

NYAY: Another Pipe Dream Scheme

As a run up to the Lok Sabha elections, Modi's government announced in the last budget an input support of Rs. 6000 per year to the farmers having a land up to 5 acres. The government of Telangana state implemented such a scheme before the assembly elections, while the government of AP and some other states announced additional amount over that of centre's scheme.

As a part of the election campaign, the Congress party vowed to implement Nyuntam Aay Yojana (NYAY) if voted to power. Its leader Rahul Gandhi asserted that NYAY would be the final assault on poverty in the country. Under the scheme, Rs. 72,000 will be transferred annually into the bank accounts of a fifth of the poorest families in the country (about 5 crore families).

The basis of these two schemes is the concept of Universal Basic Income that should be given directly to the beneficiary. Many reputed economists in India are praising the NYAY as a welfare agenda that guarantees a minimum income to the poor. They are arguing that it should be treated as a social security and as a constitutional right rather than as a dole or election promise.

An intense discussion is going on about affordability and implementability of NYAY. Rahul Gandhi said that his party had consulted big economists including Raghuram Rajan who concurred that it is doable scheme. But many think that NYAY is financially unviable as it requires Rs. 3.6 lakh crore annually. Prof. Jayati Ghosh said the scheme can trigger social tension and was difficult to implement. One reputed economist argued that the NYAY can be implemented provided various subsidies were done away. The food subsidy, fertilizer subsidy, petroleum subsidy, expenditure on MNREGA, SC and ST welfare and Awas Yojana etc. comes to a total of Rs five lakh crores. So by stopping these welfare schemes, NYAY can be implemented successfully. Yet nobody brought into the discussion Rs 6 lakh crore subsidies being handed out to the big bourgeoisie every year. This debate is an indicator of what is going to happen tomorrow.

In a country where income disparity is growing at alarming rate for the last seven decades and the poverty and misery of the vast masses of people reached to unbearable proportion. The need for a poverty alleviation or eradication programme is unquestionable. The pertinent question is how to do it. The past experience indicates that every poverty eradication programme taken up by the governments at various times had failed in achieving the objective.

During the British colonial rule, providing wage employment during times of distress such as drought and floods was used as a relief, It was continued in the early decades after the transfer of power.

A debate took place in late 1960s which stressed on the creation of assets to provide a constant and recurring income as a poverty eradication programme in the place of wage employment. This was followed by the slogan Garibi Hatao and Indira Gandhi's 20-point programme. Under this programme, the beneficiaries were provided with goats, buffalos, cows etc, so as the beneficiaries would earn income by rearing these animals. After a decade the then Planning Commission summarized the working of this programme as failed to bring out the beneficiaries from poverty and they were in need of another round of help to come out of the poverty.

This failure led to another debate that suggested a strategy that combines asset formation and wage employment as poverty eradication programme. This led to the formulation of Employment guarantee schemes which finally culminated in MNREGA.

On the other side, there was an argument that one cannot ask the hungry people to wait for the results to be yielded by the created assets and they had to be provided immediately with food. This argument led to the implementation of schemes like Rs. 2 a Kg rice, anna canteens etc. this later took the turn as populist schemes that treated peoples as beggars always waiting to be given doles from the rulers.

Though the successive governments tampered with the statistics to show that the number of people below the poverty line had reduced over the time, the fact of the matter is that the poverty of the masses of people has reached to gigantic proportions. Even some of the official studies showed that poverty eradication programmes including the latest MNREGA had failed in alleviating poverty in the country.

These programmes are a failure because they failed to address the basic causes for the poverty in India. Even today the tiller of the land has no right over the land he tills. Nearly 60 per of the tillers of the land are landless peasants. Without the redistribution of land on the basis of land to the tiller, there will not be any development in the country that can provide decent living standards for the people. So most of the rural population are underemployed because not of their choice but for lack of alternative opportunity.

The wealth of the country created by the toiling people is being cornered by the imperialist sharks and a hand full of biog Indian bourgeois class leaving only a meager protion of national wealth to the people. Thus the pervading semi-feudal relations and imperialist exploitation and domination are the main causes of poverty in India. Unless and until the semi feudalism is eradicated and imperialism is thrown out of the country, poverty will continue to haunt the people of India that their lives doomed into misery.
