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LITERCY, EMPLOYMENT AND SOCIAL SECURITY: A REVIEW

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Abstract

This is a study of the performance of the State in India (Union Territory and the States) with regard to the realisation of Constitutional aspirations in the areas of Literacy, Employment and Social Security.

An integrated view on three sectors is taken. Employment in the organised sector requires education. Lack of education/literacy leads to semi-skilled and skilled, organised sector unemployment and under-employment, specifically in the modern sectors. Unemployment leads to increasing poverty and inequality thereby necessitating the provision of social security. There is a need to recognise this triangular relationship while planning for India's development in the future.

Constitutional Perspective

The Constitution of India, as adopted in 1950, is the basic document to understand the promises made by the free Indian State with regard to rights of the Indian people. These rights are attempted to be honoured as reflected periodically through the Quinquennial and annual plans of the Planning Commission, perspective plans of the State Governments, reports of the National Commissions and Committees, legislative enactments of the Union and State Governments, action plans of development departments, High Court and Supreme Court judgements as well as other judicial instruments. Relationships between the State and the Citizens develop in the framework of the rights and duties of the citizens vis-a-vis the performance of the State with regard to the facilitation of the realisation of rights.

1. This is an abridged version of a concept paper that was written for the Constitutional review Commission headed by Justice M N Venkatachalaiah. I hereby acknowledge the useful discussions I had with Justice M N Venkatachalaiah, Sri K Parasaran, Dr M Govinda Rao, Dr Abdul Aziz, Dr M R Narayana and Dr N. Shivanna. I acknowledge the useful comments received from an anonymous referee to whom this paper had been sent by the Institute. The author accepts full responsibility for the views expressed in this document.
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The Constitution of India provides two types of rights: (a) Civic and Political rights and (b) Social and Economic rights. Right to Education, Employment and Social Security (of which the significant component is Food Security) constitute the most important social and economic rights. Performance of the Indian State with regard to the realisation/provision of these rights in these last 50 years is the framework within which the Constitution is to be reviewed. The Constitution of India provides the normative goals of India's national life. Status of realisation of the rights of the people provides the existential realities. Progress in regard to India's march on the path of normative goals is being reviewed in the light of existential realities. Hence, this paper will have four sections: (a) Normative goals of national life in India with regard to Literacy Employment and Social Security as reflected in the Constitution; (b) policies, plans, strategies, programmes, interventions, schemes and investments for the realisation of the national goals in the five decades following the adoption of the Indian Constitution; (c) performance of the Indian State in regard to the march towards (and realisation of) goals of national life, and (d) problems, concerns and issues that centre around inadequate or non-performance of the Indian State with regard to the realisation of national aspirations. The basic Question addressed in this paper is: "Has the Constitution failed us or have we failed the Constitution". If there have been structural constraints within the Constitution which inhibited the Indian policy makers and planners to propose and implement strategic interventions for promoting literacy, employment and social security, then one can say that the Constitution has failed us. If in spite of Constitutional provisions, performance is wanting, then we have failed the Constitution. In the latter case -the Question that follows is: Was our failure to realise our dreams due to defects in the planning process. If the failure is due to wrong priorities, imbalanced emphasis on sectoral allocations and slackness in implementation, then the failure is by and large a consequence of indiscretion in deliberations and implementation. Alternatively, if the failure is because of the poor capacity of the State relating to physical, financial, human and administrative resources, then it is incidental to the systemic realities. Structural limitations need to be corrected by correctives to the Constitution. Functional limitations have to be addressed otherwise. Functional indiscretion, inefficiency and inadequacies may need to be addressed through structural changes, institutional measures and legislative/judicial controls. Where do the problems rest and what needs to be done will become clear through a national consultation process.

There are certain larger socio-economic and political angles of vision to look into the problems such as poverty unemployment, inequality, illiteracy, and social insecurity. These visions are rooted in the prevalent structures of property relations and inequality in India as well as macro-level policy choices

for development of Indian economy as against a decentralised approach and policy. The Constitution of India protects the right to property, (land, assets and wealth) even while there is an inegalitarian distribution of property in the country. [Upendra Baxi: 1983]. This is a negation of the appreciation of the proposition that human freedom cannot co-exist with large-scale injustice and inequality as reflected in the phenomena of poverty unemployment, illiteracy and social insecurity. Further, the macro-economic policies for development through nationalisation of resources and capital markets (Insurance, Banking), heavy industries (Public Sector Giants), major irrigation projects have not provided the required foci on rural unemployment and poverty Village industries, handicrafts, small-scale industries, intermediate technology, local area development, decentralised structures and organisation for employment generation and poverty alleviation have lost out to macro-economic planning. Hence, even though literacy and skill development takes place, the capacity for absorption of skills in the economy is limited. It is not clear whether the Structural Adjustment Policy adopted since June 1991 with a thrust on liberalisation of regulations and controls, privatisation of trade and investments, globalisation of markets and marketisation of the economy will mean a sea-change in the generation of employment for the poor and alleviation of poverty therein, which will also mean an increased capacity for the Indian poor to profit from schooling opportunities, higher levels of literacy and lower dependence on social security measures. Incidentally, it is noted that development planning has been subjected to the dictates of decentralised finance and governance with the adoption of the 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments. This may be construed as a piece-meal approach to address the problems of poverty and inequality and the adjunct problems and issues of literacy, employment and social security. The foregoing visions call for fundamental and foundational changes in the Constitution of the country Having submitted the foregoing angles of vision, it is clarified herein that this paper does not take up any ideological position. Facts of the case have been presented in an impersonal way If any ideological position has crept in an implicit way, it cannot be helped, as it must have become integral to the thinking process of the author without any deliberation.