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## Reverse Migration – A People's Movement

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-J.C.Pant, IAS (Retd.)\*

### 1. Population bomb-the urban slums

According to census figures, about a third of India's population resides in its urban areas, and about a third of this population resides in the urban slums. This roughly works out to a staggering figure of about 100 million (10 Crores) people residing in the urban slums under the most appalling living conditions. Who are these people, who neither belong to the villages which they have left behind nor do they belong to the cities they have come to inhabit? Why were they forced to leave their villages where they lived through the ages? They are true aliens to their urban surroundings and stand completely alienated from the civic society and the so-called development-process taking place in the country. Their miserable living conditions make them vulnerable to the land sharks and suspect in the eyes of the law enforcement agencies. These urban slums today have become vice dens where women and children get the worst possible deal. There is no primary healthcare system worth the name covering these slums since their very existence is never admitted by the civic authorities. The urban development programme going by the name of slum clearance only destabilizes them from time to time, heightening their sense of insecurity and as a consequence heightens their propensity to crime and punishment. These slums are also cesspools of bacteria and viruses ever ready to strike their deadly fangs on the neighboring and far-away affluent localities. Poverty, indeed, has become truly infectious through these veritable hells on earth-these urban slums.

While the national average of population residing in these slums is 27% to 30% of the urban population, this proportion for Mumbai is over 50% and for Delhi over 40%. The day this proportion for Mumbai goes beyond 60%, as seems to be the trend of rural-urban migrations, and crosses the 50% mark in Delhi, this demographic situation is likely to become explosive beyond the control of the civic law enforcement agencies. Years of resentment arising out of the inequality of urban lifestyles is bound to burst spilling over the high-rise compound walls of mansions upon mansions-engulfing the assiduously crafted urban arts and culture, from one metropolis to another. This is what the population explosion is likely to

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\*Chairman, REACHA, New Delhi, & Former Secretary to Govt. of India in the Ministries of Agriculture, and Health & Family Welfare.

look like when the population bomb explodes. This bomb is relentlessly ticking away with no remedial initiative visible anywhere from the government or the people. It is in the context of this likely population explosion that a planned reverse migration in the shape of a people's movement is being suggested as a feasible solution to many of our burning problems.

Mercifully, the new approach to population stabilization is addressing the crucial issues relating to health and status of women; the nutritional and clinical aspects of mother and child healthcare, in addition to, of course, the knitty gritty and quality of family planning as well as maternity services in the country. In sharp contrast to this, is the approach of the alarmists, who occasionally tend to blow up the population issue out of all proportion and context. They, then come up with knee-jerk reactions and go on to recommend strict implementation of the family planning programme, even compulsory sterilization, in order to achieve what they call population control. The terms "compulsory sterilization" and "population control" figure prominently in the 1976 National Population Policy declaration, and the country knows full well, the adverse effects and consequences of such policy prescriptions. But even the new approach has not fully addressed the situation arising out of complete lack of primary health care services in the urban areas. At least, the rural areas have a modicum of primary health care services, which, of course, need substantial improvements; but the situation in urban slums is, indeed grim. The continued migration of more and more people from rural areas to the urban slums is, therefore, a great threat to the health status and well being of the entire country.

## **2. Flight from the villages-the vanishing commons**

The land reform movement which was part of the freedom struggle in India gave rise to comprehensive land reform legislation in nearly all the states of India after independence. This ensured that a certain percentage of total village land area would be set aside for the sacred groves, grazing lands known as 'gauchars' etc. These common lands were used by the village landless agricultural laborers and artisans for various purposes apart from grazing their cattle, such as collecting fuel, drinking water, fodder for the cattle, easement rights etc. These common lands served a very significant role in the rural agrarian economy and made for a sustainable style of livelihood for the rural poor. Then came a rash of socialistic fervor that village lands not cultivated should be allotted to the rural poor in order to give them social and economic status. What the rural poor got was a small piece of land each which he could hardly put to any meaningful economic use but which he readily parted with for a consideration, in favor of the nearest farmer-peasant owner. Thus were the common lands, the gauchars and sacred groves of India parceled out to the land-less, who then had nothing to fall back upon in the shape of

drinking water, fodder for their cattle, fuel for their hearths, easement rights etc. The vanishing commons drove them out of their homes and villages into the uncertain world of urban slums, which had a certain glitter about it all right. So the 100 million slum dwellers of India today are the poorest of the rural poor who once lived in over six and a half lakh villages of India, because the village common lands which once sustained them have nearly vanished.

### **3. Restoring the commons, the sacred groves and gauchars**

Restoring the commons in India's villages is not only crucial for sustaining her agricultural growth, but also to revive the village eco-systems which provided drinking water, fuel and fodder to each inhabitant and their cattle. If the precious topsoil so critically important for higher agricultural productivity, which is facing threat of erosion, were to be conserved, then the gauchars and sacred groves of India would have to be revived. Maintaining and sustaining these common lands has been a hallowed tradition in rural India, and a mere push all over the country would be enough to set the trend in the desired direction. Along with these efforts, a special effort to revive village industries and value-added-agriculture-based cottage industry would be needed to revive the rural economy. The feasibility of setting up gaushala based rural industrial complexes is being examined and the concept has been able to attract widespread support from a large section of our society. This alone is likely to throw up a viable option before the miserable slum dweller to trudge back to his native village to re-build his life, perhaps at a higher level of subsistence. In other words, a planned reverse migration is not only feasible but also essential to save the country's metropolises, as well as to revive the village economy. It would be reasonable to plan for half the country's slum population, say 50 million, to migrate back to their respective villages. In planning and organizing this reverse migration the corporate sector has a crucial role to play as well as a strong vested interest in its success. A key role would be played by the proposed network of gaushalas to provide employment to the village folk on their return to the villages.

### **4. The rural energy scene-animal power and cattle-care**

According to an estimate, bullock power in India is providing an equivalent of about 40,000 mega watts of rural energy and still we do not have a breeding policy which will enhance this capacity. In fact the cattle breeding policy in India has been primarily to increase milk production, which has resulted in the buffalo replacing the cow. It is well known that milk pricing is done on the basis of its fat content, and buffalo milk scores over cow milk in this regard. The process of milking cattle has also changed in recent times. Now, cattle are injected with oxytocin before the milking time, which induces labor pains resulting in milk becoming painfully extractable mechanically, thereby rendering the calves redundant. Earlier,

the calf taking one udder to induce the mother cattle to give milk was a natural process without the pain associated with mechanical milking. This painful process is reportedly adversely affecting the quality of milk, which is being consumed by all and sundry. The redundant male calf is being led to the meat trade, which is getting special incentives for export as well. The male, progeny, the source of rural energy, both in cows and buffaloes, is thereby gradually getting the go-by in the country. So, not only is the country's breeding policy indifferent to the rural energy potential of cattle, the milk trade itself is decimating the male progeny. Natural breeding of cattle has been replaced by artificial insemination for milk production, which can do without the male. So all our superior breeds are heading towards extinction.

In this context, prohibition of cow slaughter, which is one of the Directive Principles of State Policy in the Indian Constitution, acquires a special meaning. The main logic of this prohibition was to propagate bullock power and to utilize the dung for rural fuel and manure to ensure soil health. Cow milk was primarily a by-product not for sale, but only for domestic use which incidentally provided a guarantee for proper nutrition to women and children of the house, and the old who took care of the cows. With the arrival of the diesel driven tractor, bullock power came to be looked down upon. Though it is still the mainstay of rural energy in large parts of the country, and with the buffalo becoming the main supplier of commercial milk, the cow and its progeny, the bull got short shrift in the eyes of the development planners as well. In the rural households also, the buffalo displaced the cow, and all the milk began to be sold leaving nothing for the women and children. A sharp decline in the nutritional status of women and children in rural areas, a factor contributing to the population explosion in the rural areas, can be clearly attributed to the eclipse of the cow, which was revered since the ancient times.

Cattle population in India was never a burden on the land as they grazed green or dry grass and ate the dry agricultural waste, and provided valuable dung for fuel and manure, apart from being used for draught power. A policy to reduce the cattle population and promote export of meat, in order to reduce the biotic pressure on land is clearly counter-productive in the long run, as there is no cheap substitute available for fuel and manure in place of dung. The use of bullock power is still the only sustainable energy avenue available to the Indian farmer, what with the diesel driven tractor not being able to put in its full capacity utilization due to shortage of diesel. The damage done to our agricultural lands, especially in Punjab and Haryana, due to excessive application of chemical fertilizers and pesticides, as well as canal irrigation is now well known. It is estimated that over twenty million hectares of prime cultivable lands have gone out of cultivation and have become degraded because of excessive irrigation and faulty agricultural practices. These lands need urgent treatment to restore them to health again through the application of

cattle manure, bio-fertilizers, cow urine etc, to be supplied to the farmers through the proposed network of gaushalas, which would be home to domestic cattle who have ceased to give milk. There is, therefore, a clear case for bringing back the cow as an essential member of the rural household. Gosewa based lifestyle was a part of our cultural tradition, adoption of which would also restore the nutritional status of women and children in the rural areas, a key factor to counter the population growth rate. Gosewa would also give social status and employment to rural women, apart from of course, reviving the sagging fortunes of the bull, the prime mover of rural energy. There is now an urgent need to evolve appropriate bullock driven rural technology to reduce the drudgery of rural life, especially for women and the old persons. Once these domestic cattle cease to be useful to their owners they could be maintained by the nearest gaushala which could utilize the dung and cattle urine for various purposes. These gaushalas could also become the nucleus for village industries etc.

## **5. Sustainable agriculture**

Inadequate availability of drinking water in a large number of villages of the country is a recent phenomena consequent to overdrawal of ground water by some people for taking recourse to high cost, high yielding agriculture. The village well and the village tank have existed in India for centuries and were always a steady source of supply of drinking water to humans, their cattle as well as for irrigating their lands. Today, the village tanks have silted-up and the village wells have dried up on account of the life-style changes that have taken place in rural areas. De-silting of the village tank was done as a ritual by the village potters who provided pots of various shapes and sizes to store grain, milk, curd, water as well as for making utensils for domestic use like “kullhar” for drinking water. Both the village well and the village pond have dried-up primarily because of the high cost agriculture undertaken for quick profits, which necessitated overdrawal of groundwater. It needs to be appreciated that promoting practice of sustainable agriculture is essential if we have to make availability of drinking water possible throughout the country in the foreseeable future, at a reasonable cost. Sustainable agriculture is, therefore, not a matter of choice but a necessity. India’s drive to maintain self-sufficiency in food grains production and thereby retaining her independent stance in the comity of nations in her foreign policy is, very much dependant upon her success in promoting sustainable agriculture to maintain high productivity levels in irrigated arable areas and to increase the same in rainfed areas to at least twice their existing productivity levels. Sustainable agriculture, thus, provides a solution that is far-reaching and appropriate. It is an approach to land and water management that is ecological, economical, equitable and efficient in such a way that whatever we take from nature is suitably returned back so that nature retains its regenerative capacity. It ensures that future generations inherit from us the same or added environmental capital than what we inherited from our forefathers.

## **6. Sustainable rural development**

It is worth quoting Gandhiji here who once said “there is enough to meet everyone’s needs but not enough to meet everyone’s greed.” Curbing the greed of the high and mighty, bent upon appropriating what is available to launch on a fast-track growth at the expense of the less fortunate members of society, must become an essential task of good governance, if essentials for a good life are to be provided to everyone. It is in this context, that sustainable agriculture as a strategy for promoting sustainable development becomes relevant to a strategy for poverty alleviation in order to make it possible to meet the essential needs of all. The importance of animal power and cattle-care as a source of rural energy and essential nutrition for women and children in the rural areas has already been highlighted, and the special relevance of the tradition of Gosewa in this regard has been mentioned. We may as well define sustainable rural development to be the accumulated result of:

- a Gosewa based lifestyle,
- a Goshala based rural industrial system, and
- a Gauchar based sustainable agricultural system.

Bringing this about would require determined application of science and capital to a process of development, which would be entirely in accordance with the genius of the Indian people as well as eco-friendly and popular.

## **7. Protection of environment and restoration of the eco-system**

Rainwater is the most important source of pure water on earth-both for irrigation as well as for drinking purposes. Sadly, in India we are presently not utilizing more than 45% of this water that falls on our landmass. As a result, most of the rainwater flows away and is not conserved. Thus, the hydrological cycle, constituted by the perennial evapo-transpiration, condensation and precipitation of water in its various forms-solid, liquid and gaseous, which re-cycles the atmosphere’s water resources under the overall power of the Sun’s solar energy, remains untapped by us. During the course of each new cycle this water strikes the earth with renewed vigor and vengeance bringing greater destruction on the top-soil by eroding it ever so violently, since there is very little vegetation covering the soil in large tracts of our landmass. As a result, land is not only adversely affected by loss of fertile top-soil accumulated through centuries and the consequent decline in agricultural productivity, the lower reaches also suffer from repeated spells of floods and loss of life and property. Protection of environment, thus, becomes a very essential part of our strategy of sustainable agriculture, which by the way, is the only activity, which involves a large percentage of the population in covering the landmass with vegetation of appropriate kind so essential for rainwater conservation. Sustainable agriculture, thus, becomes a strategy also for land management to promote rainwater conservation, soil conservation as

well as for the conservation of other natural resources. It is now being realized that the very process of development should be such that whatever disturbance takes place during the process is set right through the development process itself. Application of science to the development process has to be, therefore, primarily, for the purpose of bringing about eco-restoration through the process of development, as well as to modify the ill-effects of pollution to make the resulting effluents not only harmless but useful also.

## **8. Energy aspects in the context of sustainable agriculture**

Population growth and economic development demand increasing productivity per unit area of cultivated land. Considering the inelasticity of arable land area in India, this is being achieved so far primarily by adopting energy (commercial) intensive methods, namely, use of hybrid seeds, irrigation, chemical fertilizers and pesticides, and mechanization of agricultural operations. But, considering India's meagre fossil fuel resources and large human and animal power base, risks of overdependence on oil imports as also the ecological imperatives, make this strategy unsustainable.

In 1960, only 1.6% of India's final energy consumption was used directly in agricultural sector; in 1990 it had risen to 9.2%, 58% of it being petroleum based. According to the 8<sup>th</sup> Plan document, in 1996-97, 20% of the total HSD and 23% of the total electrical energy consumption would have been used directly in the agricultural sector (mainly tractors and pumpsets). Indirect energy is consumed in this sector for production of fertilizers, pesticides and agricultural machinery. Fertilizer use in India has grown from 65,600 m.t. in 1950-51 to 13.87 million m.t. in 1995-96 (about 80 kg/hectare net sown area). Gross energy requirements for production of nitrogen, phosphatic and potassic nutrients is about 80, 12 and 8 MJ/kg respectively, and for pesticides 100 MJ/kg. It means over 2 kg coal or 1.33 kg oil per kg N-fertilizer!

India has only 5.7% of proven coal reserves and 0.4% of proven hydrocarbon reserves of the world while it has 1/6<sup>th</sup> of its population. But compared with other major agriculture producing countries, India has an abundant resource base of renewable energy-human, animal and plant. However, India's dependence on commercial energy has been growing from 19.8 m.t.o.e in 1953-54 to 101.5 m.t.o.e in 1990-91, @ 4.52% per year.

The situation of petroleum products is even more critical. Use of oil and gas grew @ 5.4 % during the 6<sup>th</sup> plan, but @ 6.9% during the 7<sup>th</sup> Plan. Consumption of petroleum products has risen from 17.9 million m.t. in 1970-71 to 75 million m.t. in 1995-96 and is likely to reach 164 (150 as per another estimate) million m.t. in 2010-11. India's self-reliance index of oil has dropped from 70% in 1984-85 to 48% in 1992-93, and is likely to drop

to 27% in 2010-11. Import bill of petroleum crude and allied products has risen from Rs. 7000 crores in 1960-61, to Rs. 10870.0 crores in 1990-91, to Rs. 24095.0 crores in 1995-96, to the likely figure of Rs. 33420.0 crores (\$9.3billion) in 1996-97. This, despite a long spell of low international prices of crude oil, which have just started to rise. Prices of crude oil are highly sensitive to the political situation in the Middle East, which has about 64% of the world's oil reserves and is militarily controlled by USA. Allowing India's oil sufficiency ratio to drop below 50% is a security risk and would impose an intolerable cost of imports.

India's petroleum dependence problem is compounded by its relatively excessive use of 'middle distillates' (HSD and K. oil). So, India must import not only crude but also HSD. This is a result of keeping the HSD price presently only at 38% of that of petrol, while their production cost is about the same. Similarly, the use of scarce electrical energy in agricultural sector is charged at a mere Rs. 0.33/kwh while its supply cost is about 10 times. The result is wasteful and avoidable use of HSD and electricity in agricultural sector.

Conversely, the situation for the traditional indigenous animate energy sources is one of neglect and underutilization. India has 272.5 million cattle and buffalo population, 85 million draught animals and 15 million animal carts. These animals are well integrated into Indian agriculture, economy and ecology, and provide not only draught power but also milk, dung and urine as manure, and a host of valuable products on death. The draught animals constitute together 40 million HP mechanical power. About 60% of the sown area covered by smaller holdings still depend on draught animals.

Similarly, the use of 'bio-fertilizers', namely animal wastes, crop residues, human and municipal wastes, aquatic plants and wastes, green manuring and leguminous crops and trees, and biological N-fixation, optimally integrated into the nutrient supplies, could considerably reduce the demand for energy intensive fertilizers. Bio-fertilizers have the additional benefit of preventing soil degradation caused by heavy use of chemical fertilizers, and also preventing the widespread pollution caused by the leaching of fertilizers and pesticides (presently 60-70% of fertilizers is washed away and in some cases less than 1% of pesticide may be actually used up).

But for the enormous subsidies given to energy intensive fertilizers and pesticides, HSD and electricity, Indian agriculture would be far more sustainable, self-reliant and environment-friendly. We also need to direct R&D inputs into developing the efficiency of traditional resources, e.g. a draught animal is now used only for say, 300 hours a year on average as against easily possible 1000 hrs, and an animal cart could carry 2-3 times the load with improvements in its design and manufacture. Simultaneously, much energy could be saved with better upkeep of



pumpsets, and other machinery, and judicious use of fertilizers, pesticides and irrigation (such as drip and sprinkler irrigation).

But all this is possible only if the inherent limitations to the availability and increasing use of fossil fuel energy in agriculture sector are recognized and alternative strategies based on our resource base and opportunities are adopted.

## **9. Role of the corporate sector**

The advent of liberalization in the Indian economy has changed the ground rules of the development process. Gradually, state-led and state-sponsored development is getting tapered off, and corporate sector and Multinational Corporation (MNC)-led development process is taking its place. This process of development is going to create islands of prosperity here and there, but is likely to leave the rest of India literally untouched. The viewpoint of investors who see India as a huge market is not likely to be borne-out simply because the vast Indian masses are never likely to have enough purchasing power to benefit the MNCs. The only way the rural masses in India can be helped is by increasing their purchasing power by finding or creating markets for the products of village industries. The quality of these products may need improvement and modifications, but there is no doubt that India itself can become a market for its own village industries. Can the corporate sector in India play this role of creating an assured market for her village industries? Can the corporate sector strive to make “going back to the villages” as attractive to our youth as the “Wild West” was, once upon a time to the American people? If the answer to this is in the affirmative, then there is real hope for the Indian masses. This, in fact, is the key to the whole plan of reverse migration that has been mooted in this paper. It has already been argued that if our metropolises are to be saved from the population explosion, then the only way to go about it is to trigger off a process of reverse migration. And the only way to do this is to create an assured market for village industries. This would have to go hand-in-hand with setting up a network of gaushalas, one for each cluster of say 10 villages, to also serve as a hub for village industries, which could use the hide and bones of cattle dying naturally as raw material. The captains of Indian industry have now to put their heads together to hammer out a plan for creating a network of gaushalas as centres of village industries, and then creating the required assured market for their products, by extending this facility through their existing marketing infrastructure.

## **10. The plan for reverse migration**

It is estimated that the number of urban slums could be conveniently put at a round figure of about 5000, each with a population of, say 20,000

persons, which gives a total of 100 million population in the urban slums. This works out to almost 10% of the entire population of India. The plan is to train, after proper identification, 100 persons from each of these 5,000 conglomerations to take the lead in a planned process of reverse migration. In other words,  $5,000 \times 100 = 5,00,000$  (about 5 lakh) persons have to be given training to enable them to pick up the threads of a new life in the villages they came from. The success in this endeavor is likely to prompt others to follow suit. In any case, the proposed plan is to help half the existing population of urban slums, i.e about 50 million, to migrate back to their respective villages. The other half, i.e. about 50 million would remain where they are. In any case, the process of reverse migration once triggered off would prevent further migration from the villages to the urban slums. Otherwise, if the existing process of rural-urban migration continues unhindered, then the population of the urban slums is likely to swell to unmanageable dimensions, thereby creating a situation in which a larger population of India would be bereft of elementary primary healthcare services. In other words, the cesspool of viruses and bacteria located in the urban slums would continue to swell with unabated rural-urban migration. The living conditions of the remaining 50 million people who would continue to reside in the slums could be improved to ensure proper education, healthcare etc., and the whole plan when implemented would have a soothing effect on the demographic profile of the metropolises. These 50 million people who stay back could play a vital role in building the market for the products of their respective village industries. A plan to take up training of 5,00,000 persons from the 5,000 urban slums in order to enable them to start a new life in their respective villages has been prepared by two voluntary associations. These are:

- The Yug Nirman Mission (YNM), Shantikunj, Haridwar, and
- Research and Extension Association for Conservation, Horticulture and Agro-forestry (REACHA), New Delhi.

The success of this venture depends to a great extent on the role the corporate sector in India is going to play in assisting the process of setting-up of a network of gaushalas in the country, and in creating an assured market for the products of village industry which will come up gradually.

## **11. Creation of a casteless society**

A significant characteristic of the slum dwellers in India is that though they are the poorest of the rural poor, their stay in the urban slums has shorn them of their village based caste prejudices, while their brethren back home are still steeped in them. It is this pre-occupation with caste prejudices at the village level which is at the back of the entire political process in India getting vitiated along caste lines. There is a great opportunity to use this people's plan for reverse migration as a people's

plan to rid our villages of their caste factions and prejudices as well. The 5, 00, 000 persons who are being trained for starting a new life in their native villages are also being imbued with this mission to fight the caste prejudices of their brethren in their villages. The vision of the founding fathers of the Indian Constitution to create an India where people of different castes and creed would live in harmony may become a reality if this plan succeeds.

## **12. Summing up**

Promotion of sustainable agriculture through maximization of rain-water conservation and cattle-care, as a strategy for promoting sustainable rural development, leading to poverty alleviation has now to be taken up in all seriousness. These measures to ensure a good life for all are not picking up in spite of policy pronouncements to this effect from time to time. The reason for this is clear to see, that we as a people do not seem to be involved in the entire development process initiated by governmental planning, in spite of the fact that parliamentary democracy is supposed to be functioning satisfactorily in the country for the last 50 years. What exactly is missing in the whole development process? Have the planners been able to find out what the people need or are they busy making plans according to their own wisdom and assessment of what the people need? Keeping the energy scenario in India and the whole world in view, how long can the fast track high-yielding agriculture, hooked to higher and still higher doses of imported chemical fertilizers and pesticides, be sustained? Has the so-called de-centralization process been able to involve the rural poor and the urban poor in preparing plans for their own development? The rural landless migrating to the urban slums today number about 10 crores and lead the most miserable existence possible, next to the vulgar display of urban wealth. While the census figures mention that 27% to 30% of urban population resides in these slums, this figure for Mumbai is 50% and for Delhi it is 40%, and is likely to increase rapidly. How long will this in-equality co-exist cheek by jowl for such a long time without flaring up into uncontrollable violence? Such a process may well start from Mumbai, and then Delhi will not be far behind. It is known that there is no primary health care system to serve the urban poor living in the slums? The only way to improve the quality of life in the urban slums is to decongest them to, say half their existing population. How can reverse migration from urban slums to the rural areas be triggered off? The only way this seems possible is to generate employment in the rural areas through village industries based on agricultural produce, which in turn can be sustained only if there is an assured markets for products of village industries. In other words, the only way our towns and cities can be saved from certain disaster is to create assured markets for the products of village industries. Can the captains of Indian industry and other entrepreneurs of our country be convinced of this logic of creating assured markets for village industries as the only way to save the cities? Why has the nutritional status of women and children in rural areas and urban

slums declined so precipitously during the last 50 years? It is now realized that the population explosion, in large measure is a consequence of poor health and nutritional status of women and children in the country.

These are uncomfortable questions, but if an attempt is made to answer them it may throw up an alternative development strategy more in tune with the traditions and culture of this country known as India, that is Bharat. This paper could provide an inkling to what an alternative development strategy might look like, which would also be in tune with her genius. India is a vast country with immense diversity and different development models for different regions could emerge through this alternative development strategy. What should be the mechanism to evolve such different development models to suite the requirements of different regions of the country in a manner, which will enable the involvement of the local people in planning and implementing them? This is a question I would like to leave to the top planners, captains of industry, intellectuals as well as development experts of our country, to answer.

### **13. 50 years of independence**

India completes 50 years of independent existence on 15<sup>th</sup> August. 1997. This is the time for stocktaking. What have we done with our freedom? Have we achieved what we set out to achieve in 1947? Have we lived upto the vision of the founding fathers of the Indian Constitution? Where have we gone wrong? Why haven't we done as well as we could have done? These are questions which all the people of India should ask themselves. A diagnosis of what went wrong would have to be peoples' diagnosis, not the diagnosis of this or that segment of our society. While we have done wonders, we could have done better and more. I am proposing a tentative list of points which we may pose to ourselves in the process of introspection, along with many more that one or another may like to raise.

- The Constitution of India is a MANIFESTO FOR TOTAL REVOLUTION evolved by the freedom fighters for India's war of independence. How have the various instruments of the Constitution functioned in the last 47 years? A review would throw a lot of light on what the country has been upto. Each institution should address this on its own, apart from outside experts also evaluating their role and performance.
- The leading lights of the freedom movement Swami Vivekananda, Mahatma Gandhi, Sri Aurobindo, Raman Maharshi, Rabindra Nath Tagore, Sir Syed Ahmad, Subhash Bose, Jawaharlal Nehru and others saw the liberation of India as essential for the whole world. Indian Independence signaled the end of colonialism, and political domination of one country by another. Where does India stand vis-à-vis the rest of the world now after 50 years of

independence? Has India's Foreign Policy kept track of this aspect?

- India's history through the ages has been characterized by a war between her culturally integrating social forces (centripetal forces) and external disintegrating forces (centrifugal forces). The last 2000 years have witnessed this process on an unprecedented and increasingly higher scale, rising now almost to a crescendo level. A special study of the external disintegrating forces operating on India during the last 50 years, and how the country has countered them so far, needs to be carried out.
- A study of the funding of Political Parties so far would throw valuable light on the dynamics of political processes and how they have affected social cohesiveness and whether the vision of an egalitarian social system put forth by the founding fathers of the Constitution is anywhere in sight. Faculties of Political Science in various Indian Universities can take up this subject for doctoral theses. How the political processes have affected the economic development of different groups and communities in India may also be addressed.
- There are many intellectuals who view India's growing population as its biggest problem. Is this perception well understood? How has the country taken care of its women and children?
- Promotion of Sustainable Agriculture through maximization of rainwater conservation and Cattle Care, as a strategy for promoting Sustainable Development leading to Poverty Alleviation to ensure availability of clean air, drinking water, nutritious food, clothing, shelter, irrigation for agriculture, horticulture, agro-forestry, etc. and employment for all, is not picking up in spite of policy pronouncements.
- Rural poverty in large parts of India and migration to urban areas has generated what are known as the 'urban slums', where life is lived at its worst. Can reverse migration be engineered, and if so, how? This will also help in breaking the hold of the caste system in the rural areas.
- The Primary Health Care System in the country is crying for attention. Propagation of the tenets of a healthy lifestyle would reduce this pressure on the PHC system, which can be taken up by voluntary groups.
- Primary or Elementary Education as it is understood today may become impossible to give to the children in future. Similarly, school and college education, as well as University education, also appears to be heading towards becoming more and more inaccessible. How does the country propose to educate its children in future? Voluntary initiatives as distinct from Government efforts have to come forth.
- The elite of the country are proud of sending their educated children abroad. How is this 'brain drain' affecting the country?

- The NRIs are keen to serve India, but a proper mechanism to help them do so is still not in place. Why? Perhaps lessons could be learnt from Israel.
- Mahatma Gandhi, Vinoba Bhave and other leaders laid stress on evolution of 'Lok Shakti' as distinct from 'Rajya Shakti'. Why has evolution of 'Lok Shakti' been so retarded? Voluntary movements such as the Arya Samaj and Sarvodaya have literally petered out. Why has 'Rajya Shakti' mesmerized voluntary initiatives?
- Decision-making on considerations of merit seems to have literally vanished from the governmental sector and public life in general. There is need for putting in place a "procedure legislation" in decision-making in government to ensure transparency and adherence to norms of merit and good governance, on lines of the Procedure Act of USA.

Such a process of mass introspection may throw up answers, which I hope, may provide guidance to the Indian people in the years to come to steer India into the 21<sup>st</sup> century as a modern welfare state.

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