



Study and suggestions for improvement of quality of life marginalized and socially disadvantaged segments

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Introduction : From the historical point of view, they have been subjected to the worst type of societal exploitation. They are mainly landless with little control over resources such as land, forest and water. They constitute a large proportion of agricultural laborers, casual laborers, plantation laborers, industrial laborers etc. This has resulted in poverty among them, low levels of education, poor health and reduced access to healthcare services. They belong to the poorest strata of the society and have severe health problems. They are less likely to afford and get access to healthcare services when required. They are practically deprived from many civic facilities and isolated from modern civilized way of living since so many centuries. The health outcomes among the Scheduled Tribes are very poor even as compared to the Scheduled Castes. The Infant Mortality Rate among Scheduled Castes is 83 per 1000 live births while it is 84.2 per 1000 per live births among the Scheduled Tribes

Among the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes the most vulnerable are women, children, aged, those living with HIV/AIDS, mental illness and disability. These groups face severe forms of discrimination that denies them access to treatment and prevents them from achieving a better health status. Gender based violence and domestic violence is high among women in general in India. Girl child and women from the marginalized groups are more vulnerable to violence. The dropout and illiteracy rates among them are high.

Early marriage, trafficking, forced prostitution and other forms of exploitation are also reportedly high among them. In situations of caste conflict, women from marginalized groups face sexual violence from men of upper caste i.e., rape and other forms of mental torture and humiliation.

Nevertheless the Constitution of India has made definite provisions for the welfare and uplift of the tribal people throughout the country. And the greatest challenge that the Government of India has been facing since Independence, till today is the proper provision of social justice to the

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scheduled tribe population, besides its rigorous efforts in implementing the new policy of tribal development and integration was initiated throughout the country.

Improved Access to Agricultural Land- The reasons for the high incidences of poverty and deprivation among the marginalized social groups are to be found in their continuing lack of access to income-earning capital assets (agricultural land and non-land assets), heavy dependence on wage employment, high unemployment, low education and other factors.

Therefore, there is a need to focus on policies to improve the ownership of income-earning capital assets (agriculture land, and non-land assets), employment, human resource & health situation, and prevention of discrimination to ensure fair participation of the marginalized community in the private and the public sectors.

Active Role of the State in Planning- It is necessary to recognize that for the vast majority of the discriminated groups, State intervention is crucial and necessary. Similarly, the use of economic and social planning as an instrument of planned development is equally necessary. Thus, planned State intervention to ensure fair access and participation in social and economic development in the country is necessary.

Improved Access to Capital- The poverty level among the SC and ST cultivators is 30% and 40% respectively, which is much higher compared with non-scheduled cultivators (18%). Similarly, the poverty incidences of those in business is very high 33% for SC and 41% for ST compared with only 21% among non-scheduled businesses. The viability and productivity of self-employed households need to be improved by providing adequate capital, information, technology and access to markets. It is a pity that though the STs do own some land, they lack the relevant technological inputs to improve the productivity of their agriculture.

Improved Employment in Public and Private Sectors- There is a need to review and strengthen employment guarantee schemes both in rural and urban areas, particularly in drought-prone and poverty-ridden areas. Rural infrastructure and other productive capital assets can be generated



through large-scale employment programmes. This will serve the dual purpose of reducing poverty and ensuring economic growth through improvement in the stock of capital assets and infrastructure.

Education and Human Resource Development- Firstly, lower literacy/level of education and the continual discrimination of SC/STs in educational institutions pose a major problem. The government should take a second look at the Education Policy and develop major programmes for strengthening the public education system in villages and cities on a much larger scale than today. There is a necessity to reallocate government resources for education and vocational training. For millions of poor students located in rural areas, the loan schemes do not work. We should develop an affordable, uniform and better quality public educational system up to the university level. Public education system is our strength and needs to be further strengthened. Promotion of such private education systems that creates inequality and hierarchy should be discouraged.

Food Security Programs- The public distribution system should also be revived and strengthened. In distributing Fair Price Shops in villages, priority should be given to the SC/ST female and male groups, as a number of studies have pointed out that they are discriminated upon in the Public Distribution System and in Mid-day Meal schemes.

Public Health System- The public health system in rural areas has also been by and large neglected. Therefore, the primary health system for rural areas and public health system in urban areas must be revived and more funds should be allocated for the same.

Untouchability and Discrimination- The practice of untouchability and the large number of atrocities inflicted on Dalits continue even today mainly because of hidden prejudices and neglect on the part of officials responsible for the implementation of Special Legislations; i.e. the Protection of Civil Rights Act (PCRA) and the Prevention of Atrocities Act (POA). The Government should make a meaningful intervention in this regard so as to mitigate the sufferings of Dalits due to practice of untouchability and atrocities inflicted upon them and should also treat



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this matter on a priority basis to ensure that the officials and the civil society at large are sensitized on this issue.



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