed by the priests who were made the de facto owner of the land. But the process of democratisation in temples must be encouraged by making the temple management socially inclusive of people of the same faith and the hegemonic dominance of priest groups must be neutralized with necessary legal and administrative measures.

The Constitution of India, Article 25, speaks about the right to freedom of religion, freely profess, practise, and propagate religion, subject to public order, morality and health and ensures the Government's right to regulate and restrict any economic, financial, political or other secular activity which may be associated with religious practices such providing for social welfare and reform or allowing equal access to all classes and sections of Hindus. The broad principle is that the State laws can regulate the administration of property of religious endowment. The Government of Odisha must amend the endowment laws to further facilitate the best management of temple land and its use for public purposes.

GHUNGHUTIPADA SLUM IN SAMBALPUR DISTRICT OF ODISHA

How Temple project discriminates against the Landless Dalit.

31 July 2022.

The Ghunghutipada slum in ward no.17 of Sambalpur Municipal Corporation is home to more than 200 households belonging to scheduled castes (SCs). About 400 years back the then king Rajabalarum Deohad engaged their forefathers to beat drums during temple rituals and also to maintain the cleanliness of the temple premises. Since then they have been staying over the land for generations without a Record of Rights (RoR). Despite their persistent efforts to get a RoR over the land, it has been deliberately undermined by the revenue administration till date, but for others there has been very good land record settlement in the city. The constitutional promises and land reforms laws are not being executed purposefully to ensure a minimum piece of land to live a life of dignity. There has been no visible change in their livelihood and living conditions as their socio-economic status remains as before with persistent victimization based on their social identity as land less, untouchables and slum dwellers. Almost all of the households live as daily wage earners mostly engaged in odd jobs; women as domestic workers and male members are construction workers, doing cleaning and sanitary work.

The so-called reservation in education and government jobs have no use for them. They all very piously carry voter cards to routinely vote to ruling parties and silently pay holding tax to Municipality and also very well in possession of their caste and resident certificate and Aadhaar card in favour of their identity as citizens of this country and domicile of Sambalpur town. Not just homestead land, these slum dwellers also have been deprived of basic amenities despite different government schemes and provisions to ensure land, housing, drinking water, toilets, electricity and many other schemes relating to social security and the social development of the poor slum dwellers. It has been noticed that both municipality and district administration have neglected the plight of the poor and low caste people in Sambalpur. It is said that about 60 no of slums in the city and periphery lack basic amenities. The inhabitants of Gunghutipada are not just betrayed once by the revenue administration

but also very well discriminated against now in the rehabilitation and resettlement plan of the state government in the SAMALEI (Samaleswari Temple Area Management and Local Economic Initiative) project.

Ironically as found in the declaration of Chief Minister, the government has followed two types of rehabilitation policy - one for the land-owning people and temple priests and the other for land less slum dwellers, primarily scheduled castes.

How come the government officials and policy makers have such double standards while dealing with the displaced people of the same project? The land less slum dwellers package is in all respects abysmally low in comparison to others. Even the livelihood aspect of the slum dwellers has not been taken into consideration.

How come a settlement of 400 years are being simply called unauthorized dwellings? It is whose responsibility to ensure survey and settlement? Even when there is a scope to correct the grave historical mistake, the administration rather practices selective attitude against the land less slum dwellers. Why only temple priests have the opportunity of preferential treatment in matters of rehabilitation and resettlement?

Most recently, in an interaction with this writer at Ghughuti Pada slum, the inhabitants asked such uncomfortable questions to government referring to their centuries old suffering of last 400 years, under the rule of the then king to the present day elected governments.

Since the inception of the project, they have had no peace of mind, good sleep and timely food. Most unfortunately, the formal eviction process has not been followed in case of the slum dwellers and here also formal eviction notice has not been served by the local authority. Rather, very brutally the local police demolished their houses. They were not given sufficient time to go for alternative arrangements. The school going children are women who have been suffering a lot in such a vulnerable situation. The women said that it will be very difficult for them to operate from the new place for domestic works and to shift their belongings to relocations with such meagre help from the government. "We are not opposing the temple beatification project but there should not be discrimination against us in rehabilitation and resettlement. Why are we being paid less than others as we are equally losers like others," asked Mrs Kuni Rout,(50), and Mr Janek Nag,(50), both residents of Basti. Mr.

Pradeep Kumbhar, (42), and Manohar Kurma and many others who are struggling with court cases and petitions and street protests to get justice under the banner of Ghughutipada Basti Banchao Adolan echoed the same concerns.

Though not new, the land and livelihood issues of slum dwellers now have a new dimension with inclusion of urban temple projects which is also a major cause of displacement but the basic question of land rights remains the same in any kind of project. Here, the SAMALEI project is worth of Rs 200 crore to develop more than 100 acre of temple area by Odisha Bridge and Construction Corporation and also to generate economic activities for the locals. The project has been closely monitored by the CMO for its timely completion. The temple beautification programme of the government of Odisha is part of the larger religious revival project to match with many such central government initiatives of recent times which are being posed as promotion of religious tourism. While no one is opposing such temple beautification projects be of the central or state governments, it is rightly expected that the land less poor people around the temple must be treated humanely and their genuine rights must be recognized under the provision of law and constitutional mandates.

FILL UP ABANDONED MINES TO CREATE PRODUCTIVE LAND

Friday, 01 July 2022

It is found that in Odisha, hundreds of acres of land in abandoned mines has been laying waste. After the extraction of minerals, mines become abandoned. Mining does not mean unending loss of land. The existing abandoned mines should be refilled and developed for its productive use. The regained land created out of refiling must be allocated on lease to prospective farmers inclusive of small and marginal farmers of different social groups for agriculture and other ancillary activities which will boost production and self-employment in mining affected areas.

Though there is provision under Minerals Conservation and Development Rules, 1988, to fill-up the mined-out areas and to further make it productive but in reality there has been no monitoring of the provision. The rules say about the removal and utilisation of the top soil and reclamation and restoration of land before conclusion of operation. But as observed the rules are being violated. As a consequence of this there has been an increase in waste land.

Privately it is estimated that the mining waste land reclamation would have made available thousands acres of land in mining areas of the State especially in the coal mining areas of Angul and Jharasuguda districts. The Mahanadi CoalFields Limited has started a land reclamation programme but it has not created the desired impact. The Ministry Coal and Mines has disclosed that as of 2021 there are about 270 discontinued /closed /abandoned coal mines in the country and the MCL has two such mines. Odisha has 25 per cent of the coal reserve of the country as estimated by the Geological Survey of India. Currently, mining operation is taking place in areas of Talcher, Chhendipada and Kaniha blocks in Angul, Lakhampur and Brajarajnagar in Jharasuguda, Hemagiri block in Sundargarh and Talalabira of Sambalpur owned by Hindalco, Birla. MCL, a subsidiary company of Coal India Limited under the Union Ministry of Coal, is the major lease holder of seven underground and 16 open cast mines in an area of about 20, 000 hectares. Besides, several mines undergo operation through a number of joint ventures. The growing demand for thermal power will have devastating consequences in the coal-bearing areas of the

State as open cast mining will have a huge demand of land for mining operation which includes not just mining but for other related purposes like dumping, infrastructure, office, residence and other commercial purposes.

The laws like Coal Bearing Areas (Acquisition and Development) Act 1957, SEZ Act 2005 and MMDR Act 1957 make the State almost powerless in dealing with land issues. Though the land situation in mining areas is getting serious, the State Government has not initiated any visible schemes for creation of new land for agriculture and forestry purposes by reclamation of wasteland, specially the mined-out land in the mining areas of the State.

Added to the coal area there are also thousands of acres of waste land available without treatment in other non-coal mining areas of the State such as districts of Koraput, Keonjhar, Mayurbhanj and Sundargarh.

The last hundred years of mining has produced many small or big sizes of abandoned mines in Odisha. The coal mining areas are the oldest one which started in 1875 at Gopal Prasad of Talcher. By a conservative estimate, if the waste land in coal mining areas were developed then hundreds acres of land would be available for productive use by locals. Especially farmers could go for integrated farming, agriculture, animal husbandry, fish farming, herbal garden and agro forestry to generate employment and boost growth by using existing modern agricultural technologies.

The production of milk, meat, eggs, fruits and vegetables and fish in the State can be improved to meet the growing demand of the domestic market and for export. This will bring food and nutritional security to the poor households in mining-affected areas such as Nagada or Sukinda where mostly the poor people are being deprived of quality food and children and women have been suffering with malnutrition.

The refilling of unused mines will check water and soil pollution and regenerate new forest in the areas as well as restore the old eco-system which will be helpful for the local people affected by mining. The filled-up mines can also be used as small lakes for tourism development, boating with fishery and duckery projects.

Already there are funds available with a host of schemes such as CAMPA, DMF and CSR which can be creatively used for land development. It is

also suggested that the fly ash and red mud and other wastes generated from thermal power plants and other industries and mines can be used for refilling.

The current scenario in coal areas witnesses growing repeated displacement impacting livelihood of people in agriculture, animal husbandry, fishing and forest produce collection. It is a matter of grave concern for farmers, fisher folk, forest dwellers and rural artisans who constitute a majority of the displaced and affected population. The water of river Mahanadi, Brahmani, Ib and Basundhara is being used to supply water to the mines and many perennial water sources including rivers are also getting polluted with waters of abandoned mines in the periphery. Mineral rich liquid waste known as acid mine drainage contaminates water ways. The local farmer organizations in these areas have raised the issue a number of times. The environmental problem is an added burden to the people of the locality with huge coal dust, water and air pollution, water scarcity, deforestation, high temperature, increasing waste land coverage and danger of abandoned mines. Pollution has lots of long-term ramifications over livelihood, health, social environment, flora and fauna of the locality which cannot be revived in a short span without reclamation of waste land. The recreation of land resources in mining areas in a way would compensate for the growing environmental and livelihood issues of the affected people.

LAND TO THE LANDLESS STILL UNFINISHED TASK IN THE COUNTRY.

July 8, 2022

The agenda of the central and state governments relating to land resources is slowly getting away from the long promises of freedom struggle, while we are celebrating the Azadi Ka Amrut Mahotsav. The move of the governments to digitise land records, computerize databases, mapping of land areas using drone technology, conclusive land titling and registering property index of easy doing business to make India an attractive location for foreign investors is not inclusive of the unfinished task of land reform; specially the provisions of allocating land to the land less people in rural India. Many of the steps of the government have been quite supportive to the land-owning communities but what about people in this country living for generations without land to fulfil their basic housing and livelihood needs. For the last 45 years almost all state governments have been implementing land distribution programs but still unfinished. The government of Odisha has been implementing this since 1974-75 even for the last 22 years in a mission mode to protect the land rights of the poor by law and programme but still lakhs of land less households remain untouched. No one knows how long it will continue to achieve the target? However it has been argued that land is central to food security and precondition for realization of basic amenities such as housing, toilets, water and electricity for a decent and dignified living. The most striking issues such as distress migration and malnutrition in Odisha are directly linked to access to productive assets such as land.

By denying land to a vast majority of poor people, are we not denying a dignified living and the basic human right to our fellow citizens?

The most unfortunate move of the government is the appropriation of assigned land /Promised Land formerly promised to the land less for distribution has been handed over for other purposes by the active state facilitation through Land Bank. On the other side still, millions of people land less people are asked to link their citizenship and residential proofs based on land records.

On the Land governance side, though land is a state subject, there has been an increasing tendency by the centre to downsize the state power by enacting many central acts relating to land. The NITI Aayog's Land Title Act is a centralized move that persuades states to accept but the states must have their own state-specific laws. Already the other resources such as forest, mineral and sea coast are under the control of the centre and with much legal, administrative and programmatic interference from the centre the role of the state in land resources management has become minimal. This is against the federal character and against the promises of the freedom struggle.

In countries such as India, Land resources are treated as wealth, social status and identity of an individual. Any modern society while moving ahead must have to democratize all its resources including Land. India is one of the most unequal societies in terms of access and ownership over land. The socio-economically oppressive caste system had denied ownership over resources to a vast section of people and forced them to live on physical Labour for a long time. Any structural change must address the land issues relating to poor people.

Experience shows the industrially developed countries of the world have done land reform as the first step towards dismantling feudal economies while shifting to an industrialized society. Worldwide two most important things that moved the society is primary education and land reform which has brought huge change in basic quality of life of the people while qualitatively and quantitatively contributing in reducing social and economic inequalities.

Both pre and post independent India has witnessed mass struggles against casteist and feudal forces to access land for livelihood. Mostly the peasants, agricultural workers and sharecroppers were in the forefront of the struggle as a result of which Land reform was identified as one of the major economic reform activities of post-independent India. But unfortunately, in spite of Laws, the political organizations of the landlords, former kings, Zamindars, and MathaMahanta have spoiled the implementation of ceiling laws, settlement and distribution of land with all their evil designs by using their political power and misusing the legal and administrative setup that supposed to enforce the law and programme. The private army of land lords along with regimented revenue administration and civil courts have

been successfully halted and slow down the implementation of the land reform agenda in various ways. There were violent struggles against the landlords in Telangana, Naxalbari, Bodhgaya, Bengal, Jammu and Kashmir, Odisha and many other parts of India. All the land reform laws of states were brought into the 9th schedule of the constitution to save from repeated judicial impunity. The long time pending of court cases had helped the landlords to rearrange their ownership to avoid the ceiling laws. However whatever reform has taken place with all difficulties has not covered all social groups specially the socially excluded groups, and still a major section of land less rural poor have been struggling to access land for housing and livelihood. Studies shows that only few states such as Kerala, WB, Assam, and Jammu and Kashmir have created some kind of impact in distribution of ceiling surplus land but many backward states such as Odisha and Bihar with high caste-based violence and ethnic conflict have not fully used the land reform laws supporting the land less communities to upgrade their socio-eco status.

While the country aspires to become a world leader it must revisit and recall the dreams of our forefathers, freedom fighters and martyrs and the preamble of our constitution where we have promised social and economic justice to all but in order to realize social justice we must democratize the access and ownership over all forms of productive resources including Land resources. By ensuring land to the millions of landless rural poor we can build an egalitarian society.

RURAL LANDLESS POOR STILL STRUGGLE TO AVAIL HOUSING BENEFITS.

June 24, 2022

After 75 years of constitutional governance, the housing problem of landless rural poor in the country still remains unresolved as the benefits of the much-hyped rural housing schemes such as PMAY (G) have virtually failed to reach millions of the most deserving poor people due to lack of homestead land. Despite land distribution schemes of the government for landless, the problem of landlessness has existed for a long time. Though there is the provision of land to landless within the scheme but the fact is a very small number of landless families among the identified landless beneficiaries of housing projects have been provided land. The slow process will further delay the scope of achieving the target of housing for all rural poor. As land is a state subject, the responsibility of ensuring land is the primary duty of the state government but many state governments including Odisha have miserably failed to complete the historic task. The rural housing scheme was started in 1985 as IAY was primarily targeting SCs, STs, freed bonded labourers and other rural poor. The new scheme in 2015 PMAY (G), also targeting 60 percent SCs and STs and 15 percent minorities, with preferential treatment for IAP districts, was launched in 2016 targeting 2.95 crore houses with basic amenities by the year 2022. During the last five years Rs 1, 47,218 crore has been released to states for the purpose but it seems the target will not be completed. The SCs, STs and minorities population constitute nearer to half of the total population of the state of Odisha and 14 districts of the state are identified as IAP (integrated action plan for selected tribal and backward districts of the country); so Odisha deserves all kinds of support to make the mission of housing for all a reality. Added to central housing schemes, the government of Odisha also developed its own state-specific housing schemes for rural poor and others. The government of Odisha's rural housing schemes such as Biju Pucca Ghar Yojana, Pucca Ghara Yojana (Mining) out of OMBADC fund and Nirman Shramik Pucca Ghar Yojana out of OBOCWVB fund also face the same problem with land less families. The housing projects is being implemented in 691 mining

affected villages of 8 districts including Koraput, Angul, Dhenkanal, Jajpur, Jharsuguda, Keonjhar, Mayurbhanj, and Sundargarh. The Biju Pucca Ghara Yojana targets a set of beneficiaries such as household affected by natural calamities, fire, flood, cyclone, earthquake, elephant menace, communal violence, victims of the river, sea inundation, relocation due to government projects, beneficiaries of FRA, persons affected by silicosis and over use of pesticides and extremely poor and vulnerable household who are not selected under other housing schemes. The Odisha building and other construction workers welfare Board is funding the housing projects for construction workers having registration for one year. Along with persistent social discrimination, poverty, unemployment and frequent visits of natural calamities, a sizeable portion of rural household have been struggling for generations to possess a land for their family and build a permanent house to live with dignity. Though the state has made land reform laws to ensure homestead land for all, the question remains unanswered: why has this not been implemented to change the traditional face of rural villages? The dream of the freedom movement and anti-feudal struggle was to make available land resources to all sections of people and recognize people's right over land but unfortunately, many of our countrymen still are called landless in a civilized independent country. Their identity is being questioned in the absence of a record of rights over the land they have been living in for generations. The government of Odisha has settled the refugees from Bangladesh and Tibet with land but the original natives are still landless even without a record of rights over their forefather's land. When they are being asked for caste, tribe and residential proofs by the local revenue authorities, they are clueless. In recent times, people living in coast, river banks, forests and mining areas are facing difficulties due to climate change impact, displacement and natural and man-made disasters, animal attacks, caste and communal conflicts, urbanizations, and distress migration. They are in search of livelihood that has been demanding rehabilitation of new kind of refugees in their own state. The state government is not much interested in resolving the historical structural issues relating to land. Most unfortunate is that the land once demarcated /assigned for distribution among landless is again taken back by the government to hand it over to corporates by creating a land bank. When corporates, politically and economically powerful people are offered land on lease and subsidies price in urban areas for private

business and residential purposes such as GA plots why the land less poor should not be offered 4 decimal of land to construct a house is not understood. The central government scheme to purchase private land for landless people in the absence of government land is also not being implemented by the state government. The OGLS and OPLE Act and OLR Act have become largely non-implemented due to legal and administrative complications being deliberately created by the revenue officials in the absence of political will and people's movement.

DEMOCRATIZATION OF ALL FORMS OF RESOURCE.

February 16, 2019

The development of the marginalized section in Odisha more depends on access to resources, natural resources, intellectual resources, and financial resources. It is the duty of the Govt. to ensure free access of all its people to various forms of resources of the state without legal, social and physical barriers of any form. However, the poor and marginalized section of the state has been deprived up owning resources for their development largely due to failure of last seventy years of elected Govt. in implementing the constitutional mandate which very clearly spells out state's role in ensuring democratization of resources of any form. Lack of resources makes people unskilled wage labour migrant workers in large scale and most importantly is that alienated them from production process.

The continued state charity, relief, loan waiver, subsidy, support price, and temporary cash distribution in the name of agriculture development out of public money, are certainly not the solution to persistent economic backwardness and cannot lead to a higher standard of living of the common masses, marginalized sections, of the state, unless and until productive assets are not given to them, rather it is an attempt by Govt. to make people unproductive and forced them to live under mercy of state charity in most undignified manner. How long the schemes such as Rs1 per kg rice, Rs. 5 meals and schemes of Rs5000 for farm laborers and farmers and free distribution of mobile will continue out of public funds? Does it really helps the rural poor and marginalized? How these schemes are contributing to improve the standard of living of the poor with dignity by generating employment, income, production and self-sufficiency. Political decisions of ruling elite must not go for a bad economy that de link people from production process and encourage wage slavery and distress migration.

Historically peoples ownership over resources and its utilization it has been taken away by the subsequent rulers of the past and even after the implementation of constitutional governances it is found that largely the provisions are not implemented. The trend has been continuing without much change over it.

For any kind of production, employment and income, productive assets are highly required and these resources such as land, water, forest, minerals are slowly getting privatized for the corporations while the rights of marginalized people of the locality are denied. For the last seventy years our natural resources and financial resources are handed over to private corporations but not to the people to make a living out of it. The sea coast, rivers, lakes, water bodies, water resources, forest, timber, minor forest produces, hills, minerals, pastures, agriculture fields etc., are leased out in through away price but depriving the local marginalized sections who have been depending on it for livelihood. Their legal rights and physical access are restricted through legislations and by using state police. This process has alienating people from resources as well as production process and pushing them to vulnerability without resources.

Not only natural resources but also financial resources created out of budgetary allocation and institutional financial arrangements by nationalized banks are not reaching to vast majority of marginalized sections. The budgetary provisions where plan and sub plans such as TSP and SCSP are being buildup to meet the specific need of the marginalized sections are denied and whatever reaching to the people that suffer with bureaucracy apathy and corruption and lack of participation of the people. The credit policy for the marginalized by Reserve Bank of India has been violated by all the banks in case of banking with the poor and marginalized section in the state. The policy of collateral security, bank guarantee, mortgage and schemes and project related deals are being violated in the absence of strict monitoring by the state Govt. The backward areas and areas having large concentration of marginalized sections who are also largely illiterate and assets less have very minimal institutional credit facilities to meet the timely credit requirement of the people of marginalized.

While moving towards knowledge society the third most important resource is intellectual resources that can be acquired through quality education but the education system of the state is graded with social and economic status. The children of the rural poor and marginalized sections are send to residential schools and vernacular medium while the upper class/caste urban rich are send to quality English medium schools. The language policy and medium of instruction and curriculums are also qualitatively different. The teachers and non-teaching staff of the so called residential schools run by Govt. are less paid and the quality of teaching is

not at par with other schools. The doors of higher education and technical education with trend of privatization has become minimal for poor and marginalized added to continuing institutional social discrimination from Aganwadi to university level still remain unaddressed. The policy of affirmative action in education has not been monitored by the state Govt. and even the policy is not being followed to ensure the representation of the students as per their percentage of population of the state. Education is one of the important means of building human resources of a state based on which all kind of changes will take place and the marginalized section needs more focused quality education because of their historical vulnerability and denial of right to education but unfortunately even in modern state the policy of education of the Govt. is also further laminating them by limiting scope of education while encouraging quality education for a selected few elite of the state. This contradicts the basic principle of democracy and the values of constitutions that speaks of equality and equity.

The quality education, public employment opportunities, credit facilities, subsidies, permits, supply, contracts, lease and all other forms of intellectual and financial resources are available to very few people of the state who have been monopolized these opportunities, created out of public fund, for generation together with active political backing through legislations and policy decisions. The socially powerful rich few upper caste/class virtually monopolized control over resources through using state power which is against the constitutional vision of economic democracy for building a democratic and socialist society. The Govt. must widen the scope of universal public employment through state investment and democratize its scope by abolishing all forms of barriers against the marginalized sections while ensuring their full participation in social and economic life of the state. The people of the state are not homogeneous and there are diversity and local specific differences based on status and identities where social and language barriers are major reason of economic backwardness as people of so called lower caste and linguistic minorities with historical denial have restricted access to intellectual and financial resources because of very minimal access to quality English medium education and social and religious power and influences.

The unfair distribution of resources have contributed to the growth of inequality and widening the disparity at regional and social level and furthering the process of economic marginalization. It is worsening the

condition of the people already socially marginalized by adding economic marginalization to their misery. The rich –poor gap getting widen and vast section of people getting detached from the production process making dependent on state relief is not a good economy. The state much make attempt to link people with production by ensuring ownership over productive assets such as land, water, quality education, institutional credit and socially empower them by enhancing their social, political participation at various level. The ongoing economic interventions may help a ruling class to gain short term political power but it will have huge ramifications in long run over the state economy that still remain backward in all respect.

WHY POLITICAL PARTIES IMPORTANT FOR NATION'S DEVELOPMENT.

Friday, 16 July 2021

Historically all over the world, political parties have played a foremost transformative role in the life of modern nation States. Barring a few countries, almost all countries of the world have party driven democracies. In some countries, it is single-party or bi-party but largely, a multiparty system is in growing practice for more inclusive democracies. There are monarchies in Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Oman, Bahrain and Qatar and single-party rule in countries such as China, North Korea, Vietnam, Laos and Cuba, existing for a long time. Also, there are countries with two-party system such as USA and UK and many slowly shifting to a multiparty system such as in India, Germany, France, Norway and Sweden. Even these days, rainbow coalition Governments are coming up in many countries as a best-suited political system in diversity.

It is told that “If there had been no Communist Party, there would not have been a new China. The whole credit for success of China, as an emerging economic power, goes to the Chinese communist party that is celebrating 100 years of its successful existence. Similarly, the Communist Party of Soviet Union had played a unique role in building modern Russia. The history of political parties goes back to the end of 18th century in USA and UK where even now the oldest parties such as Conservative Party in UK and Democratic party in USA are still continuing in playing a major role in the socio-economic and political life of their countries despite arrival of new parties. Historically the political parties fought slavery, racism, monarchy, colonialism, and dominance of religious institutions to establish liberty, dignity, equality and democracy and supremacy of people’s power through representative governance by parties. So political parties are most advanced organizational instrument of people for distribution and growth of material and intellectual property for progress and equality.

The makers of modern India used political parties as a viable means to mobilize the people for larger socio-economic transformation of a backward and underdeveloped society to a democratic one with ideas of democracy, liberty, equality and progress. The centuries-old feudalism,

colonialism and exploitation based on class/caste came to an end with modern political ideas of dignity and self-rule. India traversed the path of Green Revolution, IT revolution and many other transformative phases while aspiring to be one of the world leaders. All this progress became possible under different political leadership to steer the nation.

The western modern political thoughts paved the way for freedom struggle and emergence of Congress party as the oldest (1885) and later the Communist Party of India (1925) and many others political outfits such as Bharatiya Jana Sangh, Scheduled Caste Federation, Socialist Party, Jharkhand Party, Indian Union Muslim League in India. These parties had have played a major role starting from freedom struggle to formation of Constituent Assembly and drafting the Constitution to taking a lead in establishing constitutional governance and parliamentary democracy for building a united modern India. India, during last seventy years of its existence as a party based democracy witnessed emergence of new political parties based on ideologies like liberal, socialist, communist, Left extremism, right wing nationalist, conservative and fascist. They all have differently contributed in many ways to strengthen our democracy and responded to the aspiration of the diverse masses looking for progressive transformation.

The current trend shows growth of regional parties and individual charisma with less ideology and collectivism along with increasing importance of election managers, data forecasters, use of money power and image building by media. Barring a few, majority of parties are largely dominated by family members and hereditary successors of second and third generations. Sometimes individuals are being projected as larger than party and ideology. There have been allegations about lack of inner-party democracy, social inclusion, holding of regular elections to elect party office bearers and transparency in party fund management and most importantly lack of ideological drive within parties.

Many parties in India are now moving for permanent establishments such as well setup office building, corpus fund, operational amenities and long term social security plan for party carders. The party chief is called as supremo while the party appears to be functioning as private limited companies.

The change of political donation laws has encouraged corporates to set up election funding trusts which have ensured regular institutional supports

to parties to fight elections, leave apart other source of donations. The Election Commission has increased the permissible limit of expenses of candidates during elections to make the expenses legitimate.

Regional parties in India were also formed during British rule in early 20th century. Shiromani Akali Dal and J&K National Conference appeared as oldest regional political parties. Later the prominent parties such as DMK in TN taking of language, social justice and federalism as major issues and others have been continuing as most stable players in political systems of their States while influencing national politics. The most successful regional party in recent time is BJD which has been successfully continuing without any break. The post independent Odisha since 1950 witnessed regional political outfits such as Swatantra Dal of RN Singh Deo which was the party of the kings and Zamindars.

It has been observed that since then the ruling political parties in Odisha continue to be dominated by sons and daughters of former CMs, Ministers, landlords, kings and Zamindars of erstwhile 26 feudatory States, owners of mining, industrial and media houses and others having money and social power. The socially inclusive character of parties has been missing with continued domination of upper caste/class people of Odisha over a vast majority of its population belonging to historically marginalized sections OBCs, STs and SCs and religious minorities. The political reservation policy with limitation of FPTP electoral system has been barrier for political assertion of these groups but there is hope with emergence of organic leaders and growing political awareness and aspirations.

With increasing role of political parties in modern democratic governance the expectation of people over parties is also increasing. The persistence inequality and diversity will persuade the people for political representations to fulfil their aspirations by using state power. There will be more regional parties in the coming days with more challenges to face by the changing political conditions, but what all we need is a qualitative change in character political parties to play a historical role for a vibrant and more inclusive democracy both economic, social, and political as well as to take forward the nation in the path of progress and development.

LET PRESENT ELECTORAL SYSTEM IN INDIA CHANGE

Saturday, 27 October 2018

The representatives of Lok Sabha are mostly drawn from political parties playing a major role in the governance of the country. During last 70 years, there have been changes in the participation of political parties in elections and voting behaviour of the citizens of the country. In this context, it is important to look into our electoral system and representation of political parties.

The first general election of 1951- 1952 witnessed the participation of 54 political parties and subsequently, the number of political parties kept increasing so that it reached 464 in last 2014 elections out of total 1,687 registered parties in the country including six national parties, 47 State parties and 1,634 unrecognized parties. The lowest number of participation was in 1957, i.e., only 16 parties and subsequently in 1962 (28). In 1967, it was 26, 1971 (44), 1977 (54), 1980 (38), 1984 (37), 1989 (115), 1991 (147), 1996 (211), 1998 (178), 1999 (171), 2004 (215) and 2009 election, the number was 363 out of 1,060 registered parties.

Since 1991 the emergence of coalition and alliance politics has facilitated for a strong presence of State/regional parties. The most important observation of election results shows that no single party has got more than 50 per cent of vote share of the total polled votes though they got more than 50 per cent of the seats.

The coalition politics of last 20 years have provided a stable Government both by the UPA and the NDA. Though the reasons of growth of number of political parties are many but this has contributed to fractured mandate under the First Past the Post (FPTP) electoral system where parties with less than 50 per cent of vote share formed the Government.

A major national ruling party such as Congress has never achieved 50 per cent of the vote share since 1952 but the only exception was in 1984 when it got the all-time high per cent which is just close to 50.

The Congress has governed the country for maximum time consecutively in 1952, 1957, 1962, 1967 and 1971 for five times but the party's vote share was always below 50 per cent even during Jawaharlal Nehru's period. It

was 45.7 per cent, 47.8 per cent, 44.7 per cent, 40.8 per cent and 43.7 per cent respectively. The vote share of Congress has reduced to below 35 per cent in 1977, but again increased to 43 per cent in 1980. It further increased to all time maximum 48.1 per cent in 1984 and again it was reduced to 39.5 per cent in 1989. In the 1991 general election the vote share of the party was 36.4 per cent. The vote share of 1996 election was 28.3 per cent and in 1998 it was reduced to 25.8 per cent. The vote share of 2004 election was 26.5 per cent, in 2009 it was 28.55 per cent and in 2014 it was 19.31 per cent which is all time low with only 44 seats. Many historical political factors have influenced the voters in different time to cast their vote in favour of the Congress.

The vote share of Bharatiya Jana Sangh founded by Shyama Prasad Mukherjee in 1951 was only 3.06 per cent of vote with 3 seats in 1952 election. Later, the vote share of BJP (Jan Sangh became BJP later) was 20 per cent in 1991, 20.3 per cent in 1996, 25.6 per cent in 1998, 23.8 per cent in 1999 and 22.2 per cent in 2004, 18.80 per cent in 2009 and 31 per cent in 2014 which is all time high and captured 52 per cent of the total seats.

Dr BR Ambedker's Scheduled Castes Federation and later Republican Party of India (RPI) got 2.38 per cent of vote share with 2 seats in 1952. The BSP has emerged as a national party under the leadership of Kanshi Ram in 1984 and became the third largest national party of the country in terms of percentage of votes polled in last elections. The party polled 4.14 per cent of vote in the last 2014 general election but got no seats in the Lok Sabha. In 2004, the party polled 5.33 per cent of votes with 19 MPs and in 2009 election the party got 6.17 per cent votes with all time high of 21 MPs in the Lok Sabha. Even in the last 2017 Uttar Pradesh State election, the BSP emerged as second largest party in terms of vote share of 22.24 per cent votes but winning only 19 seats in the State Assembly.

The Communist Party of India (CPI) with 3.29 per cent of vote share won 16 seats in 1952 election and was the main Opposition led by Shripad Amrit Dange, elected from Mumbai, in the first Lok Sabha of India. The other parties such as Forward Block and RSP got 0.9 and 0.44 per cent of vote share with 1 and 3 seats respectively in 1952.

The vote share of CPI is 0.65 per cent in the last general election of 2014. Coming to the participation of voters of the country, the trend shows that in spite of voter awareness programme the voting percentage has not increased substantially. The voter turnout was 61.16 per cent in the first

general election and it increased to 63.73 per cent in 1957 and again decreased to 55.42 per cent in 1962. During last three elections of 2004, 2009 and 2014, the voter turnout has been 58.7, 58.21 and 66.40 per cent respectively.

The voter turnout of 2014 election is all time high but on an average about 35 to 45 per cent of voters did not cast their vote between 1952 and 2014.

The important concern has been the participation of women in governance as the trend shows women have been underrepresented in political parties and also governance.

A report of the Election Commission of India on voter turnout shows that the female voter percentage is less than male voters.

The underrepresentation of women and inadequate participation has its ramifications over the social and political system which violates gender justice and dignity of women as equal partners of democracy and inclusive growth.

It is also reported that during elections there has been violence and discrimination being practised against the poor and marginalised sections and minorities who are being forced to vote against their free choice.

The communal and casteist forces engineered violence before the poll to terrorize the voters. Usually women do not come out during poll violence.

The participation of political parties and voters is important for strengthening democracy and an inclusive and transparent governance in a country like India with presence of huge diversity among voters based on caste, ethnicity, religious identities and socio-economic and educational status. In order to ensure representation of political parties in governance as per their vote share, Proportional Representation Electoral System has been proposed as an alternative for a long time. But the party list PR system needs State funding and a transparent inter-party democracy system in practice to give representation to all and to counter the hegemony of family rule, caste and religious biases and the direct influence of funding by corporates to political parties. Because, barring a few exceptions, a majority of the political parties are being funded by the corporates, particularly to fight elections, many deserving and well-meaning candidates are being silently pushed out of politics because of lack of resources to meet the election expenses.

DRAWBACKS OF FPTP ELECTORAL SYSTEM TO THE FORE.

Friday, 04 March 2022

The recent Panchayat election results in Odisha show a disproportion between the number of seats won and percentage of votes got by parties. This is the limitation of present FPTP (Fast Past The Post) electoral system in practice. The ruling BJD won more seats in proportion to its vote share. While the BJD won 766 ZillaParishad seats out of total 852, its vote share was 52.73 per cent. BJP's vote share was 30.07% and Congress' 13.57%. The Left, JMM and others have got very less in proportion to their vote share. This kind of representative character ignores the mandate of nearly 50 percent of the voters in local self-governance in a multi-party system in practice. However, if we will have Proportional Representation (PR) electoral system in place of the current FPTP system, the vote share of the parties may possibly have been reflected proportionately to the number of seats they won. The electoral system in practice is most important because that decides the nature of representation in a democracy as it translates the votes into seats. The current trend is discouraging voters' turnout because the voter's choice does not get reflected in governance and has no desired impact on the electoral outcome. It is observed that the voters' turnout has not been increasing in spite of increase in number of voters. A close look into the present electoral system shows that there are two issues; one is the overall representation and the second is the specific representation. In case of overall representation all our votes are not getting converted into seats and in case of specific representation of certain section of social groups, who are being protected under reserve seats to ensure their proportionate representation in governance, it is found that our electoral system does not allow the real leaders of the community of reserve categories. It is being told by many voters that the Panchayat election result does not reflect the winning of the real representatives in reserved seats for SCs, STs and women because of the persistent caste ridden and male dominated unequal society. In most of the cases, the ruling parties and local leaders create their blind followers by undermining the aspirations of excluded communities and women.

It is found that the majoritarian electoral system best suits to the dominant social sections in rural areas in capturing political power following procedural democracy. The candidates from marginalized sections who are mostly poor and are being increasingly dependent on political parties for support to meet the expensive election campaign are unable to assert their autonomy. The caste and sub-caste divisions among the marginalized social groups very well are used to divide the voters in favour of ruling parties. Along with poor economic status, the existing caste and gender based social barriers in the village are restricting the free mobility of candidates belonging to socially deprived sections as in many places it is being told that a few caste candidates are not allowed to upper caste hamlets for a dignified interaction and campaign. The local elections are building a scope to exercise political rights by every citizens but in reality voters are given multiple choice by ruling parties with huge expenses over persuasive method where the others such as the independents, non-party new entrants and representatives of smaller groups are not being featured prominently by the same way largely because of economic and social causes and role of paid media. Many times the dominant narratives are being propagated to influence the mass mind such as that the poor people should not contest elections or the candidates having no money bag or ruling party backing have very little chance to win. The gender bias in election shows that mostly the names of husbands are more discussed in case of female candidates. These very statements are discouraging many genuine candidates, mostly upcoming educated youths. The Panchayati Raj system has very well reserved not just the seats but also various top posts to ensure the representation of SCs, STs and women to lead the local governance to ensure their active political participation but the present trend has been defeating the very purpose of political reservation.

The concern for a suitable electoral system for India considering its unequal social system was best articulated by Dr Ambedkar in his demands before the then British Government during the Poona Pact and later in Constituent Assembly debates. But his views were not taken into consideration. The history of electoral system for the marginalized sections in India has witnessed many changes from separate electorates in 1937 and 1946 with primary and secondary elections to two- or -three- member constituency under joint electorate in 1952 and 1961. Later, single electorate under single member reserved seat which is in practice now. The voting right has changed from limited franchise till 1946 to universal adult

franchise, one -man -one vote in 1951 and also the lowering of the voting age from 21 years to 18 years in 1989. But amid the changes, the basic character of electoral system has not changed to ensure more inclusive representations required for equitable democracy. Added to this is that elections witnessed visible incidents of violence against marginalized sections, booth rigging, ballot paper snatching, kidnapping of candidates and their supporters, guarding counting centres and free distribution of liquor, cash and feast to appease the voters of different sections, specially youths. However, it is always desirable to go for new variants of electoral systems that are available in democracies of the world that suit to the socio-economic condition of a society. There must be efforts to increase the political awareness level of the voters who are discharging a great political duty towards the nation to build a society they desire.

FPTP POLITICAL SYSTEM MUST CEDE SPACE TO THE PR SYSTEM

Friday, 23 July 2021

In recent years, there has been a growth of regional parties and coalition politics in our country which is good for inclusive democracy and also for countries like ours with huge diversities and disparities. The major ruling alliances, NDA and UPA, have roped in about 50 political parties to continue in governance. Out of 29 States, both Congress and BJP have alliances in 15 States where as rest of the States are ruled by regional or State parties. It is good that people from diverse socio –religious groups and from different regions have started realizing the importance of political representation in governance for their participation and development. Increasingly, it is being felt that without political participation, development will not be possible. Development is more linked to politics and politically advanced communities are also socially and economically powerful. Almost all the major decisions relating to civil, social and economic matters are directly linked to politics.

There has been growing consciousness about sharing of power in decision as equals while establishing right to self-determination. The post-nineties era have witnessed the success of coalition politics without much threat to national governance system; rather it is proved that coalition politics is more representative in political character and it has been able to ventilate the aspiration of the neglected regions. The minorities and marginalized sections get a space in governance only through political participation and their issues of discrimination and underdevelopment can be properly addressed through political actions and bargains. The post-independence era witnessed the failure of single party dominance in accommodating various regional concerns and aspirations. This has led to struggle of people for all kinds of autonomy and participation in development for which local decision making power is highly required against the current practice of centralization. The people from different regions and socio-religious identities want their participation in decision making process as a right to self-determination. Many of our diverse identities also continue practicing discriminatory and hegemonic ideas based on the concept of

superiority and inferiority which is against the spirit of freedom and dignity which must end with democratic space provided in politics.

It is fact that is the idea of India which evolved through struggle against colonialism, feudalism and its ruthless exploitation, torture and tyranny and alternatively with emerging aspirations of freedom, self-rule, liberty, equality and fraternity. Later constitutional governance and representative parliamentary democracy created aspirations for more expansion and inclusion of all. But during last 70 years, many of our core issues have not been solved due to lack of political decisions. India is not a homogeneous nation but a federation of many States with diversities. In modern democracies, political parties become the representatives of the communities to express their demands and difficulties and to represent their cause in policy and administrative decision making bodies but unfortunately there is a vast number of social groups and regions who are not yet represented in governance because of the socially non-inclusive character of the political process. The political parties who are claiming themselves as representative of people have not changed their social composition. The national parties in India are not the true representative of people from all States and Union Territories. Many of them have presence in only a few States because to be a national party they have to secure at least 6 per cent of the total votes in any four or more States in a general election to Lok Sabha and Assemblies, besides winning four seats in Lok Sabha. The elected leaders of national parties from a few States become the national leaders and obviously, they are more concerned about their States from where they get elected. Similarly, many of the parties have poor representation of women, religious minorities such as Muslims, Christians and Buddhists and socially marginalized sections such as Dalit, Adivasies, STs, and backward sections both in governance bodies and party positions. The composition of Lok Sabha, Rajya Sabha and State Assemblies in India gives a picture which is not a truly inclusive representative democracy. The Parliament is also disproportionately represented by the States. While large States have maximum representatives and smaller States have very few representatives. Usually, the States having maximum representatives in decision making bodies have more say than others having a very minimal presence.

The use of money and muscle power in elections has virtually debarred the poorer section and socially powerless people from contesting elections. As a result, winning election has become easier for moneyed and socially

powerful people in the name of party -led democracies. Majority of political parties in India are mostly managed by moneyed families and socially powerful castes and dominant religious groups. They serve the interest of the powerful elite class though they get elected by votes of the poor and powerless people. It has given birth to crony capitalism in India which is not good for future of democracy.

In order to further strengthen the multiparty system and coalition politics with presence of large number regional parties, it will be good for India to adopt proportional representation system. The FPTP (first- past- the- post) electoral system in practice is not representing all the voters; it is only representing the winners even though they secure less than 50 per cent of the votes whereas the other voter's representatives are simply left out in the process. Though there has been a demand for PR (proportional representation) electoral system since independence, but this has been turned down by major national ruling parties. Only Left parties along with many regional parties have been demanding for adoption of PR system which is currently being practiced by 85 countries of the world. The system has more advantages of political inclusiveness through representation of all voters and best suits to coalition politics.

LET PARTIES IN INDIA HAVE INNER DEMOCRACY, STATE FUND POLLS

Friday, 02 April 2021

Political parties have been playing a major role in electoral democracies but many of the democratic practices have been missing within the functioning of political parties.

With the rise in coalition politics and number of regional political parties, there are suggestions to bring legislation to regulate political parties. The Election Commission of India has proposed a number of electoral reforms to strengthen democracy including reforms relating to political parties. The Law Commission of India report on electoral reforms 2015 recommends that there should be a comprehensive legislation, may be named as the Political Parties' Registration and Regulation Act, to regulate the registration and functioning of political parties or alliances of parties in India.

It is important to reform the political parties for better governance and to increase in accountability to people because the leaders getting elected to the Parliament and Assemblies are mostly chosen by the parties first and later voted by the people. The parties have been fighting elections more than the candidates and the voters while choosing a candidate are mostly being influenced by the parties. In the context of our democracy, currently the two important issues coming up for debate among citizens are the inner party democracy and funding of elections. Both are inter connected. Very often, there are issues raised by many about practice of inner party democracy as it has been observed that most of parties do not conduct internal elections periodically to elect office bearers and do not possess a membership record. Organizational meetings are not taking place as democratic procedures.

The party leaders are called as high commands or supreme where mostly personal loyalty to leaders is being treated as main criterion to choose as followers along with allegiance to dynastic succession.

Many of the national and State parties' top decision making positions are a hegemonic ally controlled by family members and their close aides. There has been a tendency with many parties to prefer people with money bags,

like rich people, companies, criminals and goons who are most useful during elections for short-term gains. The continuity of this process is not desirable for building a healthier democracy in a country like ours.

It may be increasingly difficult for the women, people from marginalized sections, economically poor and other minorities to participate in discharging their rights as citizens not just to vote but also to participate in elections to get elected to the highest decision making bodies of the country.

The post-independence India witnessed a continued over representation of the family members of former kings and Zamindars, land lords and the neo-rich, industrialists, mining owners, traders, media owners and moneyed people from various kinds of dominant upper social strata who have been influencing the parties generation after generation as its leaders and allowing very little space to others to come in as party leaders to play a role for the people and the country as a whole. It has been noticed that majority of parties also lack social inclusiveness in their leadership positions.

The women and marginalized sections and religious minority are almost underrepresented in decision-making forums. They are cornered into cell leaders of their social groups such as women, SC, ST, OBC, and religious minority cells debarring to become a leader of masses or party leaders.

This has been a serious concern in countries like ours where we have lack of homogeneous social groups/citizens/voters. The under representation has been motivating people to get mobilized in caste and religion line to assert their democratic participation by forming separate political parties with their leadership. To strive towards the ideas of social justice, gender justice and secularism and to ensure diversity in representation which are being adopted in our Constitution, it is highly required to follow inclusive social policies. So it is desirable that political parties must adopt legal provisions in their by-laws relating to representation of women and other marginalized communities in their party structure.

The second most important issue is related to party funds. As there has been no scope of State funding to political parties specially to manage elections, mostly the political parties are dependent on donations from public and others but these sources of funding and its disclosure have been

still a point of debate and the matter is sub judice. Recently the Supreme Court refused to stay the sale of electoral bonds.

The Central Election Commission in 2008 has made a provision for availability of income tax return of the political parties in public domain. The Supreme Court judgment in ADR petition made mandatory disclosure of candidates with criminal, financial and educational background by filing an affidavit with the Election Commission. With the change in the funding law now electoral trusts are being set up by corporates to fund political parties.

The electoral bonds started in 2017 through banks mostly beneficial to ruling national parties and a few regional parties. As per the source in 2018-19 financial year political parties have declared donation of Rs 1,931 crore through these bonds.

The BJP has got about 75 per cent while Congress has 20 per cent of the total donation. Parties such as BSP, CPI and CPM have no such donations. There is no limit to donations and these donation sources are not being disclosed in public.

This is a matter of serious concern for the functioning of democracies and the role of money power in elections. The direct nexus of corporate and political parties has paved the way for crony capitalism and influenced pro-corporate economic policies which are detrimental to the fundamental ideas of socialism and concentration of wealth in the hands of few, adopted in the Constitution of our country.

The current process paved the way towards empowering rich people and companies to manage democratic politics of the country.

There has been a proposal by various commissions on electoral reform to adopt State funding to political parties and election which will be most ideal and the support can be both in cash and kind based on the vote performances of the parties in the last elections.

This has been a practice in countries such as Germany. This will prevent the entry of corporate funding in elections and parties with large mass base can do better than parties enjoying corporate support and buying votes by using money and muscle power.

BUILDING AMBEDKAR'S VISION OF DEMOCRACY

Friday, 15 April 2022

The idea of a modern democratic India is very well-reflected in the Preamble of the Constitution. While celebrating the birth anniversary of the architect of the Indian Constitution on April 14, we must remind and reorient ourselves on his great ideas of social, economic and political democracy. Let's evaluate our institutions engaged in transforming the ideas into reality and how far we have achieved in realizing that.

In the path of social democracy, post independent India has witnessed a major positive change with enforcement of human rights laws and credible progressive social movements that immensely contributed in transforming our social life. It has encouraged change of occupational mobility, inter-caste and inter-faith marriage, appointment of Dalit priests in temples in southern States, and women social mobility. But these achievements are symbolic with active Government involvement while still a vast segment of our population remains untouched. Ambedkar's idea was to make social democracy as a way of life in our family and society at large to eradicate many forms of hierarchy and exclusion. Currently, it is highly required that our law makers and social movement leaders must focus more on enforcement of law in building an inclusive society based on values of human dignity, liberty, equality and most importantly, fraternity, to bring all sections of people together in building our nation.

Added to the strict execution of existing laws, we are in need of many more new protective legislations arising in the present context in order to uphold individual freedom and dignity of women, religious minorities, and caste affected communities and ethnic minorities. We must build our society as a socially inclusive living environment and ensure freedom of our youth to choose their life partner of choice without fear and pressure from fanatic and divisive forces executing honour killing and practising untouchability.

India, the largest democracy of the world, must adhere to the principles of Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) and all other international conventions relating to human rights to become an ideal nation. The social democracy education including thoughts of Ambedkar must be discussed at our family and taught at schools to our children to build informed social citizenship. The social democracy is impossible

without economic democracy. The economic policy of subsequent Governments in post independent India have contributed to widening the rich –poor gap that reflected in growing income and asset inequality among the people. The gap has been increasing over the years. The socialist pattern of society can only be possible with equality in the economic sphere. The first step in this regard is to fully ensure universal free quality education and healthcare with basic amenities for all our citizens. There must be barrier-free equal access to productive assets, especially land for housing and other natural resources for a decent living. The Government has to make all its productive forces employable in economic activities leading to growth with equity. Ambedkar was in favour of rapid industrialization and urbanization to usher in progress. As the Minister of Labour, Power and Irrigation in the Viceroy's Executive Council (1942-46), he led the foundation of Labour laws of the country to recognize the dignity of Labour as they are vital to all kinds of material progress. It is the duty of the State to protect the working population from economic exploitation and social discrimination. There must be decent wage for living, working hour, holiday, and social security. But what is the reality even after 75 years of constitutional governance? There is huge disparity in wage rate and social security benefits. The Government and public sector employees are well paid in comparison to the ones in private sector. The organized sector employees are in a better condition while a vast majority of workers in unorganized sector remain in distress. They are being lowly paid without social security benefits. The private sector of our country is not following any affirmative action policy in matter of public employment. The idea of Ambedkar was for an inclusive public employment policy, equal wage, and universal insurance facilities for all its citizens like LIC as model but still a vast majority of population remains outside.

It is told in the Directive Principles of State Policy of the Constitution that there must not be concentration of wealth in the hands of few families and the resources of the country should be utilized for the livelihood of the people, but the economic policy of the Government is inclined towards disinvestment in public sector and uncontrolled privatization of health, education and core industries, basic infrastructure, besides huge subsidy to corporates. This has raised valid concerns about the ongoing changes in an economic system that contradicts the very ideas of economic democracy.

Ambedkar told that political democracy is the key to any change in social and economic sector. Political empowerment can facilitate the social progress and economic development but political power has been monopolized by a few in the country which need to be democratized. The family rule, use of money and muscle power in elections, caste and communal vote bank politics have been restricting the true political participation of its citizens specially the poor and socially oppressed who are helpless onlooker in politics.

Power is therefore concentrated in hands of a few. The present electoral system, first past the post (FPTP), in practice is not ensuring the representation of all voters in decision making process. We need to bring electoral reform to make our democracy inclusive of all social groups by adopting proportional representation (PR) system to give space to all voters to reflect their voice in governance. It is also equally important to make our political parties accountable and transparent and the elections free and fair. Ambedkar always stressed on an independent Election Commission outside the control of the powers that be.

POLITICAL PARTIES HAVE KEY ROLE TO STRENGTHEN DEMOCRACY

Friday, 09 April 2021

As part of proposal for electoral reform, the Election Commission of India (ECI) has proposed that the political parties in our country need to qualitatively improve their functioning in adopting democratic values and norms of the Constitution in their internal party organizations, besides a self-adoptive code of conduct to follow.

It also said to build institutional mechanism within the party for planning, thinking and research on crucial socio-economic issues before the nation along with training for socialising party cadres and preparing them for responsibilities of governance while assuring social inclusiveness through legal provisions with fair representation of women and weaker sections in party positions.

These are being proposed based on the recommendations of various commissions' reports such as the National Law Commission and National Commission to review the working of the Constitution, etc. Political parties have increasing role in modern democracies as they are selecting the representative of the people to govern. The implementation of the Constitution lies in their hands.

If the parties themselves do not follow the constitutional principles; how they are going to deliver the mandate of the Constitution? So, complete adherence to the Constitution must be the first step to form a political party which must be exhibited in practice within the party and outside in public.

The party leaders and cadres must bring into practice the established democratic and constitutional values in their personal and family life and become model for other citizens to follow in public life for building an egalitarian society.

But it has been noticed that during elections many of the parties do not follow the democratic values and constitutional provisions but adopt such easy means of mobilization using caste, community and religion cards and do physical violence to influence the voters in their support to get elected.

In a country like ours with such diversity, continued existence of thousands of castes, communities and practice of different kinds of religions, the casteist and communal mobilization has a deeper impact on the marginalized sections, poor, and caste discriminated communities and religious minorities, especially over their political participation as a voter/citizen. The process of communal divide further widens our continued socio-religious difference by posing a threat to human relationships, social unity and our collective co-existence as a nation. It is against the founding vision of makers of modern India, the freedom fighters, members of Constituent Assembly, and contrary to the principles of our Constitution that still keeps us united as a nation in the world.

During last 70 years of practice of democracy as a nation, it has been found that the democratic values are deteriorating with increasing in poll violence and communal mobilizations, and formation of parties in caste and communal line, besides using religion, caste and ethnic symbols and names to seek votes.

The political parties in every society are change agents. They must act without any communal interest, casteist mindset and gender bias, that is beneficial to any particular caste, religion or social group and region.

Rather than dividing people the political parties must play a role in connecting people for realization of justice, liberty, equality and the parties are to be responsible to build up themselves as an inclusive secular place by bringing people from different walks of life as socio-religious groups with gender neutrality. So it expected that the parties themselves must stand above the narrow political motive.

The second most important concern is the intellectual engagement of political parties in the socio-economic and socio-political issues of the nation in terms of understanding the issues and finding possible solutions based on research, debate and discussions involving the larger masses in the interest of the nation.

We the largest democracy in the world but all our voters are not literate and educated enough to behave as responsible citizens/voters as they easily fall into traps of all kinds of disruptive forces. Political education of the masses is highly required to build up a healthier democracy and political parties have a major role in spreading political literacy among the vast masses.

As a first step the parties must prepared themselves as political educators of the masses. It is expected that the party cadres and leaders must have sound knowledge over the economic and social issues, governance and political science. They must have adequate information about Constitution and laws being in practice.

In order to do that it is suggested that the political parties must make institutional arrangements within the party for research on vital issues affecting the country and arrange for training activities for its cadres to raise their standards. It must be mandatory for all political parties to impart training to all their cadres on Constitution of India and the laws relating to representation such as the Representation of Peoples Act 1950 and 1951, Conduct of Election rules 1961, Election Symbol Order 1968, and Anti-defection Law 1985 etc.

The intellectual engagement of the parties will encourage people from different educational and professional background to join the parties which will qualitatively improve the politics and attract more people in serving the nation and restrict the entry of vested interest groups, goons and criminal and uneducated people in public life.

ELECTORAL SYSTEM NEEDS CHANGE TO BUILD INCLUSIVE DEMOCRACY.

A review of Odisha Panchayat poll results.

The recent Panchayat election result in state of Odisha shows the disproportion between number of winning seats and percentage of votes pulled by parties. This is the limitation of present FPTP electoral system in practice. The ruling BJD won more seats in proportion to its vote share of 52.73 percent whereas BJP (30.07%), Congress (13.57%), Left, JMM and others have got very less in proportion to their vote share out of total 2.10 crore balloted in this election. BJD has secured 766 seats out of total 853 Zilla Parishad seats which is much higher to its vote percentage. This kind of representative character ignores the mandate of nearer to fifty percent of the voters in local self-governance in a multi-party system in practice. If we will have Proportional Representation (PR) electoral system in place of current FPTP system in practice the vote share of the parties may possibly have reflected in number of seats proportionately.

The electoral system in practice are most important because that decides the nature of representation in democracy as it translates the votes into seats. This current trend is contributing to discourage voter turnout because the voter's choice does not reflected in governance and have no desired impact on the electoral outcome. It is observed that the voter turnout has not been increasing in spite of an increase in number of voters. The understanding of Proportional representation in India is limited to the representation of geographical areas but not the representation of all voters with equal value.

A close look into the present electoral system shows that there are two issues, one is the overall representation and the second is the specific representation. In case of overall representation, all our votes are not getting converted into seats and in case of specific representation of certain section of social groups, who are being protected under reserve seats to ensure their proportionate representation in governance, it is found that our electoral system does not allow the real leaders of the community of reserve categories.

It is being told by many voters that the Panchayat election result does not reflect the winning of the real representatives in reserved seats for SCs, STs and women because of our persistent caste-ridden and male-dominated unequal society. As in most of the cases the ruling parties local leaders prefer to create their dumb follower by undermining the aspirations of excluded communities and women for a social change through political participation which is also a kind of social assertion to participate in local governance that has ignored them for a long time.

It is found that the majoritarian electoral system best suits to the dominant social sections in rural areas to capturing political power following procedural democracy. The candidates from marginalized sections who are mostly poor and they are being increasingly dependent on political parties for support to meet the expensive election campaign. The caste and sub-caste divisions among marginalized social groups very well used to divide the voters in favor of ruling parties. Along with poor economic status the existing caste and gender based social barriers in village are restricting the free mobility of candidates belong to socially deprived sections as in many places it is being told that few castes candidates are not allowed to upper caste hamlets for a dignified interaction and campaign.

The local elections are building a scope to exercise political rights by every citizens but in reality, voters are given multiple choice by ruling parties with huge expenses over persuasive method where the others; independents, non-party new entrants and representatives of smaller groups are not being featured prominently by the same way largely because of economic and social causes and role of paid media. Many times the dominant narratives are being propagated to influence the mass mind such as; poor people should not contest elections or the candidates having no money bag or ruling party backing have very little chance to win. The gender bias in election shows that mostly the name of husbands are more discussed in case of female candidates. These very statements are discouraging many genuine candidates mostly upcoming educated youths to keep aloof from local politics and leave the affairs of local governance to the wish of the dominant people who are mostly representing the ruling parties.

The panchayat raj system has very well reserved not just the seats but also various top posts to ensure the representation of SC, ST and women to lead the local governance to ensure their active political participation in a

leadership role but the present trend has been defeating the basic purpose of political reservation.

The concerned for a suitable electoral system for India considering its unequal social system in practice was best articulated by Dr. Ambedkar in his demands before the then British govt. and during Poona Pact and later in constituent assembly debates. But his views were not taken into consideration.

The history of electoral system for marginalized sections in India have witnessed many changes from separate electorate in 1937 and 1946 with primary and secondary elections and then to two or triple member constituency under joint electorate in 1952 and 1961 and after that single electorate under single member reserved seat which is in practice now.

The voting right has changed from limited franchise till 1946 to universal adult franchise, one man one vote, in 1951 and also the lowering of the voting age from 21 years to 18 years in 1989. Which may further lower to the age of 16 years. But the basic character of electoral system have not changed to ensure more inclusive representations required for equitable democracy.

Added to this the election witnessed visible incidents of violence against marginalized sections, booth rigging, ballot paper snatching, kidnapping of candidates and their supporter, guarding counting centers, and free distribution of liquor, cash and feast to appease the voters of different sections specially youth are being misused and misguided which is not good for our future of democracy in a most diverse and unequal society like ours. The distribution of liquor and narcotics to misuse our youth for petty short term political gain is going to be disastrous for the whole society.

However it is always desirable to go for new variants of electoral systems that available in democracies of the world that suits to the social-economic condition of a society, and must consider to increase the average political awareness level of the voters who are discharging a great political duty towards the nation to build a society they desire.

POOR SECTIONS CAN CONTEST IF STATE FUNDS POLLS

Friday, 23 April 2021

Representation in democracy should be inclusive of class, caste and gender and it is more challenging in a multi-cultural and multi-religious country like India. The aspirations of people from different socio-economic status should be represented through their leaders in the governance. The 17th Lok Sabha has only 14 per cent women and 4.5 per cent Muslim and other minorities. Majority of members across ruling and Opposition mostly belong to the rich class. There should be a basic change in our present electoral system to strengthen democracy and make it inclusive.

The composition and character of the governing bodies taking decisions on behalf of the people should be changed as per the demand of the present scenario. In the context of electoral reforms, State funding of elections features as one of the most important aspects to ensure participation of all sections in election. Equally important is proportional representation system in place of present FPTP system of election. The election system in practice has been pro-rich, where candidates play a bigger role than parties, and candidates from poor economic background and small parties and financially weak parties have very less chance to win because they cannot compete in campaign with financially powerful parties supported by upper class of India. The corporate sector decides winners, while corruption, violence and bribing influence the election results. The upper class influence policy making process of governance in their favour and prevent genuine representation of the candidates by encouraging unfair competition.

The elections in our country for Lok Sabha and State Assembly and local self-Government witness huge spending of money in campaign, road shows, public meetings by parties and candidates. Mostly voters are bribed to vote, though a law is there to prevent the practice. Many parties use helicopters and helipads for high profile campaigning all over the country taking special help of film stars and celebrities.

The print and electronic media are used day and night to propagate in support of the parties. All these cost some thousand crores. Campaigns by

ruling parties create problem for local administration and public by disturbing their normal life. Many party leaders spend huge amount in building their public image through advertising. Though there is provision for ceiling in candidates' expenses in election but there is no ceiling imposed on the political parties spending during elections.

The ADR sources say that majority of the candidates from ruling parties and elected members are crorepaties. It seems the socially and economically backward classes are reasserting their power in democracy. It is discussed in media that ruling party's bosses sell out tickets to those who have paid huge bribe to them. The mining and industrial lobby plays a substantial role in selection of candidates.

The criminal background of the candidates almost is ignored, while candidates with money and backing from industrial, mining and corporate houses are chosen as nominees by the political parties. Their educational background and experience in public life do not matter much. Many of the parties lack internal party democracy and mostly ruled by a family, an individual and a dominant group.

In order to change the situation, there has been growing demand for State funding of elections ensuring equal opportunity for all candidates irrespective of their financial background. Though the matter was discussed in Constituent Assembly by Prof KT Shah who moved an amendment that election expenses should be borne by the State but the issue has been avoided by ruling parties.

The Dinesh Goswami Committee (Former law Minister) on electoral reforms in 1990, Indrajeet Gupta Committee on State funding of elections 1998, Second Administrative Reform Commission, 2008, and Law

Commission report on reforms of the electoral laws 1999 etc have extensively referred to the issue. Former Chief Election Commissioner of India SY Quraishi had argued in favour of State funding and said it can help end political corruption. The committee's recommendation suggested for State funding to registered State and national parties with restrictions and further said that the Election Commission had to work out modalities on this. It is argued that this can start with partial funding and the funding should be preferable in kind like rent free accommodation, rent free telephone, free time in Doordarshan and AIR, fuel for vehicles engaged in

election, paper for printing, loud speaker, free telephone and support for counting agents etc.

There are parties and individuals who oppose State funding taking the plea that taxpayers are indirectly forced to pay for election expenses of all political parties. Rather they want to limit their contribution to the parties whom they support. With State funding, the political parties become part of the State rather than the representative of their supporters in particular and people in general. It will affect the ultimate accountability to people. The party candidates may depend more on State than their leaders and the role of elites in party will be reduced that may affect the performance of parties dominated by individuals and families. Many Left parties supporting State funding are of the opinion that the parties should not be controlled by the State in the name of funding because it will downsize the political role of a party in holding State accountable.

However, many argued that the State funding of elections is a necessary cost of democracy and governance and not a huge burden on State. This process will contribute to reduce dependency of political parties on the corporate sector. The State funding of elections with strict legal measures will contribute to limiting the role of dominant class, private corporates, communal, casteist and extremist bodies in election. It further argued that in poor societies, ordinary members of the party cannot support party's election fund. There are countries like Germany, France, Austria, Sweden, Denmark, Norway, Brazil, Japan, Spain, Italy and many others that have already adopted State funding for political parties. The IDEA of Sweden, working with the Election Commission of India on electoral reforms and strengthening democracy says out of total 180 countries, 71 countries have facilities of giving State funds based on votes obtained and 86 per cent of the countries in Europe and 58 per cent in Asia have adopted this.

In a democracy, there should be fair access to representation which includes fair election and participation. The State funding will pave the way for building genuine party representation and the feudal and hegemonic rule in parties will come to an end which is very much required for a healthier democracy. The process may encourage parties by marginalized groups such as working class, labourers, peasants, Dalits, Adivasis, STs, OBCs, religious and ethnic minorities, women and regional parties to improve their participation in elections.

OBCS IN ODISHA HANDED OUT RAW DEAL CONTINUALLY

Friday, 13 August 2021

The 127th Constitution Amendment Bill, 2021, to give back power to the State and Union Territories to enlist and maintain their own SEBC list, has been passed by both Houses of Parliament with extensive debate and support of all parties. This was required to reverse a recent Supreme Court judgment based on the 102 Constitutional amendment of 2018. As per 127th amendment, the latest state list will be taken out completely out of the domain of the president and will be notified by the state Assembly. The state Govt. can maintain the list of SEBC as per the previous system since 1993 prior to Supreme Court judgment. There was a need to amend Article 342A and substantial amendment in Article 338B and 366 of the Constitution to restore the power of the State in line with the federal structure and bring more clarity over the issues of OBC list preparation.

The move is more a correction than any bold step towards heralding any change in the real issues. The real issues of OBC reservation confront many

States such as Odisha is 50 per cent cap over reservation and to get a correct figure of the OBC population, and their socio-economic condition to ensure social justice for almost nearly half of the population. There has been a demand by major parties to disclose the SECC -2011 data or go for detail caste census in 2021 along with repeal of 50 percent cap over reservation to move further by allowing States to make arrangements of reservation as per their social demography.

There are 2,479 castes, sub-castes and communities in India that have been notified as Other Backward Classes (OBC) in the Central list of the country. They are historically denied a fair representation in governance and remain disproportionately underrepresented in public sector job and education. Added to this there are also 671 castes are enlisted by states under SEBC list.

In the absence of a Census data since 1931 a correct figure of the population of OBC has not been available but it was estimated by Mandal Commission that they constitute about 52 per cent of the total population

of the country. The National Sample Survey in its 61st round in 2005 on employment and unemployment situation among social groups in India, estimated the OBC to be 41 per cent of the country's population.

The socio-economic and caste census data of 2011 by the Register General of India has to disclose the caste-wise population to know the correct figure. Why the country denied a fair participation to almost half of its population is an unresolved question.

The history of reservation in India can be traced back to non-representation of a big section of communities in education and governance in princely States during early twentieth century. It was mostly the non-Brahmin castes which were excluded and deprived of participation in governance and other areas of public life. The princely State of Kolhapur was the pioneer in introduction of reservation in 1902 for backward and depressed classes currently known as SCs, STs and OBCs. Later, it was followed by Mysore, Madras in 1921, Bombay presidency in 1931 and Travancore in 1935 followed by Cochin. It was to give a fair share in education and job to the deprived castes and put an end to the hegemonic hereditarily dominance of a few dominant so called upper castes.

There are also examples of exceptions in States such as Tamil Nadu and a number of other States having sizeable OBC population. They also have passed laws to raise the quota limit of 50 per cent but under judiciary scrutiny. The State of Tamil Nadu has 50 per cent reservation for OBCs, out of total 69 per cent, which includes 26.5 per cent for BCs, 3.5 per cent for Backward Class Muslims, and 20 per cent for Most Backward Classes. The Tamil Nadu Backward Classes, Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Reservation of seats in educational institutions and of appointments or posts in the services under the State) Act 1993, enjoys protection of 9th schedule 257, A, inserted under Constitutional 76th Amendment Act 1994 with effect from August 31, 1994. The other States such as Kerala has 40 per cent, Karnataka has 32 per cent, Puducherry has 34 and AP has 29 per cent reservation for OBCs. The States and UT's of Arunachal Pradesh, Tripura, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, and Lakshadweep have no reservation for BCs because they have no such population.

The Government of Odisha has enacted The Odisha State Commission for Backward Classes Act 1993 and has implemented reservation for OBCs

in late almost after 45 years of independence with very less percentage in comparison to other States though OBCs constitute a major portion of the population and continue to remain under represented in State Government jobs and education. There are more than 210 castes identified as SEBC in the State list and 197 in Central list of OBCs.

Majority of them were in caste based occupations are traditionally resources less in terms of land, education and finance along with socially treated as lower in caste hierarchy but higher than untouchables. The persistent dominance of upper caste in Odisha politics and absence of social justice movement denied equitable reservation to a large section of its people.

It was fact that Odisha's then Government had opposed the Mandal Commission recommendations by all means. Unfortunately, the purpose of reservation is always mixed with other issues such as eradication of poverty or unemployment but it has nothing to do with such issues rather reservation is an affirmative action more aiming towards representation of all section of people in a caste divided society like ours. The issues of representation was extensively debated in constituent assembly and accordingly have made the provisions in our constitution. Affirmative action or reservation is a global phenomenon being practiced in many democratic countries of the world to address many forms of exclusion, based on religion, ethnicity, indigenous status, gender, minority status, race, Caste, social and educational backwardness, to ensure inclusive representation in public governance, employment and education.

Already there has been horizontal reservation for women and PWD and vertical reservation for SCs, STs and BCs provided under the Constitution. Now EWS, another category has been added to cover the non-SC, ST and OBCs. The Odisha Reservation of Posts and Services (socially and educationally backward classes) Act 2008 has not been implemented. The Government of Odisha has made legislation for 27 per cent reservation in job and educational institutions but later reduced it to 11.25 per cent because of the compulsion of 50 per cent criteria imposed by the Supreme Court. The SCs and STs constitute 40 per cent of the States' total population and there is about 6-per cent religious minority population, mostly Muslims and Christians. Together, they constitute 46 per cent of the total population. Though SCs and STs have reservation in proportion to their population but the minority population have not yet got

reservation. So it is desirable that the Government of Odisha must ensure justice to its OBCs and minority in ensuring their fair representation, based on their population percentage, in state Govt. job, education and other sector for inclusive growth of Odisha.

OBCS IN ODISHA HANDED RAW DEAL CONTINUALLY-II

Friday, 20 August 2021

The backward classes (BCs) of Odisha have been facing serious political negligence for a long time since Independence. The first Backward Classes Commission was constituted in 1953 and the Centre asked the States to prepare their own list in 1961. While others acted swiftly, the Government of Odisha finally made a list in 1994 on the basis of a report by Justice NK Das Commission (1991-93). After the Supreme Court judgment in reference to Mandal Commission recommendations, while a number of southern and northern States made a good beginning on the matter of reservation and development of backward classes, even many of States had reservation for backward classes before independence, Odisha was a late riser. Finally, after sixty years of constitutional governance, The Odisha Reservation of Posts and Services (for socially and educationally backward classes) Act 2008 received the assent of the Governor on February 3, 2009 with provision of 27 per cent reservation, covering 210 communities. Though the law is meant for almost 50 percent of the population of Odisha, but it has not been properly executed in the State. Besides, there are a host of Central development schemes available for education and economic improvement of the BCs but hardly are they effectively implemented by the Odisha Government. Though there are no legal restrictions or need of Central Government permission in implementing such schemes but unfortunately, where as other States have implemented the schemes by getting continuous Central assistance, the Government of Odisha has substantially done nothing in this regard. The non-performing status of Odisha's BCs' welfare activities is clearly reflected in the annual reports of the concerned ministries and related institutions.

Take for example the status of the Odisha Backward Classes Finance Development Cooperative Corporation Limited established in the year 1994-95 under Odisha Cooperative Societies Act 1962. This is the State channelling agency of the National Backward Class Finance and Development Corporation (NBCFDC) established in 1992 with an authorized share capital of Rs 1,500 crore as a nonprofit making company. The NBCFDC aims for economic development of OBCs by promoting

education through educational loan with lower interest rate to students studying in India and abroad. The NBFDC has been implementing several schemes for generating employment and income in different sectors such as agriculture, transport, trade and business and service sector through loan and micro finance to individual beneficiaries and also in groups to women. It has developed Venture Capital to promote OBCs' participation in business involving banks and other financial institutions. It also has been mobilizing resources from CSR fund of corporates to finance such schemes. Last year the State Government report says they had not implemented any scheme because of lack of Central assistance. But the NBFDC says in its report that the Government of Odisha has not submitted its annual action plan to channel funds. It is reported that only 330 youths from 16 districts had been provided skill development training at a cost of Rs 1.5 crore. The Government of India meets 90 per cent of the expenditure of training on skill development. The question is when many other States have done exemplary work for income generation among OBC youths with mixing of Central assistance and own share, why Odisha is lagging behind? The other complaint is there is lack of civil society involvement in OBC development activities as the ministry grant list has very insignificant presence of Odisha's civil society. The NBFDC focuses on 115 backward districts of the country based on poverty rank where eight districts of Odisha such as Balangir, Dhenkanal, Gajapati, Kalahandi, Kondhamal, Koraput, Malkangiri and Rayagada have been identified in the category. But no such special majors have been initiated in these districts. Ideally, the State of Odisha should receive more funds because of its backwardness and presence of a sizeable OBC population, but it seems cooperative federalism does not work here.

The Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment sponsors pre-matric and post-matric scholarship, construction of hostels for OBC boys and girls, 1,000 national fellowship for pursuing quality higher education, MPhil and PHD, and Dr Ambedkar interest subsidy on educational loans for overseas studies, besides skill development training for promotion of education among backward classes. It has approved for construction of 100 of 100-seated hostel for backward classes students at the cost of Rs 3 lakh per seat but the progress has been very slow to realize the target so far as Odisha is concerned.

It is told that a major cause of indifference to taking up welfare activities may be because of the inclusion of relatively more forward castes in SCBC

list having land ownership and access to education and finance. The reality is still a vast section of most backward classes of the State are small farmers, sharecroppers, artisans, weavers, milk farmers, cattle rearers, small food venders, carpenters, blacksmiths, potters, barbers, small traders, and many other small communities who are in dire need of Government support for their economic development along with reservation.

The ST and SC Development, Minority and Backward Classes Welfare Department is administering welfare work of BCs but there are no dedicated political leaders from among the backward community to lead from the front. There must be an independent backward class department of the State headed by a Cabinet Minister to serve the BCs people exclusively. The Government of Odisha should send its officials and people's representatives from backward classes as exposure trip to southern States to learn how they have most successfully implemented several schemes for the BCs. Based on their understandings the Govt. must build a Odisha specific road map for institutional arrangement and budgetary allocation, as already it is too late so further negligence will have many negative ramification over the overall inclusive growth of the state.

QUOTA ROW: SUB-CATEGORIZATION NEEDED FOR DISTRIBUTIVE JUSTICE

The Indian social system has many layers of inherent inequality. India with huge diversity has adopted a policy of reservation to strengthen inclusive democracy through balanced representation of all sections of people. Though it is difficult to ensure absolute equality in all spheres but there must be a scientific approach to reach to the most deserving ones in lowest rung to ensure inclusive distributive justice.

It has been revealed that the benefits of reservation in Central Government jobs and Central educational institutions for OBC under Central list have not reached to a major section of communities within the list as a handful of dominant castes within OBCs have grabbed the lion's share. Justice G Rohini headed Commission set up in October 2017 for the purpose of studying the OBC reservation benefits across castes in its consultation paper shared that less than one per cent of the 40 OBC castes have availed 50 per cent of reservation benefits whereas 20 per cent of the communities listed in 983 entries could not avail any benefit. 994 entries have a share of below 3 percent. There are 2633 entries in the Central OBC list. The panel has studied 1,00,000 admissions in last three years to Central educational institutions and 1,30,000 recruitments in Central Government that have taken place during last five years under OBC category. The Commission has yet to submit its report and recommendations for a sub categorizing of OBC reservation aiming to fair distribution of available State owned opportunities. It is suggested that the 27 percent of reservation will be subcategorized to cover all communities in the list as relatively forward, backward and most backward based on the benefits they have already availed.

There is no legal restriction over the sub categorization in nine States including Andhra Pradesh, Telengana, Bihar, Jharkhand, Karnataka, West Bengal, Haryana and TamilNadu which have already adopted the practice to ensure distributive justice. They have provided more space to relatively backward communities. Also some States have accommodated minorities within BCs reservation based on social demography. Karnataka has classified OBC reservation into five categories and TN and Kerala have

provided reservation to specific caste groups such as Vanniyar, Ezhave, Nadar and Muslims within the BC reservation.

The State of UP is in path of such move with recommendations of Justice Raghavendra Kumar report in 2018. Way back the issue was raised by LR Naik, a former MP and Dalit member of the Mandal Commission, in support of most backward among OBCs as land owning OBCs are more powerful than others mostly engaged in caste based occupations.

The idea is the most backward classes whose marginalisation is more visible must have protection from the dominance of powerful BCs to avoid unequal competitions.

The move of the Government will affect the dominant OBC sections having more access to political visibility but definitely it is going to be more beneficial for the marginalised sections among OBC. The creamy layer criteria based on economic consideration and other criteria have already put restrictions on access of rich and publicly visible sections to such benefits.

The issues of sub -categorisation is also equally being discussed in case of SCs and STs reservation because it has been told that though SCs are a socially homogeneous group based on the criteria of untouchability but the list has not been strictly followed in many States while identifying the sub castes within SCs and it is found that many of the non-deserving castes entered into SCs list through manipulation. As a result, in a competition among unequal the most vulnerable sections within SCs are being deprived of getting the benefits of reservation. The States such as AP, Tamil Nadu, Punjab and Bihar have made legislations to sub -categorise the SCs reservation with a purpose to reach the more deserving communities. Bihar has made provisions for MahaDalits and TN has made provision for 3 per cent quota in favour of Arundhatiyars caste within the SC quota. Many other States have supported the move while asked by the Supreme Court and some States have opposed it. It is suggested that the States must go for scientific survey to get the correct picture of representation of various sub -castes in jobs and educational institutions in order to identify the more vulnerable sections.

States such as Nagaland, Manipur and Meghalaya have made provision of reservation for specific tribes and the tribal reservation is more than fifty percent because of their demography. Nagaland has made 52 percent

reservation for indigenous STs and 15 percent for backward tribe of Nagaland. Meghalaya has separate reservation for specific tribe such as Khasi, Jaintia and Garo and other STs. Some time back, a declaration by AP Governor for 100 reservation in all posts of school teachers in scheduled area was declared unconstitutional. However, it has been experienced that reservation policy serves as an instrument of building inclusion, distributing public opportunities, and sharing responsibility of nation building based on values of democracy, liberty, equality and fraternity. It is helping to bring different castes and tribes to work together for common goal and contribute to strengthen fraternity as fellow citizens of the country. It has contributed to abolish caste-based occupations, caste-based discrimination in public places through social mobility

WHY OBC QUOTA IN ELECTIONS IS SIGNIFICANT

Friday, 31 December 2021

The constitutionally governed modern democratic countries are built over the idea that all men are equal and deserve all kinds of human rights. The elected Governments have to ensure the realisation of rights by creating equality in matter of public opportunity for all. Globally, many democratic countries have been endeavouring to ensure equality in matter of representation of all through legislation; especially for the historically left-out groups. Representation is a human right and also the first step towards achieving equality.

The programme to ensure representation has been called in different terms in different countries such as India, USA, and South Africa as reservation, affirmative action, alternative access and positive discrimination. The scope of its applicability extends to representation in governance, legislative bodies, executive, judiciary, education, employment, business, trade and many more other sectors of national life. But it is not a permanent arrangement; it rather aims to achieve the purpose in a short span of time.

Way back the apartheid Government of South Africa had policy of reservation for the white and had denied equal access to black, Indians and others in public employment. Currently, worldwide there is reservation for women, ethnic minorities and people suffering racial discriminations. It is understood that reservation has immensely contributed to share the available public space and opportunities of a nation with the ignored and underrepresented masses.

Experience shows that the policy of reservation has brought change in life of marginalised sections and boosted economic development. The southern States of India are the best example in this regard.

For centuries together a vast majority of population in India is affected by discrimination based on untouchability, ethnicity and caste (Verna system). But there has been an attempt by many like Jyotiba Phule and Shahuji Bhonsle during pre-British era through social reform as well as legislation to ensure their representation. In the year 1902, the then Maharaja of

Kolhapur had introduced 50 per cent reservation for the Backward classes through an administrative order published in Kolhapur State Gazette.

The issue of proportional representation of diverse social groups was prominently discussed in Simon Commission reports and Round Table conference but surprisingly the representation of backward classes, who are almost half of the population of the country, has not been discussed much after independence. Barring a few southern States, the constitutional provisions for them have not been implemented by subsequent elected Governments.

Many credible commissions such as Kaka Kalelkar (1953), BP Mandal (1979), Justice Rajindar Sachar reports (2005) and independent surveys have established the fact that thousands of the castes and communities in different religions identified under OBC category are very insignificantly represented in socio-economic and socio-political life of the nation, especially in the areas of education, academics, employment in Government and public sector jobs, judiciary, media and many other important segments of public domain.

The recent World Inequality Report says India is among the most unequal countries in the world. Social inequality is one of the major reasons of growing economic disparity among various social groups specially castes and communities in the lower ladder of society. The poor continue to be poor and have relatively lower income and ownership over assets.

For a long time there is non-availability of correct data about various castes and their representation in different sectors. The lack of information is being used as a plea to delay the implementation of reservation policy by the Government and it also helps the judiciary to make stay and dilute the implementation of reservation laws. Thus it will be ideal for the Government to go for a socio-economic and caste census to know the exact status.

The other important step is the Government must ensure that like land reform laws and Tamil Nadu's reservation law, all the reservation related Central and State laws must be placed in the 9th scheduled of the Constitution to avoid undesirable judicial scrutiny.

However, the judicial interpretations till date have helped more in denying justice to OBCs and others. Unfortunately, the academics and media in the country have not yet presented a clear picture before the public about the

issues of reservation; rather they successfully spread misinformation about the truth relating to OBCs and others.

In order to end the dynasty rule, monopoly of a few, traditional caste hegemony and caste-based mindset, the social diversity must be encouraged through social reform and legislation. Till 1950, for centuries together few castes monopolized the ownership over the wealth, education and power to rule and denied basic human rights to a majority of the masses of India. But during last 70 years of constitutional governance, the elected Governments have also very selectively implemented the constitutional mandate and very systematically ignored the human rights of a vast majority of castes and communities by depriving them of their participation in nation building as equal citizens.

It has also been suggested that the available reservation for different castes and communities must be sub-categorized to reach to the most deserving and to make it more ideally inclusive. The other emerging claim in the era of privatization is to expand the scope of reservation to all private sector jobs and other areas such as judiciary, media and business. The recruitment for private jobs must be done by independent agencies such as UPSC.

The issue of political representation from Parliament to local self-governance is very vital. The Indian society can be unified with equal representation of all castes in all sectors. What it means is, all citizens must believe in fraternity and have a sense of ownership over national resources without feeling a sense of inferiority or superiority. The continued unhealthy competition among unequal and disproportionately over-possession by a few must stop.

RESERVATION IN PRIVATE SECTOR FOR LOCALS OF STATE

Odisha must think of AP model of legislations.

With increasing trend of privatization of education, health, service, business, industry, mines, agriculture and marketing systems along with sale of existing public sector companies and infrastructures build out of public finance, and handing over of the natural resources of nation, has been seriously impacting over public employment. The Private organized sector becomes a largest source of privileged employment. The available employment in both public and private spear must be equally shared among the people of this country and should not be monopoly of privileged few. It needs regulation to ensure socially and geographically inclusive representation of diversity and also to limit discrimination in many forms exist in organized sector employment market. The privatization in India has been accompanying by a reform in Labour laws which gives an upper hand to the employer in decision making and thus denies affirmative action in employment. Along with this the privatization of education will further limit the scope of universal access to knowledge and skill that linked to entrée to quality dignified occupation. Depriving a vast majority of population of meaningful productive economic activities is not a healthy practice for inclusive growth and democracy because employment is not just an economic issue rather linked to our social status, dignity and living conditions.

India is a country of highly unequal societies with lots of diversities but the governing political ideologies have been spoken for building equality and equity to ensure inclusive representation and unity that have been emerged out of struggles of makers of modern India to govern this country based on basic principles of equality, justice and equal opportunities to all its citizens. As one of the largest democracy of the world, we have been in practice of a written constitutional governance. Therefore the employment policy of the Govt. must not be limited to its own spear of employment in executive and public sector but need to extend equally to private sector also. But unfortunately for last seventy years the issues of affirmative action in private sector employment have remained unaddressed though at different point of time the issues have been raised inside parliament and

outside in street protests. As reparation against historical injustice against majority of people of this country and to ensure their fair representation for national unity the policy of reservation have been introduced. Though there has been practice of reservation in India based on the criteria of untouchability, ethnic status, social and educational backwardness, economic backwardness, disability and gender in Govt. and public sector but this criteria has not been followed in private sector which holds a major share of employment market.

For a long time the private sector has been denying a socially inclusive employment policy and for democratization of the scope of available employment. Many studies found that the corporate boards are largely managed by upper caste /class families of the country and they do not follow an employment policy declared in the constitution of the country while they have been enjoying all the benefits of public finance, national wealth and resources for their profit without social commitment.

Since its inception, it has been observed that the central and state Govt. have not administering the strict implementation of reservation laws to fulfil the existing vacancies in Govt. offices and public sector. From the day one, the court orders have been diluting the enforcement of reservation laws through various kinds of interpretations which has been encouraged in limiting the scope reservation in many ways. The post nineties employment policy of the Govt. in the name of outsourcing and contractual appointment and in many other ways also further limiting the scope of employment for majority of people who are being deprived of dignified and high paid privileged employment for generations together.

The restrictive enforcement of reservation for last seventy years in Govt. sector and denial of reservation in private sector virtually make the vast majority of masses vulnerable to organized sector privileged employment. It has been contributing to create inequality in society and help in continuing the hegemony of the already privileged few for a long time. The vast majority of masses includes, including Dalit, Adivasies, Backward classes, religious minorities and women are facing discrimination in access to employment in the organized sector in the absence of protective employment laws to ensure their fair participation.

The class of people mostly from upper castes with having advantageous access to quality education, English language and caste based social networking are the privileged one to manipulate major share of organized

sector employment. They have been debating much on merit but not about inequality in competition and discrimination in availing scope and opportunities by state. Studies have found that social networking and family/caste based influences have been impacting over recruitments in organized sector employment. Many of the all India services and scope of employment in private sector has been more beneficial to few families of the country for generations together and many communities are remain out of the unfair competition.

It is also observed that the poor and backward states having natural resources are also deprived of getting employment in their own locality of state because a lion share of jobs are taken away by the people from outside the state in the absence of protective policy for the locals by the state.

The issues of organized sector employment sharing among different social groups, region and gender have been a major issue. Along with this the criteria of locals of a state and other, and also among different social groups within a locality of the state is equally important. Not just the question of jobs but also the contracts, business and many other scope of economic activities by state and organized sector are being grabbed by outsiders of state which has been depriving the locals and pushed them to opt for migration in distress. The condition of migrant workers is well known to all. The state of Odisha having majority of BCs, STs and SCs is a best example of this kind marginalization process in the absence of a protective policy by the state Govt. The freedom and living space of a vast majority of local people have been restricted in many ways especially by policy decisions relating to economic and social participations. The scope of economic activities within a state out of state fund and scope of available employment must be inclusive of all its people whatever may be their skill or capacity. The skill and capacity of any of the individual can be developed but should not be denied a participation in economic activities which is essential for a dignified living.

The recent move of the Govt. of Andhra Pradesh to ensure 75 percent of reservation for locals of the state in the industries and factories and the cabinet nod by Govt. of Haryana with similar intension are quite relevant for other states. The AP Govt. has enacted The AP Employment of Local candidate in the industries /Factories Act 2019 to ensure this objectives of protecting the interest of the state in employment. The AP Govt. has also enacted the AP (50% reservation to BCs, SCs ,STs and minorities in works

contract and service contracts given on nomination)Act 2019 which further ensure the scope of participation of different social groups in Govt. work out of public money. It will pave the way for inclusive participation of all while limiting discrimination and increasing representation of majority in economic activities of a state. Odisha must think of on similar lin of different castes and most importantly created equal opportunity in matter of public education, employment and governance.

Reservation has not affected the quality; rather it has proved that States having reservation for a long time have made success in education, administration and governance. All southern States are the best examples in this regard. Though reservation is not a solution to the larger issues of poverty and unemployment but it has created a scope of participation especially in Government jobs and educational institutions for historically deprived sections.

WHY RESERVATION?

State Govt. is ineffective in implementing reservation and development programs for OBCs.

Affirmative action or reservation is a global phenomenon being practised in many democratic countries of the world to address many forms of exclusion, based on religion, ethnicity, indigenous status, gender, minority status, race, caste, social and educational backwardness, to ensure inclusive representation in public governance, employment and education.

India with huge diversity has adopted a policy of reservation to strengthen inclusive democracy through balanced representation of all sections of people. For last seventy years, it has been experienced that reservation helps in ensuring participation of different social groups /identities in national life and also integrating people from diverse social background to serve the country in equal capacity as its Citizens. It is also viewed as sharing of available public opportunities among all its citizens with equity. The social outcome of reservation has impacted to change the age old hereditary caste-based occupations and created a scope for abolition of inhuman untouchability practices, and different forms of caste-based discrimination, by bring together people of different caste/social groups in a common workplace.

But the post-independence India has been witnessed the denial of social justice to about half of its population historically suffered with social and educational backwardness who are still not being adequately represented in governance, Govt. jobs, academics and many other fields in spite of constitutional provisions that empower the states to enact and enforce legislations to change the prevailing situation. There are 2479 number of castes, their synonym, sub-castes and communities in India have been notified as Other Backward Classes (OBC) in the central list of the country who are historically denied their rights as citizens of this country and remain largely under represented. In the absence of census data since 1931 the correct population of OBCs has not been available but it was estimated that they constitute about 52 percent of the total population of the country by the Mandal commission and National Sample survey organization in its 61st round survey in 2005 on employment and unemployment situation among social groups in India, estimated it to be 41 percent of the total

population. The socio-economic and caste census data of 2011 by Register general of India have to disclose the caste wise population to know the correct figure. Why the country denied a fair participation to its half of the population? This exclusion of such a large number of population from public places has number of ramifications over our democracy and progress.

History of reservation in pre-Independent era.

Reservation was not started after the implementation of Constitution.

The history of reservation in India can be traced back to the row over non-representation of majority section of communities in education and governance in princely States during the early twentieth century. It was mostly the non-Brahmin castes which were excluded and deprived of participation in governance and other areas of public life due to lack of education. The princely State of Kolhapur was the pioneer in introduction of reservation in 1902 for backward and depressed classes currently known as SCs, STs and OBCs. Later, it was followed by Mysore, Madras in 1921,1931 in Bombay presidency and 1935 in Travancore and followed by Cochin and mostly, supported by the ruling upper castes to bring inclusiveness in governance and social life at large. It was primarily targeted to bring balanced representation of different caste groups in education and public governance and to arrest the hegemonic hereditary dominance of a few dominant castes.

The Poona Pact of 1932 between Gandhi and Ambedkar was a turning point of political reservation in State and Central Assemblies for the depressed classes (SCs and STs). The Macdonald (Prime Minister of UK from 1929-35 from Labour Party) Award for separate electorate for depress classes was rejected by Gandhi and Congress with the apprehension of segregation of Hindu society and its ramifications over national social life. Dr. B R Ambedkar's advocacy for SCs made provision of reservation by British in August 1943 and later for both SCs and STs in independent India in posts and services, educational institutions and political reservation in Lok Sabha and State Assemblies as reparation to Poona Pact of 1932. There was demand for separate settlements, separate electorate and representation as per population. The political reservation was only for ten years, but there was no time limit for reservation in jobs and education.

The anti-British struggle was also inclusive of struggle against caste based social inequality and man-made many forms of social discriminations. It was the aspiration of freedom movement to build an egalitarian society based on principles of social and economic equality. The Constitution of India has made provision to integrate these people in national life through ensuring their fair representation in all spheres of social life based on the governing principles of democracy, socialism and secularism and social justice. Dr. Ambedkar's initiative in 1943 made lasting impact in continuation of reservation after independence under the constitution and subsequently extend to OBCs in 1990.

Independent India –Constitution and Legislations for reservation:

(Article 340(1), 15(4), 16(4).), 338B, 342A, 102 amendments of Indian constitution granted constitutional status to National Commission for Backward Classes (NCBC)

First backward class commission:

In 1951 through the Constitution's first Amendment Act 1951, by inserting Clause 4 in Article 15, has included socially and educationally backward classes of citizens for special provision of representation where both Jawaharlal Nehru and Dr. Ambedker played a major role to expand the scope of reservations to OBCs. The process started in 1953 with appointment of first Backward Classes Commission under the chairmanship of Kaka Kalelkar, Member, Rajya Sabha from 1952 to 1964, to identify castes or communities in the country and to prepare a list of such backward communities for the whole of India along with examining the difficulties and for recommendation of steps. The report was submitted in 1955. The four criteria to identify the BCs were considered on the basis of low social position in the traditional caste hierarchy of Hindu society, lack of education, and inadequate representation in Government services, trade, commerce and industry. But it was unsuccessful in moving further with controversies of criteria of identification. The identification of caste and communities and their correct population has been controversial in the absence of caste census.

2nd backward class commission:

The Government of India appointed a five- member second Backward Class Commission under the chairmanship of BP Mandal, Member, Lok sabha from Bihar in 1979 when Morarji Desai was Prime Minister and the

commission submitted its report in 1980. The criteria adopted by the commission were social, educational and economic. The commission recommended reservation for BCs in Central Government jobs, educational institutions along with a set of affirmative relaxation policy similar to SCs and STs. The recommendation was adopted after ten years by the then VP Singh Government with 27 per cent of reservation but it was challenged as unconstitutional and cleared by a nine-member constitutional bench of the Supreme Court 1992.

Categories of Reservation:

1. Reservation in posts and services of the state (state under Article 12 as interpreted by the Supreme Court)
2. Reservation in admission to seats in educational institutions.
3. Reservation of seats in election to the Lok Sabha and state Assemblies (political reservation). The time-limit of 10 years was prescribed by constitution only for reservation of seats in election to Lok Sabha and State Assemblies.
4. Reservation in PRIs.

The purpose of reservation is not eradication of poverty or unemployment. There are Horizontal reservation for women and PWD and Vertical reservation for SCs, STs and BCs provided under the constitution. Now EWS another category added to this.

Post-Mandal commission Issues:

Reservation is provided to SCs, STs and OBCs at the rate of 15 per cent, 7.5 per cent and 27 per cent respectively, in case of direct recruitment on all India basis. It is understood that affirmative State intervention in form of reservation of seats in educational institutions, Government jobs, local self-governance, and special economic development programme are key to development of backward classes. Now with repeal of National commission of backward class Act 1993 the NCBC have given constitutional status in 2018 by adding 338B in the constitution at par with SCs and STs. However, along with the Centre, almost all States have been implementing the OBC reservation. Some States such as Tamil Nadu have been performing well because of political movements. The State of Tamil Nadu has 50 per cent reservation for BCs, out of total 69 per cent, which includes 26.5 per cent for BCs, 3.5 per cent for backward class Muslims,

and 20 per cent for most backward classes. The Tamil Nadu Backward Classes, Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Reservation of seats in educational institutions and of appointments or posts in the services under the state) Act 1993, enjoys the protection of 9th Schedule 257, A, inserted under constitutional 76th Amendment Act 1994 with effect from August 31, 1994. The other states such as Kerala has 40 percent, Karnataka has 32 percent, Puduchery has 34 and AP has 29 percent reservation for OBCs.

The States and UTs of Arunachal Pradesh, Tripura, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, and Lakshadweep have no reservation for BCs because they have no such population.

However it is fact that OBCs constitute a major section of our population and other than SCs and STs they continue to suffer with representation in Govt. jobs and educational institutions because of political apathy and inordinate delay in addressing their cause. While moving towards inclusive development and growth it is highly required to include population of all social groups specially those who has been left out because of our continued unequal social and economic systems that has been systematically deprived of a majority of the population from their basic human rights and representation in all spear of social life. It has been told that representation ensure participation and without scope of representation there will be no participation.

In countries such as India with huge diversity and discrimination based on caste and religion, it has been decided by the makers of modern India to adopt the policy of affirmative action in form of reservation to ensure social justice. Though there was report of Kaka Kalelkar commission immediately after enforcement of constitution but the matter of OBC have been much discussed in post nineties with the report of the second backward class commission or popularly known as Mandal commission but unfortunately since its inception the whole issues of implementation of the recommendation of the commission has been diluted in many ways and that has pave the way for delay in implementation of the many of the approved provisions and decisions. The main dilution comes from various court judgments and decision of the Govt. for the enforcement of the constitutional mandate and lack of uniformity among the states over the execution of the reservation law for OBCs.

Issues of creamy Layer and sub-categorization:

There have been issues of creamy layer and sub-categorization among OBCs that affect in many ways the process of execution. The exclusion criteria followed has number of anomalies relating to its categorization and ceiling limits. There are six categories such as constitutional post, service category, Armed forces including paramilitary forces, professional classes engaged in trade and industry, property owner and income and wealth taxpayer to whom the exclusion criteria has been applicable. The income ceiling specified in 1993 was Rs 1Lakh per annum and subsequently it has increased to Rs8 lakh in 2017. There have been number of candidates for service and students have been suffering with this issues and there was an expert committee to examine the issues related to creamy layer who has submitted its report to the ministry but things have not changed. (An expert committee was constituted by GOI under the chairmanship of B.P. Sharma, former secretary, DOPT in 2019 to examine the issues related to creamy layer and the criteria evolve by the Prasad committee. (Source MSJE)

The other issue is sub categorization of OBCs into backward and most backward classes because it has found that few OBC castes have taken away a lion share of the benefits of reservation while many left out without the desired benefit. Though there is no legal restriction over the subcategorization about nine states includes Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Bihar, Jharkhand, Karnataka, West Bengal, Haryana and Tamil Nadu have already sub categorized to ensure distributive justice. Justice G. Rohini commission has setup to see the extent of inequality in distribution of benefits of reservation among the castes covered under central list and to develop a scientific approach for the sub categorization. Way back the issue was raised by L. R. Naik, a former MP and Dalit member of the Mandal Commission, in support of most backward among OBCs as land-owning OBCs are more powerful than others mostly engaged in caste based occupations. The most backward classes whose marginalization has been more visible must have protection from the dominance of powerful BCs to avoid unequal competitions as the true spirit of social justice must prevail in the path of equality.

Religion factor in OBCs.

The list of OBCs is not just limited to caste Hindus but also Muslims and Christians, Non -ST Christians, Sikhs and others. The Jains are not included because all most all of them belong to socially and educationally

advanced caste. The Zoroastrians or Parsis are not included because they are free from caste system.

What is social backwardness: Social backwardness describes the low position of a caste in the traditional hierarchy of the traditional social system of India /caste system that is linked to caste based occupations which are consider to be inferior or lowly.

The three criteria being followed are social backwardness, educationally backward and inadequate representation in Govt. services (Article16-4).

Restrictions on enforcement of reservation in selected institutions.

Such as ISRC, IF, IM etc.

State of Odisha and OBCs reservation:

The Government of Odisha has enacted Odisha State Commission for Backward Classes Act 1993 and has implemented reservation for OBCs late almost after 40 years of independence with very less percentage in comparison to other States though OBCs constitute a major portion of the population and continue to remain backward in many respects of social, educational and economic development, besides in political representation. There are more than 210 communities identified as SEBC in the State . Many of them are traditionally resources less in terms of land, education and finance and they are also socially treated as lower in caste hierarchy but higher than untouchables.

The Odisha reservation of posts and services (socially and educationally backward classes) Act 2008 has not been implemented. The Government of Odisha has made legislation for 27% reservation in job and educational institutions but later reduced it to 11.25% because of the compulsion of 50% criteria imposed by the Supreme Court. The SCs and STs constitute 40% of the States' total population and there is 6% minority population. Together, they constitute 46% of the total population. Though SCs and STs have reservation in proportion to their population but the OBCs and minority population have not yet got reservation as per their population percentage in the State. So it is desirable that the Government of Odisha must ensure justice for its OBCs and minority population in ensuring their fair representation in job, educational and economic sector of the State.OBCs of Odisha are historically neglected because of continued political apathy and lack of backward class movements in the State.

Reservation for EWS and the status of OBC reservation:

The Constitution's 124th Amendment Bill passed in both the Houses of the Parliament has expanded the scope of reservation in education and job for the economically weaker section of citizens other than SCs, STs and OBCs backward by amending Article 15 and Article 16 with inserting economically weaker section to clause 5. The economically weaker section shall be notified by the State from time to time on the basis of family income and other indicators of economic disadvantage. The reservation is in addition to the existing reservations and subject to maximum ten per cent. However, with this, the reservation restriction of 50 per cent becomes irrelevant and the weaker section ambit has expanded to economically weaker section also other than social disability and educational backwardness.

The criteria of poor other than SC, ST and OBC coming under EWS category.

Economically weaker section" shall be such as may be notified by the State from time to time on the basis of family income and other indicators of economic disadvantage .[Article 15(6) Constitution of India]. For this purpose, persons who are not covered under the existing scheme of reservations for the Scheduled Castes, the Scheduled Tribes and the Socially and Educationally Backward Classes and whose family has gross annual income below Rs.8.00 lakh are to be identified as EWSs for the benefit of reservation.

Family for this purpose will include the person who seeks the benefit of reservation, his / her parents and siblings below the age of 18 years as also his/ her spouse and children below the age of 18 years. The income shall include income from all sources i.e. salary, agriculture, business, profession etc. and it will be income for the financial year before the year of application. Also, persons whose family owns or possesses any one of the following assets shall be excluded

From being identified as EW irrespective of the family income:

5 acres of Agricultural land and above, a residential flat of 1000 sq ft and above, residential plot of 100 sq yards and above in notified municipalities, a residential plot of 200 sq yards and above in areas other than the notified municipalities. (source – MSJE, GOI)

It has been argued that the economically weaker section of citizens have largely remained excluded from attending the higher educational institutions and public employment on account of their economic

backwardness because they failed to compete with their fellow players enjoying more economic privilege. So in order to ensure their representation, Articles 46, 15 and 16 have been redefined to include the economically weaker section. With this move, the long pending demand of the upper caste in India other than SC, ST and OBCs has been fulfilled and the economic criterion of reservation has been introduced. This has further expanded the reservation scope and paved the way of demand for others such as religious minorities and OBCs who are not yet adequately represented in education, job and governance in proportion to their population. It is also going to include the scope of reservation to judiciary and other sector jobs which are not yet being covered and the vast areas of private sector which has been denying principles of equal participation to diverse social groups in their workplaces.

Education and Economic Development schemes for OBCs:

Along with reservation in jobs and educational institutions, the ministry of social justice and empowerment has been executing schemes and programme for the development of the poor OBCs in number of ways for their educational and economic development so that the gaps with other forward social groups can be minimized in the process and it will pave the way for their representation in all other sector. The ministry has developed schemes that includes pre-matric and post matric scholarship for OBC students and special hostel for OBC boys and girls, national fellowship for pursuing higher education, MPhil and PHD and Dr. Ambedkar interest subsidy on educational loans for overseas studies, and skill development training. The ministry has set up National Backward Class Finance and Development Corporation (NBCFDC) with an authorized share capital of Rs1500 crore for economic development of OBCs by promoting education through educational loan with lower interest rate to students studying in India and abroad. NBFDC has been implementing hosts of schemes for generating employment and income in different sectors such agriculture, transport, trade and business and service sector through loan and microfinance to individual beneficiaries and also in groups to women. It has developed Venture Capital to promote OBCs participation in business involving banks and other financial institutions.

However, data shows many of the backward states such as Odisha having presence of about half of OBC population have failed to ensure 27% of reservation and also ineffective to mobilize available resources from

ministry in the absence of dedicated institutional mechanism for OBC development in the state.

The Odisha Backward Class Finance Development Cooperative Corporation Ltd setup in the State has no proper scheme or allocation. It has been suggested that the State Government should allocate adequate finance and develop special schemes for the economic development of the backward classes of the State in the areas of skill and entrepreneurship development, encourage trade, business and self-employment of youths and women in rural villages. The landless sharecroppers and small and marginal farmers must be supported with land and credit for sustainable agriculture development to boost production and employment. They must be allowed with equal stake over resources, land, water, forest and financial resources of the State. The students must be encouraged with scholarship for higher and technical education. The scope of reservation must be extended to private sector, business, trade and commerce for inclusive economic development. There must be a separate backward class development department with a dedicated minister and adequate resource allocation to plan, monitor and promote accountability for the development of OBCs in the State.

Experience with OBCs reservation so far and way forward:

It has been experienced in the last 60 years that reservation policy serves as an instrument of building inclusion, distributing public opportunities, and sharing responsibility of nation building based on values of democracy, liberty, equality and fraternity. It has been helping to bring different castes to work together for common goal and contributing to strengthen fraternity as fellow citizens of the country. It has contributed to abolish caste based occupations, caste based discrimination in public places through social mobility of different castes and most importantly created equal opportunity in matter of public education, employment and governance. Reservation has not affected the quality rather it has been proved that States having reservation for a long time have made success in education, administration and governance. All southern States are the best examples in this regard.

RESERVATION FOR ECONOMICALLY WEAKER SECTION

promote equality among citizens.

The Constitution 124th amendment bill passed in both houses of parliament has expanded the scope of reservation in education, in admission to educational institutions including private, and Government jobs in initial appointments for the economically weaker section of citizens other than SCs, STs and socially and educationally backward classes of citizens by amending Article 15 and 16 with inserting economically weaker section to clause 5. The economically weaker sections shall be notified by the state from time to time on the basis of family income and other indicators of economic disadvantage. This reservation is in addition to the existing reservations and subject to maximum ten percent. However with this the reservation restrictions of 50 percent become irrelevant and the weaker section ambit has expanded to economically weaker section also other than social disability and educational backwardness which has been the dominant discourse of justification in favors of reservation. It is argued that the economically weaker section of citizens have largely remain excluded from attending the higher educational institutions and public employment on account of their economic backwardness because they failed to compete with their fellow players enjoying more economic privilege. So to ensure their representation Article 46, 15 and 16 has been redefined with addition to include the economically weaker section. With this move, the long pending demand of the upper caste in India has been fulfilled and the economic criteria of reservation has introduced. This will further expanded the reservation debate and pave the way of demand for others such as religious minority, OBCs who are not yet adequately represented in education, job and governance in proportion to their population. It is also going to encourages to expand the scope of reservation as affirmative action policy to other areas of Government, judiciary, public sector which are not yet being covered under policy of reservation and the vast areas of private sector which has been denying principles of equal participation of diverse social groups in their workplaces. As reservation helps in ensuring participation of all in national life and integrating people from diverse social background to serve the

country as its citizens in equal capacity. This also being viewed as sharing of public opportunity among all its citizens with equity and equal opportunities being created by state under principles of constitutional value that speaks of justice economic, political and social to all its citizens through equal participation in all spear of national life. Reservation has contributed to change the age old caste-based occupation and created scope for abolition of untouchability and caste-based discrimination by unifying people of different caste/social groups in a common workplace to serve the country.

The history of reservation in India started with issues of non-representation of majority section of communities in education and governance in princely states during early twentieth century. It was mostly the non-Brahmin castes who are excluded and deprived of participation in governance and other areas of public life due to lack of education. The princely state of Kolhapur was the pioneer in introduction of reservation in 1902 for backward and depressed classes currently known as SCs, STs and OBCs. Later it was followed by Mysore, Madras, Bombay and Travancore and mostly supported by the ruling uppercastes to bring inclusiveness in governance. The Poona Pact of 1932 between Gandhi and Ambedkar was a turning point of political reservation in state and central assemblies for the SCs. The McDonald (Prime Minister of UK from 1929-35 from Labour party) award for a separate electorate for SCs was rejected by Gandhi and Congress with the apprehension of segregation of Hindu society and its ramifications over national life.

The anti-British struggle was also inclusive of struggle against caste based social inequality and man-made social discriminations. It was the aspiration of freedom movement to build an egalitarian society based on constitutional governance which is being reflected in making of our constitution. The constitution has made provision of reservation for scheduled castes and scheduled Tribes in education, job and legislatives to integrate these section of people in national life through ensuring their fair representation in all spear of social life. Later in 1951 the constitution first Amendment Act 1951 by inserting clause 4 in Article 15 included socially and educationally backward classes of citizens where both Jawaharlal Nehru and Dr. Ambedker played a major role to expand the scope of reservation to OBCs. The process started in 1953 with appointment of first Backward Classes Commission under the chairmanship of Kaka Kalelkar, Member, Rajya Sabha from 1952 to 1964, to identify castes or

communities in the country and to prepare a list of such backward communities for the whole of India along with examining the difficulties and for recommendation of steps. The report was submitted in 1955. The four criteria to identify the BCs were considered on the basis of low social position in the traditional caste hierarchy of Hindu society, lack of education, and inadequate representation in Government services, trade, commerce and industry. But it was unsuccessful in moving further with controversies of criteria of identification. The identification of caste and communities and their correct population has been controversial in the absence of caste census. However, the current SECC 2011 can help in solving the problem.

The Government of India appointed a five-member second Backward Class Commission under the chairmanship of B P Mandal, Member, Lok Sabha from Bihar in 1979 when Morarji Desai was Prime Minister and the commission submitted its report in 1980. The criteria adopted by the commission were social, educational and economic. The recommendation of the commission recommended reservation for BCs in Central Government jobs, educational institutions along with a set of affirmative relaxation policy similar to SCs and STs. The recommendation was adopted after ten years by the then VP Singh Government with 27 per cent of reservation but it was challenged as unconstitutional and cleared by a nine-member constitutional bench of the Supreme Court. However, along with the Centre, almost all States have been implementing the OBC reservation.

The State of Tamil Nadu has 50 per cent reservation for BCs, out of total 69 per cent, which includes 26.5 per cent for BCs, 3.5 per cent for backward class Muslims, and 20 per cent for most backward classes. The Tamil Nadu Backward Classes, Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Reservation of seats in educational institutions and of appointments or posts in the services under the state) Act 1993, enjoys protection of 9th schedule 257, A, inserted under constitutional 76th Amendment Act 1994 with effect from August 31, 1994.

The Government of Odisha has enacted Odisha State Commission for Backward Classes Act 1993 and has implemented reservation for OBCs in late just after 40 years of independence with very less percentage in comparison to other States though OBC constitute a major portion of the population and continue to remain backward in many respect of social,

educational and economic development along with political representation. There are more than 209 communities identified as SEBC in the State which are traditionally resources less and socially treated as lower in caste hierarchy as higher than untouchables. The Government of Odisha has made legislation for 27 per cent reservation in job and educational institutions but later reduced it to 11.25 percent because of the compulsion of 50per cent criteria imposed by the Supreme Court. The scheduled castes and scheduled Tribes constitute 40 percent of the total population of the state and there are 6 percent minority population together is 46 percent of the total population though SCs and STs have reservation in proportion to their population percentage but the OBC and minority population have not yet reservation as per their population percentage in the state so it is desirable that the Government of Odisha must ensure justice for its OBC and minority population in ensuring their fair representation in educational and economic sector of the state.

EWS QUOTA ONLY FOR UPPER CASTES NOT WELCOME.

Friday, 11 November 2022

The Supreme Court recently has upheld reservation for the economically weaker section (EWS) among non-SCs, STs, OBCs, mostly the meritorious upper castes usually called as general category. The affirmative policy of our country by now has included almost all social groups under the purview of reservation in education and jobs but still many deserving ones are deprived of the boon as they are left out or misplaced in the scheduled list because of confusion over their caste and religious identity. This is not justice for all poor in the country but selective justice for a few social groups who are otherwise socially and educationally forward.

The historical social reality of India is that we are a caste divided society and have continued practice of social inequality based on caste in social life over long past. A minority in the population the Indian upper castes irrespective of their religious identity have a hegemonic presence everywhere. It is primarily because of their historical advantages of caste. They have managed to get more access to education, political power and economic assets at the cost of the lower castes.

The idea of affirmative action was perceived to correct the historical wrongs based on caste and give space to the historically caste oppressed sections to ensure their fair representation in selective areas primarily in education, governance, executive and legislative. Caste in India is vertical not horizontal; so people in lower ladder have to be brought upward to make it horizontal. It has been understood that the social inequality in India is the mother of economic and political inequality. The idea of reservation was more understood as a concept to ensure representation of certain sections of people in different spheres of activities as they remained left out because of their social identity. It was certainly not because of poverty and hence, reservation was not conceived as an anti-poverty program. With the criteria of economic status selectively used for upper castes, not for others, the social groups already over represented in education and jobs disproportionate to their population will now get further boost in the name of affirmative action.

Why does the economically weaker section (EWS) among meritorious upper castes only need reservation? Are they not over-represented everywhere both in Government and private sectors and have been very well enjoying the benefits of their inherent hegemonic merit? Why do the upper caste poor get preferential treatment to get reservation? This move defeats the very purpose of social justice and social equality in a hierarchical society.

The basis of the new reservation of EWS has changed the very idea of social justice and constitutional interpretation of justice in practice. The Government and judiciary have been smartly doing things for a few social groups who are at an advantageous position already while a majority of the population belonging to SCs, STs OBCs and religious minorities are still lying neglected. Unfortunately, the Government has been denying a caste census lest the reality of economic status and representation of different social groups should not be known.

This move of the government has happened in a time while the center and many states such as Odisha, with exception of TN, have been denied reservation to poor OBC and SEBC taking the plea of the 50 percent criteria.

The issues of reservation for Dalit Christians, Dalit Muslims, Ajlafs and Pasmanda Muslims need serious introspection while considering reservations. The scheduled castes status not being religion neutral has affected many poor religious minorities. They have been routinely discriminated against because of their caste, religion and economic backwardness and remain under-represented in governance in a constitutionally governed secular country. Since its inception, the reservation of SCs, STs and OBCs has passed through many hurdles including selective judicial interpretations. Unfortunately, still a valid list of scheduled categories has not been finalized as the Parliament debate and judicial scrutiny continue to dilute and disturb the implementation of reservation for the deserving social groups. This shows the seriousness of the ruling parties towards a majority of the poor people of the country. Though for a long time there has been demand for expansion of the affirmative action policy to private sector but there is scant action in this direction. The Government has been very systematically pushing a neo-liberal agenda of market driven liberalization which is more beneficial to the people who are already educationally and economically well-off. The

reality is that we have not made any substantial change to bring down the many forms of social inequality both in private as well as public life in the absence of non-implementation of many protective laws and affirmative action policy but on the contrary, purposefully neglected their implementation due lack of socio-political will of the ruling elite which largely belongs to the upper strata. The continuation of many diversities and discriminatory practices in the name of religion, tradition and culture are evident of the attitude of the upper castes towards the marginalized people. We have by law made only political equality by ensuring one-man-one -vote but not yet made much effort to ensure social and economic equality by enforcing laws based on constitutional directives. Rather there are unfortunate confusing moves to undermine social inequality by selective over emphasis on economic inequality.

ODISHA STILL DENIES SC/ST/OBC STATUS TO DALIT MUSLIMS

Friday, 25 September 2020

In recent times, the citizenship of the Muslims has been a hot topic for discussion, while many more important socio-economic issues concerning them are swept under the carpet. The issues of participation in employment, business, education, health and access to basic amenities, ownership over land and most importantly, participation in governance of the Muslims are ignored in spite of two major landmark commission reports on Indian minority in post independent India.

The first commission was headed by Justice Rajindara Sachar (2006), former Chief Justice of Delhi High Court and the second was headed by Justice Ranganath Mishra, former Chief Justice of India (2007). Both the reports are an eye-opener to public about the status of religious minorities in India.

Among the religious minorities, the situation of Dalit Muslims is worst as they are prosecuted because of their caste based social identities. They continue to suffer in spite of change in their faith while they are almost disconnected from their social groups by legally losing status of Scheduled Caste. The SC status is not legally religion neutral and has been restricted to Hindu, Sikh (1955) and Buddhists (1990) only till date.

The Dalit Muslims are also socially alienated from the major Dalit population of India commonly identified as Scheduled Caste. After OBC reservation, many of Dalit Muslims are included in OBC category in different States.

Islam is the second largest religion of India. Studies by many such as ISI, New Delhi (2010), Abdur Rahman, Denial and Deprivation, (2019), Dalits in the Muslim and Christian communities, National Commission for Minorities, report by Satish Deshpande and Geetika Bapna, Department of Sociology, University of Delhi (2008), and the various commission reports found that the Muslim society in India is not homogeneous as they are divided into four major social and economic classes under the influence of caste system in India.

In Indian society, the Ashraf, (Sayyads, Sheikhs, Mughals, Pathans) are the land owners, civil and religious leaders. Ajlafs (mostly similar to Hindu Sudras/OBC) are mostly artisans and occupational groups such as Barber, Tailor, and Weaver etc.

The Arzals are the lowest like their Hindu counterparts. The Arzals are the Dalits of the Muslim community. They constitute a separate most deprived group within the Muslim society. Similarly, the untouchables/scheduled castes converted to Christianity are called as Dalit Christians. The change in religion has not contributed much to upgrade their social and economic status in the new religion and even within their own religious fraternity; rather they continue to face the same discriminatory treatment in social life and majority of them are engaged in age old unclean occupations such as scavenging, washing, cleaning etc.

These issues are swept under the carpet. Landlessness is very high among these communities. They are deprived of basic amenities such as homestead land, good housing, drinking water, toilet, electricity and sanitary facilities in their hamlets/Muhallas which are segregated in case of Dalit Muslims.

Usually the Government schemes very seldom reach to these hamlets because of their locations and discriminatory attitude of the governing elites. The condition of elders, women and children in family is very miserable. They cannot enter into any petty business but they are only selectively allowed to do few jobs since generations together.

Very less has been done for their schooling and economic development and also for socialization and secularization. Inter caste /jamaats marriage is rare and often leads to social tension because of social hierarchy among Muslims. The suffering of Dalit Muslims is not addressed properly.

The Kaka Kalelkara Commission of 1955 and Mandal Commission of 1980 have very well recognized the issues of social and educational backwardness among major Muslim groups /castes and recommended including them in OBCs.

The implementation of OBC reservation though is late but placed Muslims as socially and educationally backward classes and also entitled them to avail reservation in education and jobs. The States such as Kerala, Tamilnadu, AP, Telengana and Karnataka, Manipur, Bihar, West Bengal and Uttar Pradesh have made specific percentage of reservation for

Muslims as backward class and most backward class. But in Odisha there is no minority commission and backward caste Muslims are not identified either as OBC or SEBC whereas Dalit Christians are included in the SCBC list in the State.

Reservation in education and employment is necessary to revamp the social and economic status of the downtrodden. It has certainly contributed to change hereditary caste based occupations.

Modern Education exposes to rational thinking, a global outlook and aims at building a world where every individual lives with dignity and self-respect which Jyoti Rao Phule, Dr Ambedkar and Sir Syed Ahamad Khan, Hamid Dalwai always advocated for. In Odisha, minorities constitute 6 per cent of the total population of the State whereas Muslims with 10 lakh population account for 2.5 percent of the population. However, the Muslim communities have been neglected much with denial of OBC or SEBC status. The State Government has not set up any minority commission to look after the issues of minorities including Muslim minorities.

There is no dedicated minority department with Minister from minority groups' heading it. Also there is absence of any minority financial corporation to encourage self-employment among minority youths.

There is no allocation for upgrading of Madrasas for quality education of Muslim children and promotion of Urdu language. But almost all parties have minority cells to satisfy the minority political leaders as party agents.

TIME ODISHA FORMED A STATE MINORITY COMMISSION

Friday, 22 January 2021

Odisha needs a Minority Commission to deal with the problems of minority communities while such commissions are existing in 13 States. However, unfortunately, the State Government has not taken any initiative in this regard.

Though STs, SCs Development, Minority and Backward Class Welfare Department of the Odisha Government deals with the minority affairs but there has been a demand from among the minority communities for such a panel since long.

Public institutions are a part of our constitutional democracy and as citizens, everyone deserves the right to be represented for a cause before the State. The idea of India as envisaged in the Constitution and inclusive development includes participation of all its people with multi-religious faith and identities.

The Union Ministry of Minority Affairs has been created since 2006 headed by a person belonging to any of minority communities. Legally there are six notified minority communities in India namely Muslims, Christians, Buddhists, Sikhs, Parsis/Zoroastrians and Jains those who constitute 19 per cent of the population of our country. As per 2011 Census, minorities constitute 5.05 per cent of the total population of Odisha out of which largest population among minorities are the Christians (2.77 per cent), followed by Muslims (2.17 per cent), Sikhs (0.05 per cent), Jains (0.02 per cent) and Buddhists (0.03 per cent).

Leave apart issues of communal tensions, religion based discrimination and segregation, there have been reports about the under developed socio-economic condition of these communities along with their underrepresentation in various fields includes political, governance, Government jobs, education and business etc which needs to be changed to build a composite living space for people of diverse faith.

The dedicated ministry has planned out budget of Rs 4,700 crore for the year 2019-20 to carry out different schemes and programmes targeting the educational, health, and economic development along with ensuring

employment for the youths. There are a number of schemes and programmes which are not being properly implemented in Odisha due to lack of awareness among members of minority communities and in the absence of an appropriate monitoring body in the State, leading to persistent backwardness in many ways.

One of the major flagship programmes of the Government is Pradhanmantri Jan Viakas Karayakrama (PMJVK) which is being implemented in 109 minority concentrated district headquarters, 870 minority concentrated blocks and 321 minority concentrated towns, based on the population data of the Census 2011, focusing education, health and public infrastructure development for larger public utility of the people of the areas including non-minority population in the locality. The district of Gajapati is identified as a Christian minority concentrated area. There are districts such as Bhadrak, Kendrapada, Baleswar, Cuttack, Jajpur, Khurda, Puri, Kondhamal and Sundargada also having sizeable minority population. Education among minorities as top priority, the Union Ministry has implemented scholarship schemes for the minority students from pre-matric to post-matric level and higher education within the country and abroad.

The pre-matric scholarship ranging from Rs 1,000 to Rs 10,700 and post matric scholarship ranging from Rs 2,300 to Rs 15,000 is being awarded to selected students for ten months.

The merit –cum-means based scholarship scheme is available for selected students with family income slab of Rs 2.50 lakh (annually) to study in 85 reputed institutes for professional and technical courses. The Maulana Azad National Fellowship is available through UGC for students pursuing MPhil and PhD after clearance of NET/CSIR-NET examinations. In order to encourage students and candidates for jobs the scheme called NAYA SAVERA is being implemented to provide free coaching and allied schemes for services since 2007 and it is now restricted to family's income not exceeding Rs 6 lakh per annum.

Added to this, a scheme named NAI UDAAN is implemented for one time support to minority students for clearing prelims conducted by UPSC and other exams conducted by SSC and SPSC. This scheme supports the candidates whose family income is not more than Rs 8 lakh per annum. The rate of assistance is Rs 1 lakh for clearing preliminary exam conducted by UPSC.

PADHO PARDESH is another interest subsidy scheme on educational loans for minority students for overseas studies. The Canara Bank is the nodal bank dealing with this schemes. There are also a host of other targeted schemes for women such as NAI ROSHNI to promote leadership development among minority women and NAI MANZIL scheme for education and livelihood initiative for making employable the school dropouts from BPL families within age group of 17-35 years through education and skill development training. This project is operational in 22 States since 2016 with support from the World Bank.

The State of Odisha has eight such projects being implemented in minority concentrated areas. Along with this under the framework of Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship, the National Skill Development Corporation's SEEKHO AUR KAMAO scheme supports skill development and placement through education and engagement facilitation.

There is also a scheme called USTAD and HUNAR HAAT for promotion of traditional art and craft among minority youths with skill upgrading to making them as master craftsmen, and providing facilities for marketing linkages nationally and internationally. HAMARA DHAROHAR is a scheme to preserve the rich heritage of the minority communities of the country.

The Ministry of Minority Affairs encourages civil society organizations and engaged around 300 such agencies for implementation of various schemes but it is noticed that Odisha has a very negligible participation in this regard.

It is required to encourage minority community based civil society organizations to take up their issues of civil, social and economic development by using the available institutional arrangement and resources with Government and others.

Only State level institutional arrangement with the representation and control of minority communities can change their lot, which will strengthen Odisha's secular ethos, democratic participation and development.

5TH SCHEDULED AREA CONFRONTS VIOLATION OF CONSTITUTIONAL RIGHTS.

October 2, 2020

About one-fourth of population of Odisha is ST and almost half of the geographical area of the State comes under the 5th Scheduled area as provision of the Constitution. Even now, there are Adivasis in the State who are not being enlisted in the ST list of the Government so the correct population of Adivasies is not known. Dr. B R Ambedkar and Jayapal Singh Munda played a major role in the constituent assembly in ensuring provisions of Scheduled Area and scheduled tribe for the protection and development of the tribal communities. There are provisions under Article 224(1) in the Constitution stipulating that the Governors along with the Tribes Advisory Council (TAC) have special power over the administration of 5th scheduled area. There are nine States having 5th Scheduled area which include Odisha, AP, Gujarat, MP, Maharashtra, HP, Rajasthan, Jharkhand and Chhattisgarh. The States such as Tamil Nadu and West Bengal are having TAC without scheduled areas. The Part B of the 5th scheduled says about TAC which consists of not more than 20 members of whom nearly three-fourth shall be the representatives of the Scheduled Tribes in the State legislative Assembly. The TAC has to advise pertaining to the welfare and advancement of the STs of the State. The Governor can make rules in this regard.

The TAC of Odisha shall be constituted for two years with Chief Minister as its Chairman and Minister of ST and SC Development Department as Deputy Chairman. Excluding the Chief Minister and Secretary, all the rest of the members are STs. The Principal Secretary of ST and SC Development Department is the Secretary to the council. It is often alleged by the tribal leaders of scheduled areas that mostly the TACs are controlled and dominated by non-tribal which need to be fully represented by tribal only. There has been no regular meeting of the TAC to discuss issues of concern relating to the life and livelihood of STs in 5th Scheduled area in Odisha. Many of the advices in form of recommendations of TAC have never been looked seriously by the State Government. It is argued that the Governor shall function as per the advice of the TAC in the matter of administration of 5th Scheduled area, not by the Council of Ministers.

Way back in 1948, it was said by Jaypal Singh Munda in a debate in the Constituent Assembly that the STs should be benefited by the provisions of the 5th Schedule area and that the TAC should be a reality and not a farce. Though he was demanding a separate homeland for indigenous people of central India, but later he joined the anti-colonial struggle in building modern India and became member of the Constituent Assembly. He said it is the end of five thousand years of marginalization of indigenous people of India, which dates back to the Indus Valley civilization, with the enforcement of the Constitution. “We are going to start a new chapter of independent India where there is equality of opportunities; where no one would be neglected,” he said. But unfortunately after 70 years of implementation of the Constitution, the TAC remains ineffective in many respects in fulfilling the dreams of the makers of the Constitution of the independent India. There has been a number of protective legal provisions for the protection of STs such as SCs and STs (Prevention of Atrocities) Amendment Act 2015, PESA Act 1996, FRA 2006, CAMPA Act and special allocation of funds under annual plan and sub plans such as Consolidated Fund of India, 275(1), and Tribal Sub Plan and grants of MOA specially dedicated for 5th Scheduled area but no desired changes have taken place due lack of political will on the part of political parties in power. Mostly the elected representatives of 5th Scheduled Areas of the state have not taken this seriously.

It is being very often reported that the available financial resources for tribal development remain unutilized, leave alone lack of transparency and accountability. The recent legal provisions have created scope of financial resources under District Mineral Foundation, CSR and CAMPA as these funds are primarily for mining and forest area which are mostly located in Scheduled Area. It is being reported that Odisha is the second State which returns tribal development funds. The Government of Odisha has been ignoring in amending the State laws in line with provisions of 5th Scheduled area such as Odisha Panchayat Act to give more power to Garamasabha. There has been also demand for inclusion of all MADA, cluster area and tribal villages of the State in the list of Scheduled area. In order to preserve the indigenous identity it is being demanded that all ST dialects should get a place under 8th Schedule and the Adivasi religion such as SARNA and other faith and beliefs must be properly placed in census religion code. The indigenous communities in Odisha bear rich cultural values in the form of their language, music, folk song, painting, weaving,

agriculture, forestry, herbal medicine and community based collective value system. These are the richness of Odisha and the inclusive development of Odisha is not possible by neglecting a major part of its population and geographical area. The 5th Scheduled areas of the State are home to more than 60 per cent of the total tribal population while they are placed in highly resource-rich regions. But socio-economic development indicator of STs shows a very sorry state of affairs. A major section of them continue to lag behind all indicators of human development in comparison to other social groups and still a major chunk of tribal population lives in distress and sub-human sufferings as revealed in Odisha economic survey reports.

The tribal population in scheduled areas is fast declining due to social exclusion, illiteracy, extreme poverty, malnutrition, distress migration, displacement, loss of livelihood and unemployment. The post nineties liberalization and privatization have paved the way of increasingly setting of extractive industry, commercial ventures and dams but failed to create opportunities for STs . Urbanization is coming up with the entry of non-tribal population having a direct bearing on employment and livelihood, land, forest, water and above all, the language, culture, faith and belief system of the people in the locality. It has been posing a potential threat to the legal status of such areas in the coming days. The Adivasi struggle of colonial era witnessed emergence of many struggles for their identity and the most noted protests were by Birsa Munda (1875-1900) who fought for land, dignity and self-determination within his 25 years' span of life. The historic legacies continue to inspire the struggles against similar challenges even today. In recent times the 5th Scheduled areas has increased with unrestricted entry of corporates and non-tribal. Police and para military forces are deployed to counter left Wing extremism, but it is the STs who suffer the most as it is evident from many parts of the state. Though land and forest are central to STs' life and livelihood which have been denied to them by colonial laws and even today by the modern State violating the provisions of the Constitution. The miserable condition depicts serious violation of right to life and development indigenous communities and it is unfortunate that India being a signatory to UN Declaration on Rights of Indigenous People adopted by the UN General Assembly in 2007 is not utterly following the principles of the international convention. The post independent India has followed the Panchasila

principles of Jawaharlal Nehru and ideas of Verrier Elwin but there was no continuity of the principles by the successive Governments.

REVIEW PVTG MICRO PROJECTS' EFFICACY IN ODISHA

Despite years of their implementation, not much development has taken place among primitive tribes of the state.

Friday, 17 September 2021

The makers of modern India wanted to build an inclusive society by minimizing many forms of inequality across social groups and within communities through planned economic development. To address the development of the most vulnerable sections amongst marginalized sections such as STs, the Central Government has implemented a slew of micro projects since 1975 for as many as 75 Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs) out of notified 700 ST communities in the country. The PVTGs are identified on the basis of stagnant/low population growth, low literacy, subsistence level of economic status and dependent on pre-agricultural level for livelihood. A majority of PVTGs are inhabitants of Central India.

The largest number of communities in the country listed as STs and PVTGs are in State of Odisha. There are 62 tribes and among them, 13 are PVTGs which include ChuktiaBhunnjia, Birhor, Bondo, Didayi, DangariaKondha, Juanga, Kharia, KutiaKandha, Langiasaura, Lodha, Mankidia, PaudiBhuyan and Saura. As per a State Government survey their population was about 90,000 in 2015 who were spread over 20 blocks of 12 districts. Though small in number, these PVTGs are with distinct culture, language and belief system but have been on the edge with low literacy, economic backwardness, isolation and distress condition.

There are as many as 17 micro projects started for the PVTGs between 1976 and 1995 and these schemes are still continuing with involvement of the Central and State Government, corporates, NGOs and international donors such as IFAD. The State Government has taken a loan of Rs 312 from IFAD for its Rs 800 crore project for PVTGs empowerment and livelihood improvement. Recently, during the Covid pandemic the Government of Odisha has supported the PVTG households with special Covid assistance, ration kit and Labour assistance. There are a host of activities for education and economic development going on for a long

time by the State department with support of the Union Ministry of Tribal Affairs (MoTA). There is a National Council for Tribal Welfare headed by the Prime Minister where the Chief Ministers having of 5th and 6th Scheduled areas in their States are members.

The Tribal Sub Plan has been implemented for last 40 years aiming to bridge gaps between the tribal and rest of the social groups. It is to bring larger socio-economic equality and building an egalitarian society but certainly not to appease the tribal community. They deserve all rights as fellow citizens and dignity as human beings.

The resources for tribal development comes from a host of sources which include special Central assistance to TSP, Articles 275(1), TSP component of the State and Central Governments ministries, institutional finance, CSR fund from corporate bodies, UNO, international agencies, District Mineral Foundation fund, OMBADC and CAMPA fund etc.

There are also a number of NGOs, religious bodies, private trusts and educational institutions engaged in tribal development for a long time. As per sources, the MoTA supports 200 NGOs with 300 projects. There are 38 Ministries and departments of the Central Government having Tribal Sub Plan components. The grant to the States under Article 275(1) of the Constitution of India is 100 per cent to States on the basis of the ST population of the State to the total tribal population of the country.

The micro projects in Odisha have almost completed about 30 years of its operation and no one knows how long they will go further, but in spite of spending a huge among why the socio-economic indicators such as women literacy, child mortality rate, infant mortality rate, women with anemia, children with sickle cell anemia, student dropout rate etc. do not improve is a moot question. The PVTGs are still below than other STs of the State and far below the State and national average and much below other social groups in all these indicators.

A majority of them have no basic amenities for life such as habitat rights, house, drinking water, sanitary facilities and linking road to their hamlets. The vulnerable condition of PVTGs in Odisha has attracted national attention on the issues of their extreme economic backwardness, malnutrition, diseases, hunger death, child Labour, displacement due to mining and distress migration. There have been no sign of improvement

in the standard of living and quality of life of these groups in spite of special projects and micro projects.

There may be examples of very insignificant success of a few individuals or households from among them but the socio-economic and educational status of the communities as a whole has not changed much at par with other social groups.

The approach of ongoing project model and cluster method must be relooked. In the changing condition slowly many of them are migrating from their homeland to outside in search of livelihood and mostly they get engaged in odd jobs, low paid works and join in slums as scavengers and housemaids in the cities.

Unfortunately for a long time, they are being exhibited as museum materials in most vulgar and undignified manner in the State sponsored Adivasi exhibitions and Meals, wall paintings in the cities and decorated as statues in traffic islands. Is it decent to show human beings--men, women and children--in such a fashion before others? How such exhibitions are going to help in building a positive image of such communities in public needs pondering.

They struggle to cope with external changing conditions which are quite challenging for them. The fact is mostly non-tribal actors play a major role in the development of PVTGs of the State. The over domination of non-tribal persistently continue in all spheres. The organic leadership of STs are not being encouraged much in a governance role for the execution of these projects which need to be emphasized.

ODISHA'S BACKWARDNESS LIES WITH MISTREATED FEDERALISM.

Let minerals- bearing States be not subordinate to Centre

Friday, 14 May 202

Odisha may have natural resources such as mineral, forest, water, and sea coast but the State has very limited power to use the resources without the approval of the Central Government. Independent India's Parliament has passed legislations, limiting the power to the States in managing the natural resources available within its geographical boundary. All the resources are being treated as national wealth denying the ownership of the State over these resources. For example, the Mines and Minerals Development and Regulation (MMDR) Act 1957 and its amendments in 2012 and 2015. The regulation of mines and minerals and their development are under the control of the Union, declared by the Parliament by law.

The rights of mineral bearing States such as Odisha over major minerals have been ignored in matter of allotment and auction of lease and decision over royalty rate. Why mineral bearing States have only to be content with royalty which is a minuscule percentage of the value of the minerals and nothing else? The share of Odisha in terms of value of major minerals production is highest in the country. The State caters to major public and private sectors' domestic and export demands.

The State has large deposits of many major minerals including some of the strategic minerals such as bauxite, chrome, uranium, coal and iron ore. The lease holders are mostly non-Odias and having corporate offices outside Odisha who unfortunately don't show any concern in Odisha's development.

The Central Government owned public sectors such as SAIL, MCL, NALCO, NTPC and HRE have larger shares over mining operation.

The liberalisation has paved the way for denationalization, privatization with FDI and centralization of decisions in mineral lease by encouraging global auctions, longer lease period and change in mineral control laws. Now more power is vested with the Center and role of States has been squeezed. The minerals and metallurgical products of Odisha are being

exported to China, Japan, Malaysia, South Korea, Taiwan, Vietnam, USA, Russia, Canada, Iran, UK, Germany, Singapore, Spain, Australia, and UAE etc. mostly from the Paradip Port. The change of international market prices has no immediate effect over the fixed royalty rate in the absence of regular revisions by the Center.

The people of Odisha, especially the inhabitants of mineral bearing areas, are impacted badly by mining activities. There is pollution and other related problems. The areas rich in mineral deposits are ironically the poorest regions in the country with miserable quality of life led by the people without basic minimum amenities, not even safe drinking water. Last 50 years of mining activities have not brought any tangible improvements in the life of the locals like the Adivasis, STs and SCs. The communication infrastructure built by the Center out of public finance is more targeted for mineral transportation to serve the business of companies rather than the common public's utility.

There is little attempt by the Centre or the extractive industries of both public and private sectors to build good hospitals, educational institutions and improved public transport systems.

The railway link, highway, express highway, major seaports in the Odisha are under the control of the Central Government and are meant to serve the interest of mining companies more than the native people.

The programmes and schemes of mining area development such as PMKKKY of DMF have been taken over by the Centre. The finance, control and monitoring are in the hands of the Centre where the State is supposed to be a mere implementing agency.

The very policy has reduced the power of the State over control of the royalty fund available with the State. Even the State has no power to spend its own non-tax revenue. Minerals are an important natural resource and must be under the control of the State.

The mineral bearing States must have power to lease or decide to whom they want to lease out the mines for their maximum utilization and profit. It will give more power to the State to use its own resources and prioritize its development without depending on the Centre for decisions, permissions and financial resources.

There must be resource federalism by allowing the States to manage and control their resources without interference by the Centre; otherwise in the name of federalism the monopoly of Union will create more regional imbalances among the States and within the States. It is time to take up such issues in Parliament by the States like Odisha, Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh and WB.

The existing laws relating to minerals must be changed to suit the interest of the people of the State. The political trend shows that India has already entered into an era of coalition politics and the rise of the regional parties.

The recent Assembly election results show the repetition of the people's mandate in favor of regional parties and a trend towards empowerment of the States.

The reasons behind such moves are many. The most visible actions of the Centre in recent past such as the abrogation of Article 370 and Statehood of the Jammu and Kashmir, sharing of GST, role of appointed Governors in State affairs, interference in subjects under State List, misusing national institutions against the State Government and arbitrary allocation of financial resources to the States have exhibited a clear indication towards more centralisation of power and subjugation of States as subordinate rather than equal partners in the

national development. The national ruling parties, whoever in power at the Centre, have misused their authority and positions during election campaigns against regional parties. This has been largely unacceptable in a federal character of governance.

Article 1 of the Constitution says, "India, that is Bharat, shall be a union of States." So, it is desirable that the Centre must convert itself to a federation of States and ensure financial, administrative and more importantly, political autonomy of the States by amending the Central laws.

COOPERATIVE FEDERALISM CAN ENSURE BACKWARD STATES' DEVELOPMENT

Friday, 18 March 2022

The idea of building a strong India depends on development of all its States but growing inequality and imbalance in development of States and regions have raised many relevant questions over our cooperative federalism which has been in practice for last seven decades. In recent times, the rankings of States based on various socio-economic statuses are being routinely exhibited by the Central Government but that does not culminate with any kind of special assistance to the backward ones who are in the bottom of the ranks. The sharing of resources by the Centre is not based on backwardness of States.

Odisha which has been demanding a special category status for a long time has failed to get any extra Central assistance to address its economic backwardness. Not just Odisha but all the major mineral bearing States of India remain backward regions though they have been largely contributing to strengthen the national economy in many ways. These issues are not being raised and discussed in proper forums such as Parliament and Assemblies.

Historically, with huge diversities and differences, the formation of India emerged out of anti-feudal and anti-British struggle, whose motto was political unification and national unity. It was much challenging those days. The merger of feudatory States and tribal areas into one political entity and formation of States in a democratic process under constitutional governance have created new aspirations among common people but after many decades of the formation of modern States, the basic needs of people still have not been fulfilled. People are still struggling to access some of their basic needs such as food, shelter, health, education etc.

Ideally the national development and economic growth must be inclusive of its entire people. But it is being experienced that the resource rich eastern region of India still remains backward in many respects in comparison to other parts of the country.

Currently, many large and developed countries such as USA, Russia, and Brazil are in practice of federalism as it best suits to the decentralization of

power while keeping the unity of the country intact. With the march of democracy towards more power to people, India as an emerging world economy and the largest democracy of the world must adopt and follow the best practices of federalism around the domain.

In post independent India, the old urban areas and business hubs have further developed into vibrant cities, mostly with support of the Central Government to build communication infrastructure such as national highway, port, airport, railway line, educational and health institutions. The same way backward States and regions are not supported for their basic communication infrastructure development. Even today the situation has not changed much as the backward States have to stand before the Centre with begging bowl for assistance.

It is being observed that the national political leadership of the Centre mostly comes from bigger States having industries and urban centers and more representatives in Parliament. The relatively small States with less political influence are usually neglected in decision making process of the Centre, particularly in case of allocation of financial resources. It is being told that the Central institutions and authorities are being misused against States having different political affiliations or not falling in line with the ruling national parties.

The regional parties have no alliance in Parliament. They are some way or the other attached to national alliances headed by national parties. There have been continued political, constitutional and administrative issues that emerged out of experience of last 72 years of practice of federalism. Considering our huge diversity, unequal development, the States must have full freedom to decide over the matter of economic affairs, especially for utilization of their resources and management.

The mineral bearing States must have power to take decisions for the best use of their available resources. They must have power to enter into negotiations of business with stakeholders of global mineral market within and outside, including imposition of tax and royalties. It is being suggested that in a most ideal form of cooperative federalism, the States must have more power. Everything must not be confined to Delhi or State capital, rather decision making must be decentralized.

Especially in the matter of human development, food security, social security, basic amenities, education, health, agriculture, industry,

communication, connectivity and local governance etc, the States and local bodies should enjoy full autonomy. The States must have power to collect all kinds of revenue from their respective territory and contribute a small portion to the Centre for its functions.

LET ODISHA VIGOROUSLY PURSUE A POLICY FOR BACKWARD REGIONS

Friday, 21 May 2021

The post-independent economic development process in Odisha has not generated much employment for all sections of people across the State as evident from the growing distress migration.

The economic policies has contributed to widening the rich –poor gap across social groups as well as increasing the regional disparities. The unorganized sector labourers, small and marginal farmers, sharecroppers and petty traders are in the bottomline. It is evident from the statistics of the Government that many of the middle age socio-economic issues such as child labour, bonded labour, distress seasonal migration, trafficking, illiteracy, untouchability, social discrimination, malnutrition and extreme poverty are still prevalent in the State in spite of rule of a regional party for five times consecutively. These problems are the consequences of the economic policies of the successive Governments ruled for the last seventy years.

Justice S K Mohanty Commission's report on regional imbalance submitted to the Government in 2008 identified south-west districts such as Malkangiri, Nuapada, Gajapati, Ganjam, Kalahandi, Kondhamal and northern districts like Mayurbhanj, Sundargarh and Keonjhar as most underdeveloped. This region is home to a majority of the total poor of the State but it is contributing more to the State treasury in terms of SGDP.

It has been observed that there is serious disparity in development of different regions and social groups in the State. The south-west and northern part of Odisha remain backward in many aspects of human and social development as well as in terms of educational, health, and communication infrastructure.

The most serious concern is lack of basic amenities like safe drinking water, electricity and connectivity. The lop-sided development has a serious impact on the economic growth of the State and very negatively encourages separatist tendencies, violence and extremism out of a sense of alienation and underdevelopment.

It is affecting production, social peace and quality of life. The charity, subsidy and welfare programme such as Re 1 per kg rice and few paltry schemes remain a dominant discourse in political mobilization of the poor people of the State.

Corporate private investment in mining and industry is being projected as State economic development and the role of State investment in economic development remains minimal. The development model of the Centre, schemes and programmes are being replicated by the State without any local innovation and considering the local context and relevance and a regional economic development prospective.

The costal districts remain always prone to natural calamities and every year people routinely suffer with losses and damages. It becomes the responsibility of the State to intervene in emergency through humanitarian relief.

This has been a regular State expense without a permanent solution to such tragedies. There is no plan by the State except relief to the affected people hit by flood, drought, cyclone and disaster. The biggest work done by the Government is the rescue operation and humanitarian aid. For the last seventy years, there has been nothing beyond relief.

As removal of regional disparity in development is one of the important agendas of the State which has been reflected in implementation of programmes like Biju KBK Plan, Biju Kandhamal O Gajapati plan, Gopabandhu Gramina Yojana, Western Odisha Development Council, Backward Regions Grant Fund, but these programmes have not yet created any substantial impact in removing regional disparity with low budget and lethargic bureaucracy. As a consequence, the backward regions of Odisha witness lack of local employment generation and low wage which encourages distress migration.

There are areas which still remain inaccessible and are branded as backward. Even there are districts without railway line and with zero industry. The long pending demands for Khurda –Balangir railway line and High Court bench in western part of Odisha still remain unresolved in spite of continuous uproar.

Odisha was formed as a linguistic province consisting of six districts such as Sambalpur, Koraput, Ganjam, Puri, Cuttack and Baleswar in 1936 and later in 1950 the others were merged. Broadly the whole area can be

divided into three parts as areas under direct British rule, feudatory States and tribal areas which are different from the other two. So for historical and geographical reasons, the regional socio-political and socio-economic issues are different and there was absence of comprehensive administrative and legal mechanism to plan for the whole State till 1950.

The community development block concept was introduced in the early sixties but there have been serious limitations in the formation of blocks as development units without considering the purpose of such formations.

The budgetary allocation should consider the income of the district or a particular region. The regions contributing to State treasury in terms of natural resources, minerals, forest produce, and marine product ought to get preferential treatment. It is unfortunate that the people in coal, hydropower and thermal power plant area are not getting adequate electricity. It is found that the areas coming up with industrialization and urbanizations are being captured by the dominant educated social groups by displacing the poor, illiterate and marginalized social groups to the periphery and depriving them of job, business and other economic opportunities created in the area. Budgetary provision should strictly follow SCSP and TSP in spending to reach to the most backward social groups.

The State should invest to change the basic economic structure through its radical economic policy in favour of backward region through progressive land reform, universal quality English medium education, universal healthcare, irrigation, electricity, rural industrialization, NTFP and agriculture based activities, financial inclusion and tourism which always take a backseat in spite of many natural advantages.

Industrialization in the State is not integrating all regions. The State should have own power plant and attempt should be made to decentralize energy production for its domestic consumption. Solar, wind, wave and other forms of energy sources must be explored to minimize pollution and displacement.

Odisha being a land of diversity and diverse ethnic groups, the issues of different social groups need to be integrated into the State plan for an inclusive development. Regional economics and planning should be encouraged as a subject in colleges with State specific subjects like mineral economics, forest economics and marine economics.

The Government should generate adequate disaggregated socio-economic data and impact assessment reports which should be made available to policy makers, researchers, development planners and administrators.

The institute like NCDS and universities must collectively take a lead in the process in building a prospective of economic development involving political parties, CSOs and academics of the State to mitigate regional imbalances and persistent disparity in development.

LAWS NEEDED TO SAVE OPERA WORKERS OF ODISHA

Friday, 09 September 2022

Opera and theater parties in Odisha are one of the most popular means of public entertainment. In spite of the growth of the film and television industry, the opera industry has successfully pulled the crowd in an increasing trend. As per informal sources, currently there are about 30 big parties and around 60-70 small parties having an annual turnover of around Rs 300 crore operating in the State.

The industry has provided employment to about 10,000 people of different categories that include drama artists, musicians, singers, choreographers, dancers, custom designers and related logistic workers engaged in different kinds of operations. It is said that the opera industry is bigger than the Odia film industry.

The socio-economic and professional issues of this sector must be addressed by the concerned department of the Government in order to bring qualitative and professional development. It has been very often reported about the precarious plight of the people engaged in the sector and the incidents of human rights violation against the vulnerable sections such as women, children and socially deprived sections working in the opera in different roles and responsibilities. A major section of the workers are from poor economic backgrounds, socially and educationally backward sections of our society and their involvement in opera is more driven by livelihood compulsions.

The workers engaged in the opera industry have been suffering in many ways in the absence of any kind of regulations over their employment conditions and social security's while mostly they work as casual and contract workers . They have to travel from place to place for stage shows in Lorries and other means of transport which are legally not permissible as passenger vehicles. There are reports of road accidents that have taken the lives of many innocent people working in opera parties.

Most recently, a couple from Jagatsinghpur district belonging to scheduled caste (SC) communities made a complaint before the Birmaharajpur police in Subarnapur district that they have been discriminated against on caste

ground by the manager and senior manager of the opera party where they both have been playing as dancers for last two years. The issue has been propagated in social media and web channels with demand for strong action against the culprits as per law. It is most unfortunate that the opera party owners are most insensitive to such issues that violate someone's dignity as a human being. It is a fact that there are a good number of artists, dancers and others working in opera parties belonging to SC communities and a sizable number are women and children with different roles and responsibilities. Opera parties are not just entertaining but in many plays they have also propagated social change messages through but the industry itself have not changed its social responsibility by adopting non discriminatory policies and practices against people of low caste and women.

Baishnaba Pani (1882-1956) of Mahanga in Cuttack district who was a writer and pioneer in folk song theater movement was ostracized by family members and upper caste people because of his marriage with a woman belonging to washer man community. But he fought against caste discrimination and untouchability in social life as an artist. There are also very often complaints by women and adolescent girls about many forms of mental and physical harassments and exploitations without a proper mechanism to address the issues of violence against women at workplace. It is equally important to make our public places and place of public employment totally free from any kind of discrimination based on caste and gender and steps must be taken to stop the exploitation in any establishment.

The most shocking part is engaging child labour in opera parties though there have been complaints against the trend. A number of unwanted stories are being featured in media in spite of presence of strong laws against such exploitation of women and children and to protect the human rights of the vulnerable section. But unfortunately, the application of protective laws is very minimal in reality because there is lack of unionization of such workers in the industry and the opera owners always very well manage the situation with support of police and others. Children working in opera are being deprived of education and family care, while they have to travel from place to place for stage shows but these very serious issues remain unaddressed by our child and human rights protection bodies. There has been no legal or administrative intervention to regulate such inhuman cases.

During the Covid -19, the vulnerability of the opera artists and others was discussed because of lack of employment and social security. The State Government has not done any proper survey to make a list of people engaged in the opera industry for their welfare and development. There have been regular complaints against the opera party owners who are making a huge profit out of the regular shows of more than 300 days a year and even sometimes the shows are staged twice over a night but the artists and other related workers are not being paid properly.

The usual complaints against use of vulgar and double meaning words in stage shows are largely rejected by opera loving people but there is no denying that some parties take resort in them for gaining cheap popularity. It is the script writers and directors who must ensure to deliver the most decent, qualitative, socially educative entertainment to build a healthier and inclusive human society which will enhance social respect for the opera artists in public. The Government must bring legislations or executive orders to regulate the opera industry in the interest of the people working there in a most vulnerable condition without social protection mechanisms. There must be an institutional effort for skill up gradation of all types of artists along with improving professional career and social security of the workers.

DISTRESS PLIGHT OF MILK PRODUCERS.

Compensation to traditional milk farmers demanded.

During this COVID-19 pandemic one of the worst among sufferers are about 11 Lakh milk producer families of Odisha who have been facing with crisis of milk sale since March 2020 and continued uncertainty. Even in normal time also, dairy sector in the state have been struggling with the crisis of distress sale with continued problem in supply side arrangement in spite of demand for animal protein by vegetarian population in emerging urban areas. This ongoing pandemic has been an additional burden over continued crisis of small milk producers in rural areas. About 75 percent of these producers are family based traditional milk farmers for generations having small size dairy farm . They are mostly having marginal land holding while solely dependent on production and marketing of milk and milk products as main sources of livelihood. Though these families are being identified as one of the major socially and educationally backward classes of the state to get benefits of reservation but they have not much representation in higher education, organized sector jobs, business ,trade ,services and other areas of socio-political and socio-economic activities. This has been increasingly difficult for them to maintain the cattle population with increasing price of animal feeds, sinking space of grazing land, and other related regular expenses. The continuous outbreak of natural calamities, cyclone, FANI, have been damaged cattle sheds in many places of the coastal areas. Very shocking reports are being appeared in vernacular media on their distress plight and in few places such farmers have closed their dairy farm to avoid further difficulties in the absence of compensatory help either by Govt. or private marketing companies and state owned cooperatives.

It is reported that India being self –sufficient in milk production with large presence of small producers, about 46 percent of the milk produced is being mostly consumed by producer and rest is being sold out to organized and unorganized market. But this consumption ratio by producer in state of Odisha is lower and the ratio of sale in unorganized market is higher and dependable in the absence of Govt. owned institutions and milk producer cooperatives and large private companies. Out of more than 60 lakh liters produced per day only 1/6th of the production are being

procured by the organized sector companies in the state that includes both Govt. and private. Along with OMFED there are number of private companies such as milk-moo, Sudha dairy, Heritage dairy, Pragati ,Milk Mantra, and Odisha dairy and more than 50 no of companies dealing with dairy products in different parts of the state are in the business but these organized sector have very less market share though this sector has paid a relatively better price than unorganized sector and also having limited risk of adulteration where as a major chunk of the milk sale has been in unorganized sector open market which involves the local producers mostly traditional milkman. The marketing of both the sectors have been seriously affected due to COVID-19 lockdown and shut down and the close down of market areas ,street sale , specially tea stalls ,hotels , and eateries serving sweets and other milk products such as cheese, curd, white butter. Along with this these are also thousands of homemade business which are almost closed.

In the liberalization phase already there has been an attempt of rapid privatization of agriculture marketing and especially in the dairy sector the multinational companies such as Nestle, Lactalis, Donone, and Fonterra dairy have entered the market which will change the dairy market of India and impacting over the small producers. On the other side the Govt. has been encouraging small producers with subsidized loan for establishment of small dairy, vermin compost with cattle unit, to purchase milking machine , dairy processing equipment , dairy product transportation facilities , cold storage facility for milk and milk products , and establishing private veterinary clinic and dairy marketing outlets and parlors. Many states such as Gujarat and Maharashtra have strong cooperative movement of the dairy sector and backward states such as Odisha have been lag behind in many respect without any sign of improvement.

In the ongoing situation considering the ground reality of dairy farmers ,it is being argued that any attempt to improve the economic condition of the milk farmers will increase the income and generate meaningful productive employment in rural areas . Though Odisha has one of the lowest milk price in comparison to other states, the state Govt. has not taken much initiative to improve the condition of milk farmers similar to the steps taken by other states such as Gujarat, Maharashtra, UP and Bihar in terms of increasing the production, better marketing facilities and social securities for people engaged in production along with a fair price for milk.

These states have also developed processing units to convert milk into milk powder and butter to manage the surplus milk but such facilities are not available in Odisha. Even many of advisory issues by Department of animal husbandry, Govt of India are not being followed by the state to increase the sale of milk by encouraging procurement for Govt. run schemes and programme as protection to milk farmers as well as to improve the quality of diets served to women and children of poor communities. It has been directed to states to include milk in the Anganwadi and Mid-day meal schemes in schools and also in public distribution system to boost the nutritional needs of the poor children and women in rural areas as Odisha continues with malnutrition issues of women and children and other rural poor. The state Govt. of Bihar and Rajasthan has issues order to supply milk powder in Agwanwadi centers under ICDS. Department of commerce has provided incentive of 10 percent over export of all milk and milk products and the Govt. of Gujarat and Maharashtra also have introduced subside over skim milk powder while no such initiative have not been taken by Govt. of Odisha . Rabi Behera, Chairman, Odisha Milk Farmers Association, one of the leading voice of milk framers of the state, who have been struggling with street protest with emptied milk containers on road and arranged delegations to concern departments on number of accusations, told that there has been no increase in milk price during last five years and it has only very marginally increased last year which is also very less, and while other farmers are enjoying MSP but the milk farmers have been not being treated as farmers to avail similar benefits. In order to overcome the ongoing crisis the state Govt. must declared compensation to all milk producers along with supply of subsidize cattle feed and make arrangements for regular sale of milk produce by the distress milk producer families. It is also desirable that the organized sector must increase its procurement specially the state cooperative like its counterpart in Maharashtra and Gujarat by following COVID-19 guide line from supply chain to consumer end, milk collection process to home delivery, with all sanitary measures required under the guideline, to change the distress condition of the milk farmers.

ISSUES OF BETEL VINE FARMERS IN COASTAL ODISHA DURING COVID-19

July 2020

Thousands of small Betel farmers in coastal Odisha have been constantly facing the brunt of frequent natural calamities that damaged their betel vine but while they are not getting adequate and timely compensation against their loss again this pandemic COVID-19 has added more misery to their suffering with problem of sale of their crop in local market as well as for trade to outside due to lockdown. These farmer also have been struggling with persistence issues of lack of institutional support under agriculture sector such as input subsidy , credit , MSP and host of other facilities available for other crops.

Mr. Rabindra Bhoi and Santosh Bhoi both are from village Raghuagarada in Balipatana block of Khurda district are small Betel farmers. They manage their livelihood by Betel vine cultivation have been continuously facing loss due to frequent visits of cyclone, Philine, Titili, Fani and Amphan, erratic rain and tornado. This time the lockdown and shut down has almost damaged their livelihood in the absence of adequate and timely Govt. support to compensate their frequent loss. Both Dalit small farmers have no other means of livelihood to face the ongoing crisis. Similar issues also found in case of Tuku Behera and Basant Behera both are Betel farmers of the same panchayat. This is the story of Hundreds of such small Dalit farmers and share croppers in costal districts those have similar distress stories to tell. Unfortunately the state Govt. has not been serious to their issues and the timely need of many such small farmers who survives on meagre cultivation.

Akshya Das, a betel farmer and farmer leaders of Denkia in Jagatsighpur district told that about 7000 Betel farmers of Erasama block are not being compensated in spite of their loss and for last five months their condition is worst due to lockdown. A large chunk of these farmers are Dalit and daily wage earners in Betel gardens and many of the betel gardens are in common land not being recorded in the name of the farmers though they have been in possession since generations . In spite of Long time protest by peasants here there has been lack of survey and settlement to ensure land for land less Dalit in these areas. They have been sending Betel leaf

to Mumbai and Kalkota by trains with special arrangement which has done by initiative of Late Loknath Choudhury the then MP from CPI who made a request to Govt. of India for allocating special compartment to export Betel to Mumbai. But unfortunately these days' leaders are not much interested on issues of Betel farmer and their future. Hundreds of betel farmer were displaced and lost their livelihood for land accusation by Govt. in the name of industries in Jagatsingpur district and this process is being continuing further without any industry. Rather the traditional livelihood of people have been minimized which creates huge unemployment in the area in the absence of alternative employment.

Sanjit Swain, a Betel framers organizer, Nuahata market in Kakatpur block of Puri district told that about 10000 Betel farmer in the block are silently suffering without any help from the Govt. He also told that last time the meagre amount of compensation against heavy loss due to cyclone was not through proper survey by officials rather selectively chosen in favor of ruling party supporters. These days due to pandemic the farmer have started destroying their crop and under tremendous pressure by the money lenders for repayment of loan with higher interest they have taken for restoration of the damaged farm in the absence of institutional financial support and farmer cooperatives. Finance has been a major issue in Betel cultivation which needs investment in the initial stage to setup the farm and for its care and maintenance such as building shed and to ensure continues water supply to check soil moisture.

The harvesting period of Betel is within two weeks and after harvesting it has to be sell immediately otherwise it will perish soon due to lack of storage facilities. The intermediary businessman and exporter are getting better price than the farmer in the absence of better storage and transport facilities though there is a good demand for export outside the local market within India and in South Asia. Betel cultivation is most eco-friendly ,low cost and Labour intensive having good return in terms of profit which has been quite helpful for small holding farmers with 0.25 acre of land. There are about 100 verities of betel vine are available in the world out of which half of the verities are found mostly in west Bengal and Odisha both in closed and open cultivation method. Odisha produces one of the finer quality of betel leaf in color and size.

The Betel vine cultivation is link to the economy of costal Odisha. All costal districts includes Puri, Khurda, Kendrapada, Jagatsinghpur, Jajpur,

Cuttack, Ganjam, Baleswar and Bhadrak having Betel vine cultivation which has been a source of income and employment for thousands of families as cultivators and equal number especially skilled workers of betel farm. The Laborer get a higher wage because of their skill in comparison to other agricultural workers of the area. The Betel business also include people engage in trade and Betel shops in lakhs almost all over the state in every nook and corner. So it has wider link with self-employment and income of small producers and traders. Some of the Betel cultivators are also share croppers or lease holders and they have to pay the rent to the land owner . It is also being observed that many of the Betel farmers having farm over Govt. land and that land has not been recorded in their name as a result of which both share croppers and local traditional right land owners are being deprived of getting compensation over their repeated loss due to natural calamities.

The coastal areas of Odisha have been remain backward without much industrialization and urbanization and lack of communication links due to rivers and their number of small tributaries flows to the sea . Water logging and irrigation has been continued as a major issue relating to agriculture in coastal areas. Mostly the costal farmer are dependent on paddy, Betel and fish cultivation added to seasonal vegetable cultivationbut still Betel continue as major cash crop. The state Govt. must aid to the betel farmer in restoration of shades of their Betel farm and take steps for resolving the marketing issues during COVID-19.

PROTECTION TO SHARECROPPERS BY LEGISLATION AND CREDIT SCHEME.

Odisha Agricultural Land Leasing Act and BALARAM scheme

July 31, 2020

The issues of share croppers remain unaddressed for a long time in spite of demand by many concerned on several grounds. Recently the Govt. of Odisha has taken two major steps to change the informal status of the share croppers of the state by drafting Odisha agricultural Land leasing Act, to be passed by the state assembly, and it has also declared a credit scheme of Rs1040 crores named as Bhoomihina Agriculturist Loan and Resource Augmentation Model (BALARAM) for them.

By these two initiatives by Govt. aims to bring change in the crisis ridden agrarian sector of the state as it will directly contribute to the lot of real farmers who have been engaged in cultivation but they are being deprived of getting benefits for the farmers provided by state for a long time. These share croppers are mostly land less or having very marginal holding and small producers those have no access to scope of formal credit, input subsidy, benefit of MSP and compensation for crop loss and host of many other facilities already availed by land owning farmers. The Agriculture census 2015-16 estimated that out of total 48 lakhs holding in the state nearer to one-fifth of the operational holding are being cultivated by share croppers who are mostly small and marginal farmers. This available data will be used by Krushak Sathi and VAWs in identifying beneficiaries of the schemes of Govt. with involvement of institutions such as NABARD, ATMA and IMAGE as facilitating agencies.

This BALARAM scheme, conceived during COVID-19 with many ongoing distress conditions in rural agrarian sector, is going to be implemented by department of agriculture and farmers' empowerment as part of the new agriculture policy of the Govt., SAMRUDHI-2020. As per the scheme it will extend credit facility of Rs1.60 Lakh per group by banks and primary agricultural cooperative societies through joint liability groups of minimum five farmer. It has to follow all the RBI norms including CIBIL (credit information Bureau of India Ltd) score and other banking regulations. It hopes that it will improve access to scope of formal credit

and limit the role of traditional village money leaders as well as distress sell during harvesting period. It is also expected that the migrant labourers returned to villages may be rehabilitated through this process through productive employment in agriculture. The whole process depend on the willingness of banks and their outreach in rural areas as well as access of land less illiterate farmer to financial inclusion.

The most important part of the Govt. initiative is to ensure the legal recognition of share croppers and their identification while to remove the fear of land owners over ownership of land in executing a legal deal with share croppers by enactment of law called Odisha Agriculture land leasing Act. Already many states such as TN and AP have already overcome this said difficulties to ensure protection for share croppers of their state without such law. However though late the decision of the Govt. of Odisha will be helpful to the real farmer but it depends on ground reality.

This agricultural land leasing act in its draft has included agriculture and allied activities which has cover a wide range of actions relating to agriculture, horticulture, plantation,diary, poultry, fishery, agro forestry and agro –processing, to be done individually and in group. The lease is a written contract between the land owner and share cropper for periodic cultivation of land. The proposed act has restrictions for scheduled areas of the state to protect the tribal land owners . It is said that agriculture land of a scheduled tribe owner for lease shall be permitted only to another scheduled tribe farmer and other non STs land owner in scheduled areas have no bar over their lease. The total amount of lease area is restricted to ceiling area as per OLR Act. The lease agreement covers the details of the land owner and lessee cultivator, survey number, boundaries, location and area of lease, duration and other terms and conditions including provisions of termination and list of agricultural activities. The lease agreement has to be attested local RI, Sarapanch, Local bank officer or Notary with two witness. The oral lease can be discussed in Gramsabha before approval of the officials. It is clearly mentioned that lease do not approve any right over Land to the lessee cultivator except for the purpose of periodic cultivation. Any dispute that arise out of enforcement of lease will be settled amicably and it can be taken up with Tahasildar, Collector and finally by a special land tribunal headed by a retired high court or district court judge and it is said that no civil court will have jurisdiction over dispute under this act.

It is told in the act that Govt. will create awareness to facilitate this act and motivate both non-cultivate land owners and landless cultivators while facilitate services available locally by banks, insurance, relief and marketing to avoid the duplication of Govt. benefits. The act has protected the Govt. officials if there will be any mistake done in execution of the act in good faith.

It is expected that through this deed the share cropper will be eligible to avail loan from the banks and cooperative societies or any other Govt. financial institutions. The expected value of crop from the land may be used as collateral security against the loan. During the lease period, the share cropper will be eligible for crop insurance, compensation against loss and damage due to natural calamities and other forms of attack over crop, and sale of crop at MSP in the designated sales points along with any other benefits declared by Govt. from time to time available for land owning farmer.

However with all good intention, in the present socio-political condition with level of legal awareness of the masses, the complications in the act may not be simply convincing to land owners who may not be easily agreeing to execute any formal paper work with Govt. officials to enter into any kind of risk as land owner. It seems the proposed act will make the relationship among land owner and share cropper too much complicated rather than serving the purpose. So it is suggested that to make the process simpler to identify the share cropper and their need. The Govt. may identify the share croppers by help of ward member, Sarapanch, VAW, RI or any local persons and help them in getting access to basic inputs subsidy such as seed, pesticide, fertilizer and compensation for loss as well as access to sale of crops at MSP and other such special benefits targeted only for share croppers.

ELEPHANT MENACE: PLIGHT OF LOCAL COMMUNITIES

Friday, 30 December 2022

Wildlife is part of the forest ecosystem that needs conservation with coexistence. But there has been a growing threat to the ecosystem with an increase in the death of wildlife population as the case of elephants in Odisha. Elephant is the largest land animal of the world and the World Elephant Day is celebrated on August 12. It has been reported by the MoEFCC that more than 100 elephants have died each year since 2010. Odisha has recorded the highest unnatural death in the country followed by Karnataka and Assam. The State also had the highest number of human casualties in elephant attacks during the last three years. As many as 1,578 people died in elephant attacks in India between 2019-20 and 2021-22 of which highest 322 were reported from Odisha. The last census of 2017 estimated the elephant population of the State was close to 2,000 which is about 7 percent of the country's elephant population of mostly Asiatic. During the last two years from 2019 to 2021-22 at least 245 elephants died in Odisha. The major cause of death includes diseases of anthrax and herpes, poisoning, accidents in contact with live wire, railway tracks, roads and poaching. The death of human and animal causality is a growing threat to man-animal coexistence. The five elephant reserves and corridors formed in Odisha are in Mayurbhanj, Mahanadi, Sambalpur, Baitarani and South Odisha which covers major parts of forest and wildlife divisions of the State. The forest and wildlife areas are also home to human habitations where the marginalised sections constitute a majority and also depend on forest based livelihood.

With growing change in economic systems driven by industrial and urban markets, there has also been growing conflict between humans and animals which needs to be addressed in our conservation policies. There are reports of huge loss of crops, houses and property of local communities and most shockingly the death of people mostly from marginalised sections in the forest areas. The cause of such conflict and loss of lives is due to lack of fodder and drinking water for the elephants along with destruction of natural habitations and corridors for a number of reasons that include developmental works and communication links coming up in

forest areas .The developmental projects must have a holistic plan of coexistence as well as a plan for the ecological restoration of existing natural habitats. The migratory routes of elephants need to be improved to a better condition than before for the protection and survival of the elephant population in danger. Though the Project Elephant was launched in 1992 by the Government of India which is being implemented in 16 States including Odisha aiming to protect the elephants from the poachers and also from unnatural causes of death by promoting public education and community awareness, but such projects have failed to integrate the communities in wildlife areas.

Ranjit Pattnaik, a senior socio-environmental expert, from Mahanadi elephant reserve area, said the developmental projects coming up near sanctuary areas are not following the conservation guidelines while dealing with restoration of elephant corridors from sanctuary to adjacent forest area. He said the elephant corridors are increasingly encroached due to various unplanned activities and lack of interdepartmental coordination. Though poaching is a major cause of death, there has been no serious legal intervention to control the illegal acts by enforcement of law. On the other side, there is minimum plan to plant fodder such as bamboo bush and revive perennial water sources which dry up in summer without conservation of water harvesting structures.

Kailash Nayak, activist associated with forest-based community issues for a long time, said that the compensation paid to the local communities for loss of crops and human and other casualties is not sufficient. Besides, the process is very cumbersome. There has been a lack of public awareness on compensation provisions as a number of departments are involved in the process such as Forest, Revenue and Health. The issues of legal heir and loss assessment documentation are very time consuming for a poor and illiterate people. The current compensation amount must be increased in case of death of earning members to ensure the livelihood of the family members. He said in Mayurbhanj areas mostly elephants from the State of Jharkhand in groups have been visiting the area regularly and destroying crops, houses and human habitations. It is because the natural corridors are being destroyed and disturbed for many reasons with change of time and economy. We need to observe the elephant behavior to make coexistence plans but there has been no discussion over the issues in the public domain.

Hati Sabka Sathi is a community driven national campaign to save elephants and promote coexistence by Satyendra Kumar of Rajsila Foundation, New Delhi. Satyendra is of the opinion that poaching and poisoning, and many other forms of accidents that cause the increasing death of elephants are an issue across India including Odisha. The Forest Department is doing nothing even though there are resources and schemes. "We have to change the policy of Government to stop the killing of elephants. The schemes to claim compensation also need to be revised considering the need of the communities and their dependency and its proper implementation must be ensured by law. The illegal killing of elephants needs serious monitoring and the need for alternatives must be explored to address both the issues to minimize human –elephant conflict while promoting coexistence," he said. The agricultural research institute and universities such as CRRI, Assam Agricultural University, Kerala Agricultural University and many others are engaged in research to offer better alternatives that can minimize the loss. The stakeholders in conservation efforts must look into the issues holistically in an ecosystem perspective.

STATE AND MARKET BOTH DISCRIMINATE THE MARGINALIZED IN BUSINESS.

February 26 , 2021

Inclusive democracy believes in inclusion of all social groups in every sphere of social life including business. In a society like ours with full of diversities and many forms of discrimination needs attention of the state to see the scope of equal inclusion process for left-out groups in a time when market economy and huge privatization is being promoted with state patronage. Govt. become increasingly committed to privatization and withdrawing from business to do more governance. Business is one of the largest sector of employment and income of our economy but for many historical reasons and continued discriminatory socio-religious systems a number of social groups such as STs and SCs and other are being insignificantly represented in such sector. They were historically denied rights over land, education, and access to business. The business sector has been monopolized by a minority social groups of few castes and communities without social diversity in it and many groups remain underrepresented which affects our collective participation in nation building and also sharing of resources of the nation in equal opportunity. It paves the way for increase in inequality and weakening of our democracy and economic growth. The makers of modern India have thought of to address the issues of many forms of inequality through affirmative state intervention in support of the left out and underrepresented social groups but the experience of last seventy years of constitutional governance shows a continued picture of underrepresentation of many social groups who forms the majority of the population. It is largely because of the political apathy of the ruling class and non-implementation of policy decisions of Govt. by executives in change of its implementation. When there is a major shift in approach of the Govt. towards business it is time that the Govt. must come up with a policy for business and its role specially in making business inclusive of all social groups because it is the business sector which has been using the natural resources and financial capital of the nation to make profit for self and not for the nation. The market forces are not going to address inequality or discrimination in society or market. It is always the state which has to intervene in the issues of inequality and discrimination as part of its constitutional mandate but state's withdrawing

from business does not mean withdrawing from the responsibility of making business inclusive and discrimination free access for the marginalize who are denied a right over access to capital for business. The rights over equal opportunity in matter of public employment also attracts the role of Govt. in eradication of caste based employment and ensuring employment /self-employment for all section of people /social groups in accessing scope of employment in business sector. While the employment opportunity in agriculture and other traditional sector has been drastically reducing so there is an urgent need for transfer of the manpower to other sectors such as business for income and employment openings.

Take for example about the number of National Financial Corporations setup by Govt. of India with capital fund for promotion of business and self-employment among SCs, STs, OBCs, Minorities and SafaiKarmacharies and later the provision of venture capitals for promotion of business among these groups with special bank requirements. It is being reported that in spite of the decade's long existence of these institutions the outcome of these efforts has been discouraging in terms its achievement to meet the very purpose of its existence. The declared venture capital remain unspent and the banks are not responding to the possible beneficiaries due to lack of monitoring by Govt. to meet the target. These schemes remain as high sounding publicities of ruling parties without reality any in ground level.

It is being observed that these institutions often suffer due to lack of adequate capital fund required for the purpose and dedicatedexperienced staff to carry forward the execution process and above all there is lack of political will by leaders of governing parties to implement the action plan and ensure involvement of the people for whom these plans have been targeted. The accountability, function and impacts of these institutions have never been discussed in public domain and the existing available infrastructure and experiences are also not being linked to new initiatives. The elected representative of marginalized sections very seldom take up the issues of business and the participation of their constituencies in such endeavor. Though recently there has been a number of private initiatives such as Dalit Indian Chamber of Commerce and Industry that helps in growing business among marginalized sections who are historically being denied a space in business but they have very limited presence to bring a desirable impact which only Government initiatives can do in creating a wider impact. Leaving aside dedicated institutions and schemes, there has

been general provisions made in Reserve Bank guidelines on credit policy for SCs, STs and other marginable sections but these provisions are never being properly planned, implemented or monitored at appropriate level.

There has been a lack of public accountability by commercial banks to such policies. The financial inclusion policy talks about priority sector lending and credit provision for weaker sections along with opening of branches in rural and backward and tribal areas to build access but the reality is something else in States such as Odisha. The State Level Bankers Committee never take up issues exclusive to SCs and STs and other marginalized sections who have not been enough competent to avail their rights and available opportunities to do business. Mostly the private and public financial institutions are largely managed and owned by the traditional dominant caste people in the country who have hegemonic control over decision making bodies. The branches in rural areas even discriminate the women and marginalized section while they are visiting banks and there are reports of discrimination came in newspapers. As such doing business in rural areas still have many caste based social taboos. In spite of policy and guidelines, the financial inclusion policy has not been properly implemented for building inclusion in business which can contribute for self –employment and inclusive growth. So any special scheme of venture fund by Government for the higher economic participation of left out groups the country will contribute to inclusive growth under the growing market economy and go on the path of redistribution the available finance capital of the country but that remains a dream with the marginalized social groups historically denied a space in business.

UPGRADE POVERTY –HIT YOUTHS ‘SKILLS, MAKE THEM JOB WORTHY.

18.02.2022

A possible change in the quality of life of the marginalized section of Odisha depends on overall state's development policy and state's specific approaches towards them. With a fast-changing economic scenario and capitalist mode of production, the economic activities are no more homogeneous in community rather becoming more individual centric; so the approach of development must change from community-based to individual as unit.

The traditional community based economic activities are becoming redundant with introduction of changes in technology and expansion of marketing modes. There has been rapid changes in occupations with dying of traditional skills.

The resources, skill and market are no more community based or localized. Many of the traditional occupations such as fishing, forest produce collection, agriculture, weaving and handicraft slowly shifting and these are no more economic activities of a specific community.

The youth of the marginalized sections in Odisha are mostly looking for a change and are shift from traditional family occupation. They must be encouraged to explore all the possible new opportunities coming up with application of science and technology and with expansion of market.

This will boost social mobility and in many ways expand their socio-eco horizon, besides liberating them from traditional social-cultural bondages.

Therefore in order to bring a change in the living conditions of the traditional poor and marginalized sections who are largely engaged in traditional economic activities, they have to be provided to thrive in service sector, business, industry and manufacturing units and many more new areas where the possibility of growth and employment is very high. The people who are already there mostly from forward sections of the state, they may not happily accept the change because of their traditional hegemony over such activities but the marginalized sections have to assert themselves for progress.

Unfortunately though our freedom struggles were anti-feudal and had visualized an inclusive society free from many of traditional hegemonic, socio-cultural relationship in production, which was reflected in the constitution, but subsequently, the vision of makers of modern India has not been translated into actions for lack of a fundamental change in the socio-eco condition of the historically marginalized sections.

For last 70 years, many of our schemes and programme are more focused on charity kind of activities rather than aspiring for a fundamental change in economic relation and social power structure. The so called welfare schemes are being used to fool the people and make them permanently poor.

These schemes helped in continuation of subsistence economy without growth and employment. The Land reform laws are not being used to distribute and re-distribute land and many other forms of productive resources. There have been unfinished survey and settlements. There is absence of consolidation of holding and lack of minimum economic holdings. A vast majority of people engaged in agriculture are land less, sharecroppers, small and marginal farmers in the state. Many of the farmers' welfare and protection schemes are hugely funded by both state and centre in the name of agricultural growth.

The land owning few farmers who are mostly absentee land lords are the major beneficiaries of farmers' welfare schemes whereas the real farmers are not even in the list of farmers.

The big framers of agriculturally developed states have taken away a large chunk of the Government supports including host of input subsidies and MSP. There is absolutely no change in the life of agricultural workers, share croppers, small and marginal farmers in terms of increase in wage, social security, credit, storage and marketing facilities.

Share cropping is one the most exploitative system in agriculture sector to abuse the Labour of rural poor and today, they are the most vulnerable section of rural Odisha. In this situation, why the youth of a share cropper family should continue with his father's occupation to become "Anna Data". This is a pertinent question. Similarly, the scheduled tribes of Odisha who are also called as forest dependent communities are being forced to do forest based activities. Primarily seasonal minor forest produce collection is being encouraged to live in a subsistence economy

without a future. There is no value addition and mechanization of such activities. The fisher folk of the coast and river banks are also facing a vanishing situation of their occupation because of number of factors including mechanized fishing, climate change and market expansion and many more new challenges.

In the coming days can any family survive on share cropping, traditional fishing or minor produce collection?

A recent trend shows huge migration of youth from families engaged in traditional occupations to new upcoming economic activities that are coming of in industrial and urban hubs, manufacturing centres, tourist destinations, seaport areas, and logistic hubs etc. The socio-economic picture of Odisha has been stagnant with feudal mode of production and maximum people are engaged in primary sector with a very slow growth of industry, manufacturing and service sector in spite of its many natural advantages. The marginalized section must not oppose industrialization, urbanizations, mining, industry, costal highways, airport, road expansion, bridges, dams and new projects in the name of livelihood loss. Rather the demand must be for more to access to land, housing, basic amenities, education, skill, credit and above all, for enforcement of laws against the unabated social discrimination against them.

SOCIAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL DEVELOPMENT OF MINING AREAS

In recent years, there are opportunities of social and environmental development have been created through central legislations integrating mining, industry and business sector. The Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) in the Companies Act 2013 and District Mineral Foundation (DMF) under MMDR Amendment Act, 2015 and CAMPA Act 2016 and Rules 2018 are most important.

The last few years' experience in the state of Odisha shows that Funds available for mining affected areas development are not being spend properly. There has been negligible spending of available amount under CSR, DMF and CAMPA, added to other issues such as lack of coordination and convergence and long-term plan for the affected area and people especially for environment and marginalized sections. There are also lack of data on status of fund availability and expenditure, and most important is the lack of awareness among local people especially among marginalized social groups and their involvement. It is also reported that funds created out of Supreme Court order from illegal miners has not been spend .As Rs11,568 crore in account of Odisha mineral bearing areas development corporation was not utilized for the prescribe purpose.(CAG report 2019,Pioneer Nov3,2019).

There must be inter-departmental coordination through formation of state level authorities like Mines Area Development Board with power to plan, coordinate and supervise the mines areas development by using said funds under the provision of the laws.

These above said new legislations have created scope of collective efforts involving Government, Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs), corporates and non-profit organizations (NPOs) in the State in the areas of social development, environment and building local infrastructure. These provisions have made available financial resources for developmental activities in areas having mining, industry and business. It is quite relevant for States such as Odisha having mining, industry and business which need a careful planning and involvement of the concerned departments of the State Government for an effective, coordinated and plan full utilization of available financial resources from the corporates operating in the State.

This can be very well utilized to eradicate extreme poverty through livelihood development and to ensure basic human requirements such as drinking water, primary education and health, natural environment, local employment and income generation as Odisha continues by way of one among the poorest States and lags behind human and social development index in comparison to other developed States of India. There is continual existence of vertical and horizontal inequality across the regions and among different social groups. The inequality is very high in resource rich regions such as mining areas of the state having large presence of historically marginalized population.

The resource rich regions and marginalized sections remain backward in spite of provisions of investment and budgetary spending. The natural resources available with the State and active patronage of the Government attract corporates to set up mining, industry and business ventures. With new economic policy of liberalization and privatization by recognizing the increasing role of corporates in economic development of the marginalized poor, the Government has bestowed upon non-business responsibility with corporates to intervene in social development concerns as integral part of business responsibility and to follow international standards of human rights, Labour legislation, environmental concerns and best practices in dealing public finance through promoting transparency and accountability.

It has been argued that while the companies mostly using the State resources, land, minerals, water, power and infrastructure, they should shoulder the social responsibility to spend for the marginalized poor. This is not a charity but legal and social responsibilities to be followed by the companies. Similarly, the development of a mining affected area is the legal obligation of a mining company to restore the land, forest and ecosystem and livelihood of the local people but unfortunately the corporate sector many a time violates the laws. It has been very often reported about the sub human condition of the people, STs and SCs and other backward communities in mining and industrial areas where they have been struggling for basic human needs such as drinking water. Why in spite of so many varieties of funds, the basic need of the people have not been solved. Any one visiting the periphery areas of mining projects can have a better picture about the quality of life of the local marginalized sections. There are villages where poor women of these areas usually struggle to

walk a long distance to fetch drinking water by digging small holes in river beds in hot summer.

The industry and mining companies use the surface and ground water and pollute it without developing alternative sources for the poor who have been depending on public water bodies for water consumption. The companies have built good English medium schools and hospitals for the benefits of their employees but the marginalized people in the locality who depend on Government run schools and hospitals are deprived of basic services. There has been lack of basic health and educational infrastructure and personnel in these areas but it has become no body's concern. The huge deforestation by the companies has changed the local climatic condition and weather bringing upon high temperature and drought like conditions affecting the local poor and marginalized the most. No substantial development work has been done to improve the ecosystem of the areas by the companies; so it is obvious that the local people have expectations over the corporates to ameliorate their socio-economic and environmental condition by implementing the provisions of law and the State Government has to monitor this for its effective implementation in the interest of the people of the State, especially people in mining and industrial areas for an inclusive development of the state.

The provision of CSR has been introduced to corporates in India through The Companies Act 2013, Clause 135, which says companies with annual turnover of Rs 1,000 crore or more or a net worth of Rs 500 crore or a net profit of Rs 5 crore or more have to spend at least 2 per cent of their average net profit in the previous three years on CSR activities from the fiscal year 2014-2015. The indicative activities have been specified under Scheduled VII of the Act and CSR Rules 2014. The companies have to set up a CSR committee with policy and implement the activities through its own nonprofit foundations or other nonprofit organizations.

Through these provisions the major mineral bearing mining and industrial districts such as Angul, Jajpur, Keonjhar, Sundargarh, Jharasuguda, and Koraput are getting substantial financial resources from both public sector and private corporates under CSR and DMF for the development of the districts. There are public sector companies, such as MCL, NALCO, NTPC, SAIL, RSP, OMC and private companies such as Tata Steel, HIDALCO, Vedanta, Birla, and Bhusan etc which are operating in these districts. In a recent report on CSR activities in Odisha it is revealed that there are 283 private and 21 PSU companies listed out by IPICOL and

IDCO and there was a target of Rs 464 crore of spending under CSR but only Rs 344 crore was spent in the year 2014-15. The Public Sector Company MCL alone spent Rs 61.30 crore followed by Rs 59.61 crore by Tata and Rs 24.05 by Vedanta and these firms mostly spent in Angul, Jajpur and Sundargarh. The Industry Department of State Government has not yet developed any guideline as per the requirement of the State. It is required that both the Industry and Mines departments have to work together for a coordinated effort for the development of the mining and industrial areas of the State. The State Government should have proper data base about the corporate CSR spending at district and State level and regular coordination meeting should be held involving media for wider dissemination of plans and activities for larger public involvement and to promote transparency and accountability in public spending. The parliamentary committee on public undertaking observed that the companies have not utilized over 50 per cent of their CSR fund though it is compulsory to spend on CSR activities every year as per provision of the Companies Act. It has been calculated that by advantage of this provision, 131 central public sector enterprises together have Rs 3,683.73 crore as CSR fund. The committee examined 13 CPSE during the year 2014 -2015 and found unspent amount of previous year. It has also reported by the committee that the spent CSR allocations include ineligible activities like city beautification. It is told that CSR fund should be dedicated to serve the most marginalized poor and backward areas but unfortunately there has been huge diversion of funds violating the basic purpose of such fund utilization. Sometimes the company officials are acting on their own in the absence of strong monitoring mechanism and guideline by the State Government. It has been observed that the hospitals and educational institutions run by companies are limited to company employees only and that services are not extended to local people. Even funds are being spent outside the district in Bhubaneswar and Puri for other purposes. The first inhabitants of the area are pushed to the outskirts and even missing once the project is set up.

Similarly, the provisions in MMDR Act on District Mineral Foundation says the mining companies which have executed mining lease before January 12, 2015 have to pay an amount equal to 30 per cent of the royalty paid by them to DMF and where mining lease granted after January 12, 2015 the rate of payment would be 10 per cent of the royalty to DMF for the developmental activities of the people in mining affected districts as per the model guidelines provided by the ministry.

It is reported in media that though Rs7909.25 crore has been allocated in Odisha only Rs 1672.34 crore has been spent as on June 30, 2019(Business standard August21,2019)

Odisha has a natural advantage of foremost deposits of strategic major mineral resources such as Coal, Bauxite, Chromite and Iron ore etc. It has 98 per cent of chrome ore, 60per cent of bauxite and almost one third of coal and iron ore of the total deposits of the country. The State can be country's aluminum capital, thermal power hub and south Asia's steel hub by utilizing the investments in the sector. Odisha has 58 varieties of major and 22 varieties of minor minerals deposits. In 2011-12, the State stood second in terms of mineral production of the country. Mining activities in the State date back to 1875 when the first coal mining in Talcher block of Angul district was started. The mining activities have picked up since the 50s and with mechanization in the 90s the sector has taken a giant leap.

Mineral is a non-renewable natural resource and its best utilization should meet the best interest of the local people of all social groups. It has been observed that the way the State Government has been involved in mineral business in the name of growth and development, it is not looking at the issue, with the similar interest, of the mineral bearing areas and the affected people who have been least benefited out of the business. In this context, the implications of District Mineral Foundation (DMF) created under the provisions of Mines and Mineral Development and Regulation Amendment Act 2015 and the Rules framed by the State Government is a matter of concern because the DMF is one of the major sources of financial resources generated out of mineral royalty meant for the mineral bearing area and people. While the State has been struggling with paucity of financial resources for development works, this provision of DMF created under the provision of law has generated hope of regular resource availability for mining affected areas of the state.

The mineral bearing areas are the backward areas and home to mostly the marginalized sections. It is observed that the State Government has been delaying implementation of the provisions of DMF under MMDR amendment Act and not covering all the districts because there has been focus on few major mineral bearing districts and not including other major and minor mineral bearing districts. It is violation of the provisions and also depriving other districts of their right to development.

The formation of the DMF shows bias towards bureaucrats by relying more on them. The affected people and mostly the marginalized sections' representatives have not been taken into confidence and there is no social diversity in the committee without special provision of inclusion of women, SCs and STs as per their proportion. The Government has very occasionally involving local people in planning and decision making and execution process. It is fact that the whole concept of DMF has not been widely discussed among the people in mineral bearing districts and locally. The Government has not been maintaining any transparency in allocation of financial resources and no procedure has been followed to address the issues of most disadvantaged area and social groups, and priorities of the people who deserve the most. The sustainability of the work is not being discussed locally as local people are always seen as backward even in the decision making process.

The mining activities are administered by the Central Act, Mines and Minerals Development and Regulation Act, 1957 amendment 2012. The Department of Steel and Mines source says between 1954 and 2004, there are 600 mines in the State having a lease area of 99 lakh hectares in 24 districts including Sundargarh, Keonjhar, Angul, Jharasuguda, Bolangir, Kalahandi, Koraput and Jajpur. Baring a few underground mines of coal and chromite, most of the mines are open cast which is a major reason of land degradation due to ground breaking. The lease area officially displayed and the operational area have huge difference because of illegal mining and the use of mining project periphery area for dumping, transportation and other related activities. The areas near the projects also getting affected due to land pollution by mining waste, dust and water pollution. It is also reported that due to mining, the ground water level in mining areas has gone down which has huge negative impact over the land use of the area. It can be concluded that the actual land used for mining is much more than the official lease area. The land use by mining companies has been a matter of concern by Mines, Revenue, Forest Department, State Pollution Control Board and local community. The matter of illegal mines has well reflected in recent Shah Commission investigation report on iron ore and manganese mines. The mining lease holders include the Central Government owned companies like MCL, NALCO, NTPC, SAIL, Indian Rare Earth Limited, State owned companies like OMC, IDC and Nelchal Ispat Nigam limited and a number of private mining companies of State, private corporates such as Tata, Birla, Vedanta, IMFA, FECOR and

HAMCO, etc. Out of total lease area 99374.148 hectares, the public sector has 51361.23 hectares and the private sector has 48012.918 hectares. It shows the Government owned companies are the major lease holders of mines.

The mining lease area include private areas, agricultural land, habitations and community owned common land and Government land including forest land, waste land and water bodies, etc. It is a well-established fact that mines mostly occupy more forest and agriculture land but a major part of the land which has not been recognized is claimed to be private due to non-execution of survey and settlement.

It is also found in studies that the assigned land like Bhoodan, ceiling surplus and waste land which are once demarcated for distribution are also being occupied by mining companies through lease. Mining activities in different stages of mining like pre-mining, mining and post-mining have been affecting the land use rights of the locals through displacement, pollution and creating abandoned mining.

The whole process of mining leads to desertification of the area within the life span of mining. The experience from mining area shows mining has been creating problem of habitations and agricultural activities in a number of ways due to scarcity of land, hike in price, pollution, soil and water and air pollution, water crisis and displacement, rehabilitation and resettlement problems, loss of livelihood of agriculture and forest based communities in the locality.

Studies found out of total mines, 60 per cent are in 5th Scheduled area and 40 per cent of mines are located in nonscheduled areas of the State. Most of the mining areas are scheduled area and ex-Gadajata area having huge forest and ceiling surplus land and waste land, which are also not covered under survey and settlement. The areas are also home to Adivasis and Dalits and other farming communities who constitute about 90 per cent of the population those are mostly illiterate and lack awareness about revenue laws and provisions. They have been denied due share in participation of Governance due to historical reasons. A large number of Dalit and Adivasi households are found homestead less and not being getting their Record of Rights over the land they cultivate since generations. Mining has been making them landless and depriving them of getting assigned land and Record of Rights. This has been a major challenge for these communities to get rightful compensation and resettle

after being displaced. The issues of social exclusion, caste-based discrimination and ethnic identity, religion are major problems in relocation and rehabilitation colonies which need special care and protection in rehabilitation and resettlement. The socio-economic condition of SCs and STs in mines areas needs to improve because of their historical marginalization, illiteracy and resourcelessness. There are also primitive tribal groups who are still in sub-human condition and they need very special attention.

Mining areas are also now being considered suitable for industrial hubs with the advantage of mineral availability, water and land. The major mineral belts are in the deltas of Brahmani, Mahanadi, Baitarani, and Rusikulya. The additional requirement of land for mineral based industries in mines areas has been adding more problems to the local people already burdened with land issues. It is reported in places like Jharasuguda, Angul and Sundargarh that people once displaced by mining are again being displaced by mineral industries.

The Rehabilitation and Periphery Development Advisory Committee (RPDAC) headed by RDC has no data about the periphery development and CSR programme funds and its utilization. Though it has been told that the local people have share in employment but there is no institutional mechanism to monitor and ensure the mandate of the mining companies for the local people. Coal Bearing Area (Acquisition & Development) Act, 1957 and land Acquisition Act, 1894 administer land acquisition but absence of institutional mechanism to monitor post land acquisition verification process makes the laws toothless.

In the pre mining stage the thrust should be on land reform and land distribution. The Government should ensure survey and settlement and ensure record of rights of all the natives in the locality and by that ensure the process of free and fair compensation because the compensation are mostly land based. The land settlement and distribution programme should be completed in all mines areas before mining lease to ensure homestead land and agricultural land to all landless families.

The Government can plan for large colonies, cities, habitations with all basic facilities. Cooperative farming should be encouraged by providing land in a particular patch to farmers by forming farmer society or company for integrated agricultural activities. They should be provided all facilities like capital for land development, irrigation, crop insurance, and marketing

of agro-products, seeds, fertilizer, pesticide, and agricultural appliances. Certain percentage of the profit out of mines, CSR and periphery development funds should be used for land reclamation and development by which land can be created for further use. The resource management should be decentralized with more power to State and local bodies.

The mineral conservation and development Rules 1988 (Section 23, 32, and 34) need to be strictly followed to ensure backfilling /land restoration of abandoned mines before closer and handing over the land to Govt. for its distribution among land less poor for forestry and agricultural activities with support from DMF, CRS and CAMPA funds.

The Government should have a highly technical committee to assess the land requirement of a mining company and after lease institutional mechanism needs to be set up to monitor the actual possession. Strong laws are required to punish the companies who are using land beyond their lease area. The local revenue authorities and Panchyatiraj Institutions should be empowered with adequate power to manage.

The Compensatory Afforestation Fund Act 2016 says there will be establishment of Compensatory Afforestation Fund Management and Planning Authority at the Centre. At the State level, for compensatory afforestation activities will be looked over by the Forest Department. As per the provision created under legislation, the Compensatory Afforestation Fund will be available under public accounts for each State and Union Territories with sharing of 90:10 between the State and the Center, respectively. It has made provision of administration of funds and utilization of funds collected from the user agencies to purchase new land, undertake plantation, regeneration of forest eco system, wild life protection, relocation of people from protected wildlife area, protection of forest and forest related infrastructure development. This year Odisha has got the maximum fund of Rs 5,933 crore from CAMPA among top ten states.

It is expected that the new fund will have wider impact over people in forest areas having mining and especially on tribal population in terms of generating employment and income related opportunities. The forest regeneration will contribute to arrest soil erosion, drought and desertification and improve the soil and water management of the area and facilitate agriculture.

The Forest Conservation Act, 1980 provides that no forest land can be diverted for non-forest purpose without prior approval of the Government of India. The Divisional Forest Officers (DFOs) can grant

permission for diversion of forest land up to one hectare for community development work. The Forest Conservation Act, 1980 further says that non-forest land equal to the size of forest which is diverted for non-forest purpose must be afforested. The value of diverted forest is to be calculated and recovered from the user agency for diverting forest to non-forest use and in order to compensate the loss in the interim the Net Present Value (NPV) of the diverted forest is calculated for a period of 50 years. The NPV has to be decided by an expert committee by the Central Government. The NPV ranges from about Rs5 lakh to Rs10 lakh per hectare depending on the quality of forest and it has been suggested to increase the NPV about five times more in case of dense forest.

The State of Odisha also has advantage of mangrove forest along with other States having coastline. Odisha is rich in biodiversity having two national parks, 18 sanctuaries, one biosphere reserve, three tiger reserves and three elephant reserves, which are valuable natural gifts and need to be protected. The status of forest report by Forest Survey of India data shows the forest cover in the State accounts for 31.38 per cent of the total geographical area of the State. The forest areas of Odisha are also largely inhabited by STs and other forest dwellers who have been dependent on forest resources for generations. After independence, there have been large scale activities, including mining, industry, dam, SEZ, communication infrastructure projects and urbanization. These development activities have acquired huge forest land hitting the life and livelihood of forest dwellers which cause unemployment, poverty, displacement, loss of livelihood and distress migration in the absence of alternative employment and immature condition of manufacturing and service sector of the state. The deforestation also hits economic growth of the State as forest is one of the major sources of income. So through CAMPA fund the State Government should generate employment and strengthen livelihood of people living around forest areas. The increase in poverty and economic distress will encourage more deforestation and lead to other negative social and political consequences. It is observed that the Forest Department has been planting firewood trees for industrial consumption, but it has been suggested that plantation of native species should be given priority. There has been problem of non-availability of forest land for afforestation. If an area is contiguous to a forest or in the proximity of a reserve forest area or protected forest, it will be easier for the Forest Department to maintain it. But where it is not possible to find land, the fund can be used for

regeneration of degraded forest. The Revenue Department in an office order says the revenue land recorded as forest on which the provisions of the Forest Conservation Act, 1980 are applicable would be converted for the purpose of compensatory afforestation. It further says in view of scarcity of non-forest Government land, project promoters other than Government projects, requiring forest diversion should go for private purchase of land or acquire land through land acquisition model for the purpose of compensatory afforestation. It is important for the State Government to make available land for afforestation purpose while huge forest land will be diverted in the coming days for mining, industry and other infrastructural projects. It is suggested that the huge abundant mining land can be utilized for this purpose which will be mostly beneficial to the people in mining areas. The Government should also encourage indigenous species plantation in private land of people living in forest fringe villages to increase their income and to improve local environmental condition.

There are a number of plantation schemes implemented in the State such as bamboo plantation by the Odisha Bamboo Development Agency, industrial belt plantation, bald hill plantation in hills devoid of any vegetation, plantation under MGNREGS, Shree Jagannatha Van Prakalpa to cater to the timber demand of lord Jagannath in nine forest divisions and National Afforestation Programme involving about four thousand Van Surakshya Samitis. But the real impact of these schemes needs to be evaluated. In this context the huge fund available under CAMPA needs very special attention of the Government. The effective implementation of afforestation funds fully depends on the commitment of the forest officials. It has been always suggested that the involvement of forest dwellers and people in forest fringe villages should be ensured and there should be space for involvement of communities in planning, implementation and monitoring of the funds.

STATE FINANCIAL AGENCIES FOR SC, ST AND OBCS DEVELOPMENT ARE DYSFUNCTIONAL.

December 25 ,2020

The constitution of India has made special provision for the all-round development of SCs, STs and OBCs because of their continued social, educational and economic backwardness for historical reasons. Above all economic development is vital to all other development. There has been dedicated National Finance Development Corporations for SCs, STs, OBCs and minorities with paid-up capital for economic activities of these enlisted communities and regular flow of from the MSJE and MTA, GOI. There are also venture capitals for promoting business among them. The state SCs, STs development and OBCs and minority welfare Department is the main channeling agency in the state. The said communities constitute about 95 percent of the total population and their economic development matters to the development of the state in many ways. But unfortunately the state level routing agencies has been almost ineffective in terms of allocation of matching funds and its reach out to the targeted beneficiaries of the schemes. In the recent times there has been growing impact of economic liberalization and globalization which have set a trend of privatization in all economic sectors and withdrawal of state from its welfare role. So it is highly require to promote non-farm activities among these section of people who are still over crowded in primary sector of the state for which credit based schemes for business is needed.

The State has to manage the financial resources for the best use of its people without concentration of wealth and money power in the hands of a few family based companies in the name of business and industry which has wider ramification over the economy, social life and governance and ultimately on growth. It is a fact that post independent Odisha development has been non-inclusive and have not proportionately benefits its majority of the population who have been the worst sufferer of displacement due to mines and industry by way of losing habitation and livelihood along with environmental loss. The land once demarcated for distribution among landless such as ceiling surplus land, Bhoodan land, wasteland , forest land and other category of Government land has not been distributed to them; rather this category of land was given to business

and industry houses. The forest and agriculture based livelihood of SCs and STs have been destroyed without developing alternative in non –farm sector. The lopsided development resulted in growing resource less ness among the people dependent on primary sector, besides distress migration, unemployment and chronic poverty. The business, mines and industries in the state have created jobless growth and whatever employment opportunity has been created, it is being monopolized by the upper class without having a fair share for the marginalized. The 2011 census on household with salaried jobs says only 0.20 per cent of SC and 0.12 per cent of ST households in the State have salaried jobs in private sector. The private sector employment policy does not follow affirmative action to make the business and industry inclusive of all social groups who have very insignificant representation in business. The corporate boards of the country are largely owned, controlled and managed by upper castes without caste and gender diversity. The mining, industry, and business sectors have very poorly employed them with most ordinary jobs such as contact labourers under private contractors. The labourers are very less paid and work without any social security benefits under hire and fire principles. There have been no Labour legislations being followed for such workers. Though the private sector leaders ASOCHAM, FICCI, FIMI and CII are asked by Government to voluntarily work out strategies for affirmative action. The Companies Act in 2013 with introduction of CSR has legalized private companies' obligation to poorer section.

The Government of Odisha should provide hand holding support to upcoming entrepreneurs through state Finance Cooperative Corporations and take a lead in this process to tap the available resources from central Govt. sources for inclusion of left out communities in business and industry. Therefore it is highly required that the State Government controlled finance corporations should ensure implementation of affirmative action policy for private sector business through credit based schemes and make all necessary efforts for its application.

The dedicated institutions such as National Scheduled Caste Financial Development Corporation and National Scheduled Tribe Financial Development Corporation, National Safai Karmachari Financial Development Corporation, and National Backward classes finance development corporation specially set up to promote self-employment among enlisted castes /communities but due to lack of interest of the State agencies the desired impact in the economic development is very limited.

The Odisha SC and ST Finance Development Cooperative Corporation limited functions under Department of ST and SC Development Department, the Government of Odisha. It has been almost non-functional without adequate budget, staff and dedicated leadership to carry forward the mission of the institute. The departmental officials going there in deputation with additional responsibility have no role and functioning most ineffectively without accountability. The performances of the institution have not been reviewed regularly. Many of the Central sponsored schemes are not effectively implemented without any accountability. There are schemes but not implemented due to lack of political will and bureaucratic hurdles and above all, lack of awareness among people and beneficiaries of schemes.

In order to encourage business, the Central Government has made provision of reservation in public contract, departmental purchase, dealer and distributorship but this has not been implemented in the State. The Biju Atma Nijukti Yojana has made provision of only four per cent of purchase of products from small and medium enterprise owned by SC and STs. Along with Government officials, the banks in the State have a major role in creating opportunities of self-employment to arrest distress migration and unemployment by liberating restrictions and creating an enabling social and economic environment that encourages the marginalized section to demonstrate their entrepreneurial ability in business and production. Access to credit is an important economic right of every individual without which economic development especially self-employment and entrepreneurial promotion is not possible. In terms of financial service, Odisha is very poor with less number of bank branches in providing banking service to all in interior parts. There has been no effort by the State to promote financial literacy and banks are violating Reserve Bank guidelines while dealing with poor borrowers. Bank officials are discriminately dealing with the marginalized communities. The subsidy money provided by the Government through banks is not reaching to the beneficiaries on time without any difficulties. For successful implementation of any schemes that target the poor and marginalized along with budgetary allocation and institutional arrangement there must be political and administrative commitment of the Government.

STATE AND MARKET DISCRIMINATE THE MARGINALIZED IN BUSINESS.

State may not do business but state has a role in making business inclusive of all.

February 26 ,2021

Inclusive democracy believes in inclusion of all social groups in very spear of social life including business. In a society like ours with full of diversities and many forms of discrimination needs attention of the state to see the scope of equal inclusion process for left out groups in a time when market economy and huge privatization is being promoted with state patronage. Govt. become increasingly committed to privatization and withdrawing from business to do more governance. Business is one of the largest sector of employment and income of our economy but for many historical reasons and continued discriminatory socio-religious systems a number of social groups such as STs and SCs and other are being insignificantly represented in such sector. They were historically denied rights over land, education, and access to business. The business sector has been monopolized by a minority social groups of few castes and communities without social diversity in it and many groups remain underrepresented which affects our collective participation in nation building and also sharing of resources of the nation in equal opportunity. It paves the ways for increase in inequality and weakening of our democracy and economic growth. The makers of modern India have thought of to address the issues of many forms of inequality through affirmative state intervention in support of the left out and underrepresented social groups but the experience of last seventy years of constitutional governance shows a continued picture of underrepresentation of many social groups who forms the majority of the population. It is largely because of the political apathy of the ruling class and non-implantation of policy decisions of Govt. by executives in change of its implementation. When there is a major shift in approach of the Govt. towards business it is time that the Govt. must come up with a policy for business and its role specially in making business inclusive of all social groups because it is the business sector which has been using the natural resources and financial capital of the nation to make profit for self and not for the nation. The market forces

are not going to address inequality or discrimination in society or market .It is always the state which has to intervene in the issues of inequality and discrimination as part of its constitutional mandate but state's withdrawing from business does not mean withdrawing from the responsibility of making business inclusive and discrimination free access for the marginalize who are denied a right over access to capital for business. The rights over equal opportunity in matter of public employment also attracts the role of Govt. in eradication of caste based employment and ensuring employment /self-employment for all section of people /social groups in accessing scope of employment in business sector. While the employment opportunity in agriculture and other traditional sector has been drastically reducing so there is an urgent need for transfer of the manpower to other sectors such as business for income and employment openings.

Take for example about the number of National financial corporations setup by Govt. of India with capital fund for promotion of business and self-employment among SCs, STs, OBCs, Minorities and SafaiKarmacharies and later the provision of venture capitals for promotion of business among these groups with special bank requirements. It is being reported that in spite of the decade's long existence of these institutions the outcome of these efforts has been discouraging in terms its achievement to meet the very purpose of its existence. The declared venture capital remain unspent and the banks are not responding to the possible beneficiaries due to lack of monitoring by Govt. to meet the target. These schemes remain as high sounding publicities of ruling parties without reality any in ground level.

It is being observed that these institutions often suffer due to lack of adequate capital fund required for the purpose and dedicated experienced staff to carry forward the execution process and above all there is lack of political will by leaders of governing parties to implement the action plan and ensure involvement of the people for whom these plans have been targeted. The accountability, function and impacts of these institutions have never been discussed in public domain and the existing available infrastructure and experiences are also not being linked to new initiatives. The elected representative of marginalized sections very seldom take up the issues of business and the participation of their constituencies in such endeavour. Though recently there has been a number of private initiatives such as Dalit Indian Chamber of Commerce and Industry that helps in growing business among marginalized sections who are

historically being denied a space in business but they have very limited presence to bring a desirable impact which only Government initiatives can do in creating a wider impact. Leaving aside dedicated institutions and schemes, there has been general provisions made in Reserve Bank guidelines on credit policy for SCs, STs and other marginable sections but these provisions are never being properly planned, implemented or monitored at appropriate level.

There has been lack of public accountability by commercial banks to such policies. The financial inclusion policy talks about priority sector lending and credit provision for weaker sections along with opening of branches in rural and backward and tribal areas to build access but the reality is something else in States such as Odisha. The State Level Bankers Committee never take up issues exclusive to SCs and STs and other marginalized sections who have not been enough competent to avail their rights and available opportunities to do business. Mostly the private and public financial institutions are largely managed and owned by the traditional dominant caste people in the country who have hegemonic control over decision making bodies. The branches in rural areas even discriminate the women and marginalized section while they are visiting banks and there are reports of discrimination came in newspapers. As such doing business in rural areas still have many caste based social taboos. In spite of policy and guidelines, the financial inclusion policy has not been properly implemented for building inclusion in business which can contribute for self –employment and inclusive growth. So any special scheme of venture fund by Government for the higher economic participation of left out groups the country will contribute to inclusive growth under the growing market economy and go on the path of redistribution the available finance capital of the country but that's remain a dream with the marginalized social groups historically denied a space in business.

UPGRADE POVERTY –HIT YOUTHS ‘SKILLS, MAKE THEM JOB WORTHY.

18 Feb 2022

A possible change in the quality of life of the marginalized section of Odisha depends on overall state's development policy and state's specific approaches towards them. With a fast- changing economic scenario and capitalist mode of production, the economic activities are no more homogeneous in community rather becoming more individual centric; so the approach of development must change from community-based to individual as unit.

The traditional community based economic activities are becoming redundant with introduction of changes in technology and expansion of marketing modes. There has been rapid changes in occupations with the demise of traditional skills.

The resources, skill and market are no more community based or localized. Many of the traditional occupations such as fishing, forest produce collection, agriculture, weaving and handicraft slowly shifting and these are no more economic activities of a specific community.

The youth of the marginalized sections in Odisha are mostly looking for a change and are shift from traditional family occupation. They must be encouraged to explore all the possible new opportunities coming up with application of science and technology and with expansion of market.

This will boost social mobility and in many ways expand their socio-eco horizon, besides liberating them from traditional social-cultural bondages.

Therefore in order to bring a change in the living conditions of the traditional poor and marginalized sections who are largely engaged in traditional economic activities, they have to be provided to thrive in service sector, business, industry and manufacturing units and many more new areas where the possibility of growth and employment is very high. The people who are already there mostly from forward sections of the state, they may not happily accept the change because of their traditional hegemony over such activities but the marginalized sections have to assert themselves for progress.

Unfortunately though our freedom struggles were anti-feudal and had visualized an inclusive society free from many of traditional hegemonic, socio-cultural relationship in production, which was reflected in the constitution, but subsequently, the vision of makers of modern India has not been translated into actions for lack of a fundamental change in the socio-eco condition of the historically marginalized sections.

For last 70 years, many of our schemes and programmes are more focused on charity kind of activities rather than aspiring for a fundamental change in economic relation and social power structure. The so called welfare schemes are being used to fool the people and make them permanently poor.

These schemes helped in continuation of subsistence economy without growth and employment. The Land reform laws are not being used to distribute and re-distribute land and many other forms of productive resources. There have been unfinished survey and settlements. There is absence of consolidation of holding and lack of minimum economic holdings. A vast majority of people engaged in agriculture are landless, sharecroppers, small and marginal farmers in the state. Many of the farmers' welfare and protection schemes are hugely funded by both state and centre in the name of agricultural growth.

The land owning few farmers who are mostly absentee landlords are the major beneficiaries of farmers' welfare schemes whereas the real farmers are not even in the list of farmers.

The big framers of agriculturally developed states have taken away a large chunk of the Government supports including host of input subsidies and MSP. There is absolutely no change in the life of agricultural workers, sharecroppers, small and marginal farmers in terms of increase in wage, social security, credit, storage and marketing facilities.

Share cropping is one the most exploitative system in agriculture sector to abuse the Labour of rural poor and today, they are the most vulnerable section of rural Odisha. In this situation, why the youth of a share cropper family should continue with his father's occupation to become "*Anna Data*". This is a pertinent question. Similarly the scheduled tribes of Odisha who are also called as forest dependent communities are being forced to do forest based activities. Primarily seasonal minor forest produce collection is being encouraged to live in a subsistence economy without a

future. There is no value addition and mechanization of such activities. The fisher folk of the coast and river banks are also facing a vanishing situation of their occupation because of number of factors including mechanized fishing, climate change and market expansion and many more new challenges.

In the coming days can any family survive on share cropping, traditional fishing or minor produce collection?

A recent trend shows huge migration of youth from families engaged in traditional occupations to new upcoming economic activities that are coming of in industrial and urban hubs, manufacturing centers, tourist destinations, seaport areas, and logistic hubs etc. The socio-economic picture of Odisha has been stagnant with feudal mode of production and maximum people are engaged in primary sector with a very slow growth of industry, manufacturing and service sector in spite of its many natural advantages. The marginalized section must not oppose industrialization, urbanizations, mining, industry, costal high way, airport, road expansion, bridges, dams and new projects in the name of livelihood loss. Rather the demand must be for more to access to land, housing, basic amenities, education, skill, credit and above all, for enforcement of laws against the unabated social discrimination against them.

LET INEQUALITY ISSUES BE ADDRESSED AFFECTIVELY.

Friday, 06 January 2023

The State of Inequality in India Report released in May last by the Chairman, Economic Advisory Council to the Prime Minister highlights the nature of inequality and its ramification over our society. The report has focused on both exclusion and inclusion aspects while recommending a setup of solutions to bring improvement in inclusion in the areas of income distribution, employment, health, education and household amenities. The report has used the data available with Periodic Labor Force Survey, National Family and Health Survey and Unified District Information System for Education Plus by the Union Ministry of Education.

The fact is extreme inequality in socio-economic and political sphere has deprived a vast section of people to live a life with dignity and restricts their access and opportunities to grow at par with the others. It is denial of human rights and the right to development with human dignity.

The issue of inequality is more acute in India due to its ethnic, religious, class and caste –based differences that have continued with very insignificant change. It is said that the current income inequality is higher than its pre-independent period. In spite of many efforts to arrest extreme poverty, extreme poverty has merely declined at a low rate. The colonization hangover and its enforced socio-economic inequalities have been carried forward even after independence. The inequality in income has many ramifications over our socio-political and socio-economic life that continues to slow down our progress as a nation of largest democracy. It perpetuates violence and social disturbances that affect economic growth, peace and happiness and above all a better quality of life.

The report says about the growing unemployment among educated youths with an increase in the number of educated people because of lack of employment opportunities. It is also said that the rate of employment among women has to be improved to bring gender balance in the labour market. It is found that still people somehow employed in the unorganized sector are mostly low paid and deprived of social security benefits out of a

State fund that is available for organized sector workers, mostly Government and public sector employees. This inequality in dealing with labor forces of the country must be addressed. Equity and uniformity of scope and opportunities must be provided to all. The labor market also faces ethnic - caste and gender-based discriminations in access to employment because of our socio-religious and socio-cultural barriers that have been enforced for generations. The legislations, to protect the labor of diverse social groups and labor from socially excluded groups from backward areas, have very limited applications in our workplaces and still our discriminatory social customs are being enforced in the name of religion and traditional values even though it sharply contradicts the internationally agreed modern value system based on principles of UDHR.

The Central Government by formulating national economic policies aiming towards inclusive growth of backward regions as well as social and ethnic groups can play a major role to address inequality. But many of our policy moves are not addressing our core economic issues that perpetuate inequality. Inequities exist in socio-economic and socio-political spheres. They are interconnected and cannot be seen in isolation. In this context, the State of Odisha is an example for discussion because of its continued backwardness and sub-regional underdevelopment and deplorable condition of its vulnerable social groups, who are still struggling with poverty, distress migration and chronic employment and have a pitiable status in the areas of health, education and household basic amenities. Odisha is not just featured among backward States of India but also it has a majority of its population belonging to excluded social groups who are featured at the bottom of human development index. The continued inequality is not just economic or social but also political because the States having less political bargaining power with the Center are suffering the deprivation. It is mostly the Centre that took the decision of investment and major economic interventions for development of States in the framework of national planning. It is being observed that economic policies are mostly influenced by political decisions rather than economic needs. It is told that India is a Union of States; therefore it is also the responsibility of the Union to reach out to the backward States with special financial package for its all round development but the post independent economic policies of the Center have neglected the development of the poor and backward States. Added to this, the resources of the backward States have been used for the overall national growth at the cost of the

resource rich poor States. So the inequality debate must revisit our federal governance arrangements to change the dynamics of resource federalism to address the issues of backward States and regions within the nation.

Inequality is being discussed in a time when we encourage a free market economy with competitions and withdrawal of State from all kinds of economic activities such as disinvestment of public sector and specially the welfare activities for poor and vulnerable sections who are being excluded for socio-economic and political reasons. The backward States are denied their due share by the Centre in the name of competitive federalism and economic investment is encouraged in States having good infrastructure. How the poor States will improve their condition if there is less practice of cooperative federalism by the Center is now a moot question. The backward States as well as ethnic and social groups need more support to change their condition. A hostile competitive environment which encourages competition among unequal States in a free market economy should be discouraged.

ADDRESSING ASSET INEQUALITY: FOCUS BE ON MARGINALIZED SECTIONS.

There have been a number of reports from various institutions such as the World inequality report and Oxfam' report on increase in economic inequality in India. In line with this the All India debt and investment survey -2019 by National Statistical Office (NSO) reports that the status of inequality in assets of the Indian households in urban and rural areas is a matter of concern. The survey by NSO was extended over 5940 villages covering 69455 households in rural and 47007 households in urban areas in the year 2019. The assets include land, building, livestock, agricultural machinery, equipment, transport equipment and financial assets such as deposits and investments, dues receivable. The report shows in spite of many of our organized efforts to bridge the rich –poor gap, there has been an increase in income and assets inequality. The people in rural areas, women and socially marginalized groups are continuing at the bottom of the economic rank in terms of assets. It has many ramifications over our economic growth and social life which must be addressed seriously in our economic policies by both state and central government.

It is reported that 99.4 percent of the households in rural India and 98 percent of households in urban India own physical and financial assets.

The percentages of households in rural India have more physical and financial assets than urban India. As 97.5 percent household owned physical assets and 96.6 percent owned financial assets in rural India and in urban India 85.4 percent households owned physical assets and 94.7 percent household owned financial assets.

But the average value of assets per household was Rs 15, 92,379 in rural India whereas the average value of assets for households was Rs27, 17,081 in urban India. However, the amount is quite higher in case of cultivators and self-employed households.

The average value of physical assets per household was Rs24, 65,277 and average value of financial assets per household was Rs2, 51,804 in urban India. The average value of physical asset per household was Rs15, 19,771 and the average value of financial asset was Rs72, 608 in rural areas.

The percentage of share of different components of assets in total value of assets shows that land and building together jointly holding 91 percent of the share of total assets in rural India where as urban India has a higher share over assets such as building, deposits, and the share of other assets such as livestock, transport equipments, agricultural machinery, non-firm business equipments and shares are same for both urban and rural India. It is reported that about 84.4 percent of the population of age 18 years and above had deposit accounts in banks in rural India with a higher male population and about 85.2 percent of the population of age 18 years and above had deposit accounts in banks of urban India also with a higher male population. Similarly, the average amount of debt was Rs59,784 among rural households and in case of urban households it is higher - Rs1,20,336. The average amount of debt among cultivators and self-employed households is higher than average among rural and urban areas respectively.

The Indian social reality has also been reflected in the asset ownership of both rural and urban social groups classified as SCs, STs, OBCs and Others. It is reported that the average value of assets by social groups shows 98.8 percent of rural and 93.7 percent of the urban STs Household owned assets and the average value of the assets was Rs 8,84,000 for rural and Rs18,90,000 for urban households.

In case of SCs 99.3 percent of rural and 96.6 percent of the urban SC household owned assets and the average value of the assets was Rs13,15,000 for urban and Rs8,79,000 for rural. The OBCs have a relatively higher percentage that is 99.6% of rural and 98.8% of the urban and the average value of assets was Rs 21,20,000 for urban and Rs 16,45,000 for rural. In case of others, 99.4 percent of other (non-SC-ST-OBC) households owned assets in rural areas and 98.0 percent in urban areas. The average value of assets was Rs40,54,000 for urban and Rs26,03,000 for rural. This shows the huge inequality in assets ownership of different social groups and especially the marginalized sections still have a less value of assets in comparison to other social groups.

The inter State comparison of average value of assets shows that the state of Odisha is ranked in the bottom as the all India average value of assets was Rs15,92,000 for rural and Rs27,17,000 for urban but in case of Odisha it is Rs5,32,000 for rural and Rs13,41,000 for urban and the ratio of state average value of assets to all India average value of assets for 18 selected

states shows Odisha is the lowest of ratio that is 0.33 for rural and 0.49 for urban areas. The fact is still regional disparities have continued in India as the poor and backward States continue with a smaller share in assets. It is expected that the information available in public domain, mostly the survey on economic matters by government and other credible agencies on the matter of inequality in assets must be widely discussed and debated aiming to minimize the unfair nature of economic status. Odisha is not just a backward state but having more rural populations mostly belonging to marginalized sections which have been reflected in the All India debt and investment survey report.

Therefore the central government must address the issues of inequality critically by form of preferential treatment while dealing with state backwardness in terms of asset ownership. And within the state the marginalized sections with fewer assets in comparison to others must be supported to generate productive assets for generating employment and income. The government, banks and other financial institutions have a major role in this regard.

ODISHA HAS TO CHANGE APPROACH TOWARDS MARGINALIZED.

Friday, 11 February 2022

The approach of the Government Odisha must change from increasing State charity to investment on education, skill development and critical support for production - centric self-employment to change the economic condition of the marginalized sections in the State. The Government must work to ensure required land, credit and marketing facilities to boost self-employment among youths in productive activities through growth of MSME. To make it more effective there is a need for enactment of a set of affirmative policy and supportive legislations to protect and promote the marginalized sections. In this context many of the well impacted development models followed in TN, Maharashtra, Kerala and many other States may be selectively replicated by the Government of Odisha. As Odisha has a large presence of marginalized communities and still a majority of people live in subsistence economy with increasingly dependence on State support for survival, no major change in quality life of majority of poor has been initiated. In recent years, serious unemployment and huge distress migration have been alarmingly increasing. The Covid situation has very well exposed the vulnerability of migrant workers. It is being observed that the States having more numbers of MSME are a major destination of migrant workers from backward States including Odisha. The State cannot economically develop by neglecting its productive forces from marginalized sections, which constitute almost half of the population.

The Union Ministry of MSME data shows that Maharashtra tops the list with highest number of micro, small and medium entrepreneurs belonging to scheduled castes with about one lakh enterprises followed by TN, Rajasthan, UP, Punjab and Karnataka. In the beginning of the year 2022, the number of SC owned enterprises in the country was 4, 53,972 out of which micro entrepreneurs accounted for 4,50,835, small 3,009 and 133 were of medium category. But still the proportion of SC owners to overall national total is 6 per cent only which must be increased. As part of inclusive business initiative the Central Government and many State Governments have begun a host of affirmative action strategies to

encourage the participation of people from the marginalized sections to grow as job creator rather than job seeker. The programme includes vendor development policy, 4 per cent reservation in procurement from SC and ST entrepreneurs in supply chain, preferential treatment in land allocation for business and industry, facilitating credit linkage and credit linked capital subsidy, hand holding and mentoring support by special dedicated hubs with corpus fund. The RBI has issued special credit policy guideline to commercial banks for protective dealing in matter of interest rate and collateral security. The States like Maharashtra, AP, Telengana and Karnataka have reserved 20 percent of their industrial plots for SCs and STs and offer them land at subsidized rates. Some of them have provided rebate in power tariff for five years, subsidy on capital investment and rate of interest and also special drive for market linkage development. Maharashtra has Dr .Ambedkar special group entrepreneur scheme. Kerala has foreign education and employment loan scheme for SCs and STs. Kerala State Development Corporation for SCs and STs and State Commission for SCs and STs have played a major role in promoting entrepreneurs. The Karnataka State Finance Corporation provides 4 per cent interest subsidy to SC and ST entrepreneurs. These proactive steps by respective State Governments are a major driving force for increasing inclusiveness in business sector and specially help in the growth of MSME.

Along with Government there is also voluntary initiatives by the corporate houses and their collectives such as CII, Assocham and FICCI. Since 2012 in a voluntary code of conduct agreed by business and industrial houses, they have affirmed to make the market non-discriminatory to provide assistance and follow transparency while ensuring respect for vendors from SC and ST communities. Tata and CII have developed affirmative action plans to address the issues of inclusiveness in market. But lack of information and monitoring mechanism have largely made the progress slow and almost non-functional in backward States such as Odisha. The MSME eco-system in Odisha has no coordination and lack of leadership by the State Government to ground the plan for the benefit of its marginalized sections. The marginalized sections in Odisha have no such visible platform to raise the issues in appropriate public forums while the business and industry collectives in the State mostly dominated by ruling elites are silently apathetic to such issues. In the coming days the scope of Government job will be limited with mechanization and privatization as many of the public sector's assets and share are going to be handed over

to private sector. Both the Central and State Governments have been cunningly sweeping the matter under the carpet as regards affirmative actions for the marginalized. The share of funding for SCs and STs for MSME is negligible. The public sector commercial banks in Odisha are largely apathetic to the growing aspiration of upcoming educated youth from the marginalized sections. Many from the marginalized section are routinely harassed and discouraged while struggling to set up MSME. They have to struggle with lack of capital along with inherent social constraints based on caste and class bias, social acceptability and lack of social support. The major public sector companies such as Nalco, MCL, NTPC, OMC and many other private companies have no visible State specific schemes and affirmative action for the marginalized sections of the State in promoting MSME in their periphery area. The two major funds created under CAMPA and DMF have no such initiative to make the youths employable and productive. The State level finance corporations for SCs, STs, OBCs and minorities are almost non-functional while they are supposed to play a proactive role in promoting MSME. Though lack of awareness and political mobilization are still issues in Odisha but both the State Government and companies have been engaged in charity, relief and so-called rehabilitation work without looking for a long term plan for sustainable employment and production generation.

BASIC AMENITIES IN RURAL, TRIBAL ODISHA STILL A FAR CRY

Friday, 30 September 2022

The poor and marginalised sections living in rural and tribal areas, mostly in interior parts, are denied basic amenities in spite of ample budgetary allocations under many Central and State specific schemes. Still there are many villages and hamlets where basic amenities are a day dream.

In modern life, basic amenities are an essential foundation for a decent living and it enhances economic growth and ensures a dignified life. The scope of basic amenities includes safe drinking water, sanitation, housing, all-weather road, electrification, fuel, connectivity, healthcare centre, school, playground, public library and recreational facilities etc. These are non-negotiable conditions for living a decent life, but over the last 70 years of planned development intervention, the Governments have neglected this aspect without any substantial achievement till date as it is evident from the death of people in cholera due to lack of safe drinking water in various parts of Odisha. Unless these basic issues of the poor and the marginalised sections are not solved, it is difficult to ensure an inclusive growth in the State.

The long time negligence of the Government towards a section of people in a democratic setup questions our very concept of nationhood and the effectiveness of the ongoing development process. Basic amenities are linked to qualitative and developed human living and the modern State has to ensure this out of public fund through dedicated institutional arrangements. But this process has not produced the desired result. The negligence in public investment for developing basic amenities for last 70 years has widened social, rural and urban gap as a result of which mostly the rural poor are migrating to urban areas for a better living.

The living condition of common people reflects the socio-economic, political and environmental development of a country. Mercer's Annual Worldwide Quality of Living Survey ranked Singapore as the highest ranking city in the Asia pacific region. The quality of living in Indian cities has been poor in comparison to global standards. Among the Indian States, the quality of living and availability of basic amenities are widely

unequal. States such as Kerala, Tamilnadu and Andhra Pradesh are comparatively better than others.

The 2011 Census shows a huge inequality in availability of basic amenities in rural and urban areas, besides inequality among different social groups. The availability of piped water, electricity and toilets are not provided to more than one third of the rural households as yet in the country. It shows our public investment in rural areas is not inclusive of the rural poor and the marginalised and it has failed to address the basic requirements of the common people to bring change in their living conditions.

The people in rural parts of the backward States such as Odisha are in the worst conditions. The Dalit and Adivasi hamlets, minorities mohalas, primitive tribal groups in forest areas, fishing community habitations in coastal areas, forest dwellers, small and marginal farmers, sharecroppers, agricultural workers, households with traditional occupations, milk farmers, mining and industrial areas and slums with casual mining labourers mostly reel under lack of basic amenities. They have to struggle every day to collect water for daily needs and manage with the available minimum. They use open space for defecation, burn kerosene oil or locally available firewood for food preparation and lighting the house. Their habitations are in isolation and segregated without proper sanitary facility, animal shelter space, linking road, drainage line and waste management facilities. Their dependence on public space has been sinking day by day with changing rural settings.

The village forest, water bodies and other common space are getting changed and scantily available these days. The public amenities developed out of public fund are mostly available to dominant sections of the village and, by and large, everywhere social exclusion restricts the free access of the socially marginalised groups, inspite of civil rights laws.

The situation of women, children and elderly people and sick persons in family is worsening further. This has an overall impact over the working hour of the men and women in family for earning and other productive engagement. Globally, it is understood that any human development must begin with making available of basic amenities for life. But why our Government, corporate bodies and communities have not paid adequate attention to the basic human needs and still people continue to suffer is a big question. The corporate philanthropy or corporate social responsibility (CSR) in India has not done much in creating basic amenities for the

deprived sections. The Companies Act 2013, clause 135 and scheduled 7, speaks about CSR. It has created scope of philanthropy by the corporates and spending for creating basic amenities, specially targeting the poor.

The communities in rural areas have to change their mindset relating to basic amenities. They should not wait for Government for a long time and where ever possible, the communities should build amenities on their own. It is found that mostly people spend on customs, cultures and maintaining traditions but usually they do not invest in basic amenities. The rural, hilly, isolated people should go for creating community assets such as water bodies, public toilets, community space for recreational events and plantation out of community fund. The political parties, CSOs, community leaders and others must get engaged with the community to bring a change in the quality of living. Like the Smart Cities, there has been attempt by the Government to build Smart Villages. But these villages should be inclusive of the people on the edge.

FOOD, EDUCATION, HEALTHCARE FOR ALL STILL MILES AWAY.

Friday, 15 July 2022

The celebration of the Azadi Ka Amrut Mahotsav should lead us to seriously revisit all the promises we made during the freedom struggle and later, in the implementation of constitutional mandates, especially the most important mandate— Article 21—which says about the Right to Life and Personal Liberty. The realization of Article 21 of the Constitution can only be possible with ensuring universal food security, primary education and universal healthcare for all. Everyone's life must be meaningful, complete and the living must be dignified. The Right to Livelihood is part of the Right to Life as interpreted by the Supreme Court. In this context, food security is one of the most basic and non-negotiable areas of rights which is very fundamental to human existence. Food security for all has been quite challenging with changing global socio-economic and political scenario. It is expected by global leaders that the universal food security for all may be ensured by 2030, but the Covid-19 has slowed down the economy and thus made the target more challenging.

Mostly, a sizable population in Africa, South and West Asia, Latin America, Caribbean and Oceania has been reeling under acute poverty, hunger and malnutrition. India ranks 71 out of 113 countries of the world in global Food Security Index 2021. Countries such as China are much ahead of India and countries in top of the index are Ireland, Australia, UK, USA, Finland, Switzerland, Nederland, Canada, Japan, and France. The Food Security Index measures food security based on factors such as affordability, availability, quality and safety, natural resources and resilience. The Government of India has many schemes such as National Food Security Act 2013, Eat Right India Movement, POSHANA Abhiyan, Food fortification, ICDS and national innovation in climate resilient agriculture to arrest the growing hunger and malnutrition in the country, especially among vulnerable communities while increasing the production in any kind of adverse situation. The Eat Right India Movement by the Food Safety and Standard Authority of India (FSSAI) aims to combat negative nutritional trends that impact the spread of life- style diseases. Rice fortification has been initiated in India to counter malnutrition. The

rice fortification has been done by coating, dusting and extrusion to add iron, zinc, folic acid, vitamin A and B12. The State of Chhattisgarh has already launched the fortified rice scheme under a targeted public distribution system. Odisha is one of the poorest States of India having 80 per cent of its population as per 2011 census depending on free ricedistribution schemes (Rs 1) under the National Food Security Act 2013. Even some interior parts of the State and more particularly, the vulnerable social groups and ethnic communities still are more prone to hunger and malnutrition. The State Government runs a food security scheme (SFSS) which provides 5kg of rice at Re 1 added to the NFSA beneficiaries selected as per 2011 Census. This is not good for the economic, social and political health of a State having a major part of its population depending on free food schemes. Odisha must have to overcome the situation and ensure food security. The State also has a high risk of malnutrition. Considering the issues of malnutrition, the NITI Aayog has identified 15 districts of the country including the tribal dominated Malkangiri district to implement fortified rice schemes and the Food Corporation of India (FCI) has been asked to coordinate with the rice mills for the purpose. Added to these steps, the Central Government also has launched the national innovation in climate resilient agriculture to improve preparedness to cope with challenges of climate change and its impact on agriculture sector and food production. Odisha is getting more vulnerable with climate change impacts. Along with food security the other two important areas connected to the Right to Life and Dignity are universal primary education and universal healthcare which are equally important to build quality human resources and a civilized society. Education is one of the key means of social and economic transformation of any society. Historically, primary education has been neglected in the country including Odisha with some States such as Kerala with exception. Even today, in spite of the RTE Act, a target to implement universal, free, and compulsory primary education is still miles away. Many industrially developed countries of the world such as China have started with building universal primary education. A UNESCO report on universal education goals says India will achieve universal primary education by 2050. A recent trend in education shows a gradual withdrawal of the Government from the responsibility of providing primary education and encouraging private business in education sector. There are varieties of schools that lack uniformity, commonness and universality in many ways. The school

infrastructure, teachers and teaching methodology and many related things vary and also status wise lack of equality. The education system discriminates against the poor and people of lower social strata to access education as equals. The so-called residential schools ghettoize the children of backward communities, low caste and ethnic groups in the name of separate schools and residential places. When will the children of all caste and class sit together, stay together and read together in common schools for all? Many of our special residential schools for poor and excluded groups are socially non-inclusive and lack universality. Ideally, there must be a common school system and all the students must avail equal facilities provided by the State without discrimination in any form. Similarly, in the health sector many countries such as Cuba, Brazil, China and Mexico have moved towards universal basic healthcare facilities for their people. In any civilized country, no one should suffer due to lack of treatment facilities because of his poor financial status. But there has been a tendency towards privatization of the health sector and reducing the role of Government that will be depriving a majority of our population of right to life because of their social and economic status. The Covid-19 has well exposed our vulnerability in terms of poor public health infrastructure, shortage of doctors, health workers, medicines and many more which need to be overcome with an approach of universal healthcare for all as a constitutional mandate. The elected Governments at the Center and State must act to respond to the Right to Life and Dignity to become a model for the rest of the world while celebrating legacies of freedom struggle and Constitution.

FOCUS ON UNIVERSAL EDU, HEALTHCARE, SOCIAL SECURITY

Friday, 22 April 2022

As a matter of constitutional obligation of a modern democratic country, the Government of India must ensure universal healthcare, primary education, apart from other basic amenities and social security for all citizens as these are fundamentally non-negotiable human rights indispensable for a dignified living. Many of the democratic countries of the world featured in top rank of human development index have taken measures for realization of these rights for their people. Whichever economic system in prevalence, either capitalist or socialist, globally it is agreed that these rights are the basic foundation to build an inclusive democratic society and also for achieving social progress and economic growth. These rights are also vital for promoting quality human resources and providing scope of equality in matter of basic living standard. But unfortunately, India as a country still remains in the bottom of human development index as it is very slow in reaching out to all people with a universal approach.

We do not have a universal uniform quality education opportunity for all our children . There are existence of many types of schools mostly hierarchical as per fee structure, facility and social –economic status. Still many of our children are out of school and many remain dropouts, while the adults remain illiterate, unaware about the value of education. The global education monitoring report of UNESCO says that economic inequality will keep the world away from achieving education for all in the near future. In the projected year of universal attainment of primary education, India is predicted to achieve universal primary education by the year 2050 that is ten years after Brazil and 45 years after China have done it. Countries with best education system include USA, UK, Canada, Germany, Australia, Denmark, Finland, Nederland, Japan and Russia, etc.

Next to education, universal healthcare is equally important for any civilized society that cannot see its citizens dying without proper health intervention. Many of the developed and developing countries of the world whether it is socialist Cuba or capitalist Germany and developing countries such as Brazil have developed a well-built public healthcare

system that ensures health entitlement to all. The healthcare system in Brazil is free and has universal access to all and guaranteed under the constitution since 1988. India is committed to achieve universal healthcare by 2030. Many of our healthcare schemes such as PMJAY are selective and have not been able to cover all the deserving population. Still we lack adequate resources, infrastructure and manpower to realize the goal of health for all sections of people in spite of their income, social category and place of living.

The other important area is availability of basic amenities which are very much linked to quality of life of the people in modern days. Unfortunately, still a major part of our households in rural and urban areas have very limited access to basic amenities such as good housing, drinking water, toilet, electricity and other facilities. Some of them have no homestead land to go for a decent permanent living with family. Still people travel a long distance to collect water and defecate in open. They manage without tap water and 24-hour electricity. The very poor living condition bars children in many families from getting quality education. Poverty also paves the way to increasing risk to many diseases. The poor living condition contributes to low productivity as the poor health condition of workers remain always an issue.

The international social security reports and the Allianz global investor's pension sustainability index says that India has been very weak in providing social security to the citizens compared to Brazil, China, South Africa and Russia. These countries have good insurance system. In countries such as Germany and Brazil, social security is a right, assured by the constitution. Social security in India is not universal; rather it is selective and covers a smaller part of our society.

There is also huge inequality in the award of benefits and also gaps in access to such benefits. The rich and higher income groups have more benefits of social security than the poor and low income groups. There must be universal social security for all and a basic minimum standard of support for all out of the State fund. Majority of our household below poverty line still depend on free food for survival. There is an increase in orphanages and old age homes while distress migration remains high in many parts of the country due to lack of basic social security provisions. The implementation of universal health, education, basic amenities and social security schemes will create huge employment in service sector and

change the quality of living. It will bridge socio-economic gaps, end social barriers and outdated beliefs based on fanatic ideas.

In a constitutionally driven federal structure like ours, both the Central and State Governments have equal responsibility in ensuring the basic entitlements for all. We have to follow the mandate of our Constitution. It is good that a few States such as TN and Kerala have made some degree of achievements by following best practices of many developed countries but there are few other States such as Odisha and Bihar which are far behind the global standards and remain backward with very slow progress.

SOCIAL SECURITY FOR ALL

Implement Unorganized Sector Social Security Act 2008.

March 9, 2019

Universal Social security must be ensured for all its citizens of a country without discrimination and differences but unfortunately the provisions of social security has been limited to very few people engaged in organized sector where as the vast majority of people in unorganized sector still not being covered under social security provisions. The National commission on Enterprise in Unorganized sector has calculated that 95 percent of the workforce are engaged in unorganized sector and they contribute almost 50 percent to the national GDP but in return they get nothing out of the national public fund. Social security measures are required during accident and sickness, old age and in untimely death of a person for the dependent family members. The private insurance companies coverage are limited to very few people having secured income where as a vast majority of poor, wage earners of unorganized sector have no such opportunities.

The national pension scheme, Pradhan Mantri Shram Yogi Manndhan (PMSYM) for the unorganized workers was announced in the interim budget of Feb 2019 with Rs 500 crore allocation has made provision of a monthly pension of Rs3000 after the age of 60 for unorganized sector workers. Earlier the Government had lunched Atal Pension Yojana in 2015 for unorganized sector workers. There has been number of such schemes being announced and advertised without any practical implication over the workers. However these kind of schemes without universal approach may serve a very insignificant number of workers but the basic purpose of social security remain a distance dream. Though there has been demand for implementation of Unorganized Sector Social Security Act, 2008 but neither centre nor state Government are being implementing this important act in the interest of the unorganized sector workers from social security point of view. The Government of Odisha has framed Odisha Unorganized Sector Social Security Rules, 2010 but the Government of Odisha has not yet identified the unorganized sector workers in the state. The Government source revealed that the state has total 1 crore 62 lakh unorganized workers which is about 92 percent of the total workers of the state out of which 68 lakh are agricultural workers and only three thousand

have been registered with Odisha Unorganized Workers Social Security Board till March 2018. Labour Minister also informed that total 22 lakh 35 thousand construction workers have been registered with Odisha building and other construction workers welfare Board and out of them only 11 lakh have been provided various assistance up to Rs 767 crore.

The State initiative for construction workers through building and other construction workers welfare fund is most welcome step though not enough. Similar initiative is highly required for forest and agricultural workers, farmers and fisher folk and other rural and urban poor. The social security is not just pension but must include the provision of universal health, education and public distribution system and employment opportunity for all with protection of poor from market forces.

With a large presence of informal workers and marginalized social groups, Odisha has a very poor social security measure in comparison to other States in India. Many of the social security schemes implemented in the State are mostly supported by the Centre and barring a few sectoral initiatives such as Madhubabu Pension Yojana and Construction Workers Welfare Scheme, the State has not developed any universal schemes out of own fund and also not fully utilized the Central schemes in the State. The Government of Odisha should go for integrated universal social security schemes because of large presence of poor and marginalized groups who are mostly engaged in informal sector such as agriculture, forestry, fishing, construction work and not being covered under formal social security laws.

It is being experienced that universal social security measures by the State are required to build an inclusive democratic society. It ensures a sense of belonging among its citizens who feel that the society takes care of its people of all ages, classes and groups. The unwell, weak, poor, children, elderly and unemployed are always in need of special care and protection because of their vulnerability. Our social culture and State policy should take care of all its vulnerable sections by ensuring material comfort and emotional support to live a dignified life without depending on others' mercy. But in spite of constitutional mandate, our State social security policy has not been universalized to ensure social security for all people irrespective of their nature of employment. The concept of equality and universality has been rooted in the Constitution of India. It has been told in the Directive Principles of State Policy about the social security

measures to be taken by the State but still most of the social security laws are limited to the organized sector workers and privileged few.

The employees of organized sector in Government, private and semi Government jobs have a better retirement life while a majority of people who are in unorganized and informal sector have a very miserable life in their old age. They do not have a privilege of pension with dearness allowances. The provision of old age pension for them is very minimal and irregular which cannot provide a dignified and decent living. They have to depend on private source or on other earning family members for survival. In the absence of such family support system many of them are pushed to begging and destitute condition and these cases are very often reported in media. Though depending on sons and daughters has been a tradition in our society but in recent time due to economic and demographic change, composition of family and migration from rural to urban areas in search of employment have contributed to the increasing burden of managing family with elderly people which have been a challenge to the poor and it has led to a number of complex social issues. The poor migrant workers are leaving their old and ailing parents at home while migrating outside. There has been an increase in old age homes, beggars, orphanages and shelter homes for the deserted and destitute in the State. It is reported that the condition of elderly people in rural area has become worst in the absence of a proper social security mechanism. The social security policy is not just a State sponsored charity but it is also closely linked to growth and has a direct impact on employment, production, work culture and quality of life of the people. It is the most integral part of the overall development of a society. The developed countries of the world with better social and human development standards such as Sweden, Denmark, New Zealand, The Nederland and Australia have a better social security system while the poor and developing countries such as India are still struggling to establish a developed universal social security system. In recent time of post globalization it has been widely debated over State investment and public finance spending on social security and its impact on economy and role of emerging market forces but worldwide it is being understood that social security has a close link with the economic growth and the State has a major role in ensuring social security for all its citizens specially for the vulnerable sections by adopting a universal social security policy beneficial to all.

The International Social Security Association, Geneva's report in 2012 on BRICS countries revealed that India has a very weak social security policy in comparison to Brazil, China, Russia and South Africa which have adopted international standards covering important areas such as medical, sickness, maternity, old age, family, invalidity, unemployment, employment injury and death. The Allianz Global investor's Pension Sustainability Index 2014 says India has one of the world's weakest pension systems. Brazil has a major social security programme. The Russian federation and China with a socialistic principle have universal social security, State pension system and universal compulsory nature of social insurance. South Africa has more inclusive social security policy that includes the excluded and marginalized groups. The Russian federation has a good mother and childcare policy and its funeral grant provision has been continuing for a long time. It is argued that a good pension system, healthcare and social assistance are intended to reduce inequality and help in building a democratic society that ensures equality and stimulates economic growth. Therefore social security measures should be integrated to the larger process of building democracy for an egalitarian society.

SOCIAL SECURITY BENEFITS ELUDE UNORGANIZED WORKERS

Friday, 06 May 2022

The unorganized workers in Odisha constitute almost 92 per cent of the 1.75 crore working population of the State as per the Census 2011. With declining scope of employment in the organized sector, more and more workers come to informal economy. The economic growth and social progress of a State depends on its productive and quality workforce. The neglect of our working population has impacted the State economy adversely and sociopolitical environment. In order to arrest the inequality in access to the State sponsored benefits for workers, the unorganized workers must be provided their rightful entitlements for a dignified living. The constitutional mandate and legislation for workers must be enforced universally to benefit all and not just a few in the organized sector.

Though the Government of Odisha has constituted the social security board for the unorganized workers, but the social security measures for these workers have not yet reached to the vast section of workers. There is lack of a database of unorganized workers though recently the Central Government has started e-SHRAM for registration of unorganized workers with the Supreme Court directive. A majority of the unorganized workers, who are migrants, are engaged in construction work, street vending, domestic work and self-employment but their identification and registration process has been getting delayed due to lack of initiative of the State Government as well as inaction of the trade unions in organizing the section of workers. As usual trade unions in India are more interested in organized sector employees as it is easy to organize them. But with enforcement of Labour Code on social security, the scope of social security measures has been expanded to all categories of workers.

The Unorganized Workers Social Security Act 2008 addressed issues of social security of all workers. Labour is a subject in the Concurrent List; so both the State and Center have equal responsibility to address the issues of the workers. But unfortunately, in spite of our Constitutional mandate for protection of workers from all forms of exploitation by regulating working hour, wage, insurance and social security benefits, the unorganized sector workers are yet to avail any benefits. There is practice

of inequality in wage and social security benefits as there are huge gaps in the lowest and highest wage rate as well as benefits under social security provided by the State. The unorganized workers are always discriminated.

The unorganized workers in Odisha are mostly low paid as the Minimum Wage Act has not been properly enforced and monitored by the trade unions and Labour department officials. There are irregularities in availing jobs as they live a life with insecurity of employment. They have no paid leave, sickness holiday or insurance against any damage or disability and the guarantee of pension in old age. T

he money paid under various social security schemes run by the State and Central Governments such as Aam Admi Bima Yojana, Rastriya Swasta Bima Yojana, Old age pension, ex-gratia for accidental death, natural death and permanent and partial disability etc is very less to fulfil minimum needs. Even these schemes still have not reached a large section of rural workers in the State. The minimum wage rate and the old age pension amount in Odisha are one of the lowest in the country. The unorganized workers in Odisha are found more in primary sector such as agriculture, forest produce collection, fishery, sanitary work, construction work, weaving and artisan work.

A majority of them are traditional poor, who are socially discriminated and migrant workers. Many of them are homeless and landless, illiterate and unskilled. So, it is necessary to ensure homestead land, housing and skill up gradation programme for their all-round development. Lack of homestead land in the village has been a major reason of distress migration and social conflict. The unorganized workers in urban areas also face the problem of housing, water and electricity and always struggle to live with the basic minimum.

During the height of Covid pandemic, the plight of the unorganized workers in urban and rural areas had substantially drawn the attention of all. The unorganized workers need extra allowance to meet their basic food needs in not just a crisis time like Covid but in any other odd time which deprives them of their livelihood. Among the unorganized workers, the women unorganized workers are more vulnerable. Both at family and workplaces, in the absence of protective legal and social mechanism, they are harassed. Domestic violence and exploitation at workplace have made their life miserable as they do not enjoy the privilege of organized sector women employees such as maternity leave and a host of other facilities.

The trade unions in Odisha are often male dominated and visible in urban areas.

The women self-help groups and elected women leaders of PRIs very seldom intervene in the issues of women workers. Along with enforcement of existing protective laws and implementation of schemes for unorganized workers universally, it is highly required to impart skill development training to workers so that they can be made employable regularly. The employer, contractor and owner of establishments violating Labour laws must be monitored and punished by the enforcement agencies for which the State Government must ensure adequate institutional mechanism. The trade unions and other agencies, NGOs engaged with unorganized workers welfare must be allowed to monitor the implementation of various welfare schemes.

TWO LANGUAGE FORMULA –MOTHER TONGUE AND ENGLISH MEDIUM.

Language policy in NEP is not suitable in present context.

August 7, 2020

The overemphasis of Hindi and Sanskrit in proposed three-language policy, and withdrawal of English from primary level, in National Education Policy 2020 will be impacting over non-Hindi speaking states. If executed, the language burden will be more on students of these states and additional burden on students of linguistic and religious minorities such as STs and Muslims in multilingual states like Odisha. The lowering of English will have several ramifications over participation in governance, access to higher education and scope of employment.

The recently announced National Education Policy 2020 approved by the cabinet of Govt. of India has been opposed from many quarters based on language policy especially by non-Hindi speaking states and others concern for education of the linguistic minorities mostly the marginalized sections. Along with language policy, there are also many connected issues such as privatization of education and limiting the scope of states in education policy formulation, although education is in the concurrent list. However, the selection of language is most important in the medium of education. The NEP says that wherever possible, the medium of instruction until at least grade-5 but preferable till grade -8 and beyond, shall be the mother tongue /local language /regional language. It is also told that three language formula will continue to be implemented and Sanskrit knowledge system will be offered at all level of school and higher education as an option in three language formula.

There is nothing wrong in learning many languages as much as possible and the mother tongue is always good for a child to learn as its first lessons, as suggested by many. But at the same time, there must have a purpose of learning languages and its usefulness in our life to get access to the scope of knowledge and dignified meaningful employment. Glorifying past, mother tongue and ancient classical language may not serve the current purpose of building a rational knowledge society without access to available global knowledge which is not possible without English.

The recent trend in India shows an increase in learning towards English medium education and many states have already adopted English as the medium of instruction from primary level. Nowadays the common people in both urban and rural areas prefer to send their children to English medium schools for a better future and a dignified life using the English language as a gateway to opportunities globally. It is now fundamentally necessary for higher education, science, technology, engineering, IT, law, medicine, business, and governance.

In line with this since independence, many of the central Govt. education programme have established English medium school such as Navodaya, Kendriya Vidyalaya, Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya, Ekalabya model school and model school to cater the needs which have also created scope for rural poor from different social groups to access quality English medium education because they cannot pay the higher amount of school fee charged by private schools indirectly reserved for the upper class. The Govt. run English medium schools has been contributing to reducing inequality and exclusion while reducing regional disparity and promoting to nation-building activities by preparing students of diverse background from different parts of the country.

There are about 5,100 languages spoken in the world and about 99 per cent of them are home to Asia and Africa, Pacific and American continents whereas only 1 per cent of them are in Europe. The Census of India 2001 has identified 1,500 distinct languages as mother tongues and these languages are grouped under 114 major languages out of which only 22 languages including Sanskrit are scheduled languages included in the eighth schedule of the Constitution of India. It is mentioned in the Constitution of India (Article 343) that English is the official language for 15 years only and after that Hindi will be used but again it is decided to continue with English.

The use of Hindi has been opposed by the South Indian States in 1960 especially the Dravidian movement leaders R.S.Periyar, C.N. Annadurai advocated for English to curb the north Indian language and cultural dominance against federal ethos.

Article 348 says that language of the Supreme Court, High Court and orders, rules, regulations, bylaws, issues under constitution and law made by Parliament and the legislatures of States shall be in English. Even today after 70 years of constitutional governance, the dominance of English

language is to be found everywhere. The people those who know English are rulers and leaders of respective field and the common people those have no access to English are excluded from all spheres of socio-eco and political life.

The pioneer of modern India Raja Ram Mohan Roy had vehemently argued for modern education with English medium in India in his letter to Governor General William Pitt in 1823. He said “the Sanskrit system of education would be best calculated to keep this country in darkness”. In 1816, he opened an English medium school for boys. Later, TB Macaulay in 1835 introduced English education through the English Education Act and it was approved by William Bentinck, the then Governor General of India. Though English was discouraged as part of anti-colonial struggle by G.K. Gokhale, M.K. Gandhi and R.M. Lohiabut post-Independent India witnessed the growth of English education in cities and mostly preferred by Indian ruling elites and today it is being realized by many States that the unemployment and backwardness and social inequalities are many ways linked to medium of education.

The decisions by State Governments of West Bengal, Odisha, AP and Telangana can be cited. The Government of West Bengal has opened new English medium primary schools in North 24 Parganas, Nadia and Jalpaiguri. It is told that the decision of the left front Government in 1983 to withdraw English from primary level has affected the employability of the youths in the State. The Government of Telangana and AP have introduced English as a medium of instruction in all primary schools with regional language as a compulsory subject from primary level. Similarly, States such as Punjab and Jammu and Kashmir have already adopted English as a medium of instruction from primary level though they are also giving equal importance to their regional language.

Language is one the important vehicle of participation. The deprivation of poorer sections from learning official language has affected their participation in governance. The STs in Odisha constitute about one-fourth of the population of the State. There are 62 tribes speak about 21 language and 74 dialects and only seven tribes have their own scripts. Santali language is included in the 8th schedule but it has been difficult on the part of the state Govt. to teach the tribal children in their mother tongue at primary level due to lack course material in all subjects. It is good to educate children in mother tongue for learning the basics but they must

be educated in English medium for a level playing field if we want to see any radical change in the socio-economic life of the most marginalized section. The STs of the North Eastern States are doing much better in all India jobs because of English education. The Government of Odisha is already doing this through Model school in each block, Ekalabya model school for STs and Anwasha programme through private school though this covers a very few number but it has created good impact. Therefore the NEP 2020's language policy need to be relooked with two language policy.