

FUTURE PROSPECTS OF WEAKER SECTION DEVELOPMENT WITHOUT THE CONSTITUTIONAL SAFEGUARDS AND PROTECTIVE MEASURES

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Looking at the socio-economic composition of India's population, one striking feature that unfolds itself is a large measure of disparity in the social status and the ownership of productive assets as well as in the distribution of income among the various sections of the society. The commonly used expression 'weaker sections' refers to that section of the country's population which is placed in a comparatively unfavorable condition in terms of social positions, assets and income distribution and comprises of the urban poor such as slum dwellers in the urban area and the rural poor namely landless labourers, small and marginal farmers, rural artisans, scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, religious minorities and other backwards classes in the rural areas.

For centuries social injustices based on caste, creed, religion, class etc. have been the bane of the Indian society. Of them caste with its ideology of graded inequality and with its package of social disabilities played a role in weakening our social fabric. It is also responsible for keeping a major chunk of population socially and educationally deprived and economically backward for many millennium. Over a period of time, we have developed a system of social stratification in which society is divided into two conflicting groups of people, the advantaged and disadvantaged. The former group had the monopoly of economic, political and social power and the latter denied their rights in all these spheres of life. The hierarchical system of socio-economic power structure of traditional Indian society has placed the higher castes in commanding position of dominance and forced the lower castes in submissive silence. Even after the independence this trend continued and whatever socio-economic transformation took place on limited scale due to the forces of modernization and the policy of the reservation within the framework of positive discrimination have failed in breaking the monopoly of upper castes and upper classes. Hence, even after 45 years of independence the Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and other backward classes remain to be a most vulnerable of means of production and social discrimination is main cause for acute poverty and exploitation of the Scheduled castes, Scheduled Tribes and other weaker sections of society.

According to the 1981, Census 46.6 percent of all workers were cultivators, and 24.9 percent were agricultural labourers. Among Scheduled caste workers, 28.2 percent were cultivators and 48.2 percent were agricultural labourers. According to annual report 1990-91 Ministry of Welfare,

Table NO. 2 : Distribution of Tribal Population,
Literate and Workers in fifteen P.S. in Sundarban Areas

Police Stations	Population		Tribal Literates		Workers	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Harda	5839	5639	1086	195	3075	835
Hinjalqani	2180	2130	472	60	1154	210
Hasnabad	2711	4018	1042	273	1476	359
Minakhan	2590	2463	432	75	1188	228
Sandeshkhali	24411	24522	5419	1035	13428	3562
Gosaba	8270	8078	1741	315	4806	734
Sagar	215	203	80	12	105	20
Namkhana	189	156	63	12	91	6
Kakdwip	582	558	207	49	279	58
Patharpratima	751	789	238	63	367	130
Mathurapur	1317	1264	338	72	772	238
Jôynagar	49	42	23	17	25	0
Kultali	1966	1887	286	28	1096	272
Basanti	5458	5334	930	172	3081	512
Cannilag	4937	4968	874	174	2974	640

Source : Census of India, 1981.

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Government of India, most of the Scheduled Castes still suffer from social discrimination and economic deprivation. The stigma of untouchability continues to occupy a central place in all their sufferings. About 78 percent Scheduled Castes are estimated to be below the poverty line. Most of bonded labourers in the country are come from the Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and other backward classes. The percentage of literacy among Scheduled Castes women is only 10.93 as against 24.93 among other women (excluding the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes)¹. The Report of the Commissioner for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes for the year 1987-89, makes a shocking revelation about the fast deteriorating condition of the people in the lower strata of our society known as Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. It sounds a note of caution for the government by pointing out that the entire economic system of our country has been moving in such a way that inequality has increased instead of decreasing and continues to increase.

In this paper an attempt is made to analyse the situation of weaker section development without the support of constitutional safeguards and other protective measures. Although the theme of this paper is futuristic in nature, however with the help of empirical support the issues related to the development of weaker sections would be discussed in a proper perspective.

Historically speaking the principle of positive discrimination and constitutional safeguards had been evolved in specific context of Dalit liberation struggle during the freedom struggle of India. D.N. Sandanshiv an eminent jurist observes that "in 1947, Independence of India, Hindus got India, Muslim got Pakistan and the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes got reservations" (1986:3). According to Ghanshyam Shah, there is no exaggeration in this statement. The complementary provisions necessary to reconstruct an egalitarian social order are absent in the constitution. They are at the most relegated to the Directive Principles.

The President, by promulgating ordinances in 1950, identified the SC's and ST's. But this was not the case for the backward classes other than the SC's & ST's, though the constitution uses the term "backward classes" or "weaker sections". While discussing Draft Article 10(3), several members pointed out that the term 'backward' was vague, loose and indefinite. However, Article 340 provides that the president may by order appoint a commission to investigate the condition of socially and educationally backward classes within the territory of India.

The specific constitutional provisions intended to safeguard the interests of the Scheduled Castes are on the abolition of untouchability and prohibition on its practice in any form (Article 17); prohibition of 'begar' or forced or bonded labour (Article 23), consideration of the claims of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes in appointments to services and

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posts in connection with the affairs of the union or a state (Article 335); and reservation of seats in proportion to their numbers for the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes in the Lok Sabha (Article 330) and in the Vidhan Sabhas (Article 332).

Some of the other provisions are also reinforced the status of the Scheduled Castes as protected weaker section. They include the departures from the anti-discriminatory and formal equality provisions of the constitution, empowering the State to make any provision for the advancement of any socially and educationally backward class of citizens (Article 15 (4) and for the reservation of appointments or posts in favour of any backward class of citizens which in the opinion of the state is not adequately represented (Article 16 (4)). They also include the directive in article 46 that the state shall promote with special care the educational and economic interests of the weaker sections of the people, and in particular, of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, and shall protect them from social injustice and all forms of exploitation. For analytical purpose the measures undertaken in pursuance of the various constitutional provisions for the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes may be treated under three broad categories, namely, protective, developmental and preferential. Abolition of untouchability and the disabilities arising out of its practice in any form, and prohibition of bonded labour come under the first category. Various educational schemes such as post-matric scholarships and girls hostels under central sector, and pre-metric stipends, reimbursement of tuition fee, book banks, and hostels under the state sector, special component plans of the centre and states for Scheduled Castes and Tribal sub-plan for Scheduled Tribes, special Centre assistance, and the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes Development Corporations are of the second category. Legislative, educational and employment reservations are of the third category. Of these, the effective implementation of the measures of the first two categories is a precondition for actualising the measures of the third category (Radhakrishnan :1991).

The policy of reservation and other protective and promotional measures for the development of weaker sections have been under implementation for last four decades. However, the implementation of these measures hitherto has not been too effective to achieve their desired objectives.

According to the Twenty eighth Report 1986-87 of the Commissioner for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes the implementation of reservation quota for SC's and ST's have not been satisfactory particularly in group A and B services of central Government as shown in the following table

The representation of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes in educational profession in general and higher education in particular is

walls of prejudice blocking their integration with the rest of the work force. Biased and unsympathetic selectors often disqualified them so that the reserved jobs could be declared as unreserved. When this was banned, the prejudice against them has hardened further. Almost in every office a kind of apartheid was practiced. The naked realities of caste are visible in almost all walks of life.

In view of above facts one could draw a conclusion that in spite of constitutional safeguards the socio-economic condition of weaker section is deteriorating, in the absence of these protective measures they will be further marginalised, and whatever little elite formation has taken place among these sections of society will also dried away. Past experiences shows that if there is little ambiguity in guidelines regarding the implementation of job reservations and lack of standardised procedures of recruitment one finds that weaker sections do not get any entry in jobs. For example there is poor representation of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes in central university teaching faculties particular at the level of professors and Readers because there is no reservation available for SC's and ST's in these jobs. It is shocking that even after 45 years of independence without the support of reservation not even a single Schedule Caste person could become a Professor in any Central University though, we have produced hundreds of I.A.S. and I.P.S. from Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes community due to the provision of reservation.

A Question which has been deliberately or inadvertently over looked by many, however, is the root of the evil which is the caste system. A major argument of the anti-reservationists is that the reservation of jobs for the backward castes will perpetuate the caste system. Does this mean that if there is no reservation, the caste system will wither away? (Tharyan:1990)

In recent years the socio- economic climate of country is becoming hostile towards the weaker section of the society. It is dangerous trend for the unity and integrity of the nation. The upper castes and upper classes do not want to share their prosperity and monopoly of power with the deprived sections of society. Steep rise in the cases of atrocities against the weaker sections and social tensions is a result of this repressive social psychic.

NOTE:-The percentage of literacy among the Scheduled Castes is just 21.38 as against All India average of 41.70 percent.

Group of posts	Scheduled Castes		Scheduled Tribes		Increase	
	1.1.1977	1.1.1987	1.1.1977	1.1.1987	SC	ST
A.	4.16	8.23	0.77	2.05	4.07	1.28
B.	6.07	10.40	0.77	1.92	4.33	1.15
C.	11.84	14.46	2.78	4.23	2.62	1.45
D.	19.07	20.09	4.35	5.84	1.02	1.49

negligible at all levels. The following table shows the level of representation in 41 State Universities.

The situation in central Universities even worse. One has to go long

Category	Total	SC	Percentage	ST	Percentage
Professors	2,133	13	0.61	1	0.05
Readers / Associate Professors	3,261	34	1.04	5	0.15
Lecturers	5,341	169	3.16	32	0.60
Research Associates	674	71	10.53	2	0.30

Source: Twenty eighth report of the Commissioner for SC, STs (1986-87)

way to achieve the stipulated percentage of reservation that is 15 percent for Scheduled Castes and 7.5 percent for Scheduled Tribes, provided by the constitution in various services. The top positions in decision making bodies of administration, judiciary, industry, trade and business and educational institutions are still out of reach to the weaker sections of society. For example, of the country's 18 High Courts, 12 are without a single Scheduled Caste judge and in as many as 14 no tribal sit in Judgment. The backward Classes more popularly known as the OBC's are not better placed having secured representation among the judges in only six high courts. At percent out of a total sanctioned posts of 512 high court judges, there were only 12 Scheduled Castes and seven Scheduled Tribes judges; according to the latest available figures.

The SC/ST judges, as of January 1, 1993, had a dismal share of 3.7% of the total strength of the high court judges. If reservation should have been implemented as per constitutional requirement their representation in high courts would have been 22.5 percent. Allahabad High Court which has the highest member of 70 judges, has not even one tribal on the jury. Bombay High Court the second largest with 54 judges also does not have any tribal judge (Indian Express April 11, 1993).

According to Prof. S.C.Dube (1990) the job reservation did not have smooth sailing. Those who entered public services on reserved quotas found

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STRUCTURE AND FUNCTION OF DISTRICT RURAL DEVELOPMENT AGENCY IN ASSAM : A CASE STUDY

C.S. SINGHAL

In the fifties when community development programme was introduced in the country a nation wide organisational network was created in the shape of community development blocks integrating various sectoral departments at the sub-district level. The community development programme, over the years, lost its identity, but the "Block" as an agency for rural development administration at the grass root level continued to function though its original structure had changed considerably.

The subsequent rural development programmes were implemented through various district and area level agencies like Small Farmer Development Agency (SFDA), Hill Area Development Agency (HADA), Command Area Development Agency (CADA), Tribal Development Agency (TDA), etc. The agency approach was a product of an idea that there will be more operational flexibility in the programme implementation.

In order to bring about integration in administrative arrangements at the state and district level and consequent upon the extension of Integrated Rural Development Programme to all the development blocks of the country from October 2, 1980, a new District Rural Development Agency (DRDA), emerged as a distinct administrative body for planning and implementation of rural development programmes. All other programmes such as SFDA, DPAP, wherever in existence, were merged with the DRDAs on the recommendation of the then Ministry of Rural Reconstruction, Government of India. Since then DRDAs have become a nodal agency for the planning and implementation of all rural development activities at the district level.

The present paper is aimed to analyse the structure and functioning of District Rural Development Agency in Assam. The paper is based on a research study conducted by the present author with the following three objectives: (1) To analyse the manpower position and nature of task carried out in DRDA of Assam; (2) to analyse the arrangements for co-ordination between DRDA and other sectoral departments; and (3) to suggest some measures for improvement in the functioning of the DRDA in Assam.

The data were collected through scheduled interviews of DRDA

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