

3. भगवान दास (सं.) – दस स्पोक अम्बेडकर (खंड-2), जालंधर, पृ. 188 बुद्धिस्ट पब्लिशिंग हाऊस, वर्ष 1979.
4. उपरोक्त.
5. डॉ. बी.आर. अम्बेडकर राइटिंग्स एण्ड स्पीचेज, भाग 1, पृ. 5, बाम्बे गवर्नमेंट ऑफ महाराष्ट्रप्रकाशन, वर्ष 1979.
6. उपरोक्त, पृ. 6.
7. बुद्ध शरण हंस – डॉ. अम्बेडकर के विचार, पृ. 5.
8. उपरोक्त.
9. उपरोक्त.
10. उपरोक्त, पृ. 7.
11. डॉ. अम्बेडकर – जातिभेद निर्मूलन (भाषांतर – प्रो. गांजरे), पृ. 33.
12. उपरोक्त, पृ. 34.
13. देवराज चानना – प्राचीन भारतीय गुलामगिरी, पृ. 3.

Self-Help Group and Rural Poverty

Dr. Amresh Kumar*

Abstract:

The majority of poor are living in rural India and the women are its main component. Poverty has taken the shape of 'feminization of poverty' in the country. With this awareness, the planning Commission has focused on women empowerment issues in the Ninth and Tenth plans. To wage a direct war against poverty, the Government has introduced 'Self-Help Group' programme as an innovative and dynamic anti-poverty Programme. National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD) is the main initiator of 'Self-Help Group' (SHG) movement started from 1986-87 in India. Now the various Departments of both Central and State Governments, nationalized commercial banks, regional rural banks, co-operative banks and societies and non - Governmental organizations have joined the SHG movement as promoters. SHG are the best facilitators of rural employment and income generation, income distribution and empowerment of rural women.

Key words: Employment, Self Help Groups, Poverty, Commission, Facilitators

Introduction:

Several attempts have been made by the thinkers and earlier researchers to define the term 'Poverty'. In simplest form poverty means the state of being poor. But the term poverty has multi-dimensions. Three perspectives have been used to define the concept of poverty. Firstly income perspective of poverty defined poor as people having income below the poverty line. Secondly the basic needs perspective of poverty defines poor as the people who are unable to spend on minimum basic needs like food, shelter, clothing etc for their normal activities. Under this context V.M.Dandekar and Nilakanth Rath define poor people as "those who cannot afford a diet which yields them minimum nutrition requirement for 2250 calories per day" Thirdly the social perspective of poverty defines poverty as "intolerable life conditions including social,

*Assistant Professor, Economics, GPSVTT B.Ed College, Hardasbigha, Patna

economics, political, health and others." According to Prof. Jean Dreze and Amartya Sen "poverty means capability deprivation". However, the development economists define poverty as the deprivation of opportunities and choices that denies social, political, economic and human rights and claims and the decent standard of living.

The poverty incidence estimators like B.S.Minhas, Bardhan, Dandekar and Rath have categorized rural poor as landless agricultural labourers with small holdings, non-agricultural rural labourers, small land operators, open unemployed and all types of destitute residing in rural areas.

In India the monthly per capita consumption expenditure on minimum requirement of physical quantity of food that gives intake calories 2400 is used as poverty line in rural areas. Poverty line serves as a 'cut-off line' for separating the poor from non-poor. P.D.Ojha, P.K. Bardhan, B.S.Minhas, M.Ahluwallia, Dandekar and Rath, Seventh Finance Commission of India, Sixth Five Year Plan, Jain and Tendulkar, Planning Commission Expert, Group, World Bank, National Sample Survey Organization (NSSO) and others have estimated the poverty line and incidence of poverty in both rural and urban areas process. In 2004-05, the NSSO estimated the poverty line-per capita monthly consumption expenditure, as Rs.356 for rural areas and Rs.538 for urban areas and headcounts or incidence of poverty in rural area is 221 million and 81 million in urban area and the total is 302 million in India. As stated by Amartya Sen, one should not think poverty alleviation in terms of raising income and per capita income but it should be in terms of enhancement of people's capability to lead minimally acceptable lives. Hence Amartya Sen advocated the social indicators like safe drinking water, health care education, clothing and shelter as the measure of poverty.

Discussion:

Why rural poverty?

There are several causes for poverty in India. As per S.D.Naik the long run British colonial rule, the progressive proletarianization of labour, low agricultural productivity and hand loan and village industries detriment by British trade policy were the causes for poverty in India during pre-independence period.

During the post-independence period, the incidence of rural poverty has increased to 221 million 2004-05. The rapid growth of rural

population and agricultural labourers, failure of land-reforms, rural indebtedness, low wage rate, instable agricultural income and output, inflation and the adverse effects of new agricultural strategies are the main causes for rural poverty. In addition, the rural people are also responsible themselves for the poverty due to their personal reasons like bad habits, physical disablement, unwillingness to work etc. The rural people are often and often exposed to the natural calamities like flood, drought, tsunami, earthquake, epidemics etc which generally would reduce them to poverty.

What the Government did?

The Government has implemented a series of poverty alleviation programmes. The Planning Commission has the belief that employment is surest way to enable the rural poor to cross the poverty line. Land-Reforms were implemented to re-distribute the land holdings among the small farmers and landless labourers. But progress of these measures was less than satisfactory. Based on trickle - down theory, agricultural development programmes were implemented during the plan period, The Green revolution took place and agricultural production was increased much but they failed to solve rural poverty problem. The trickle down theory is challenged by a good number of economists. They argued that the agricultural growth might have had some link with income generation for the rural poor till the mid of nineteen sixties which increased the use of labour and thus benefited the rural poor. But according to Bardhan the new agriculture technology has stopped the trickle down effects i.e. machines and landlords have displaced the agricultural labourers, particularly women workers which reduced their income level.

In the seventies, for the first time Government used Holistic approach i.e. rural development and rural employment programmes for eradication of rural poverty. The Fifth Plan proclaimed poverty alleviation as one of its principal objectives. Small Farmers development Agency (SFDA), Marginal Farmers and Agriculture Labour Development Agency (MFALDA), Drought Prone Area Programme (DPAP), Crash Scheme for Rural Development (CSRE), Pilot Intensive Rural Employment Project (PIREP) and Food for Work Programmes implemented under an ad-hocist approach. But these programmes utterly failed to lift the rural poor above the poverty line.

In the latter phase of nineteen seventies, Government had implemented three major anti-poverty programmes namely Integrated Rural Development Programme (IRDP), National Rural Employment Programme (NREP) and Rural Landless Employment Guarantee Programme (RLEGP).

IRDP was introduced in 1978-79 with the initial coverage of 2300 development blocks. It consisted of both Government subsidy and institutional credit at the ratio 1:2. The people below the poverty line were its beneficiaries and it aimed at supplementing the assets and income of the target group. During 1990-99, 20 million families were benefited under this programme. But there were lot of leakages, mismanagement of fund in its implementation. The IRDP was restructured into a single self-employment programme called "Swarna-Jayanti Gram Swa-Rozgar Yojana (SGSY) and it came into implementation since April 1999.

Food for work Programme (FWP) was restructured and renamed as "National Rural Employment Programme" (NREP) in 1980. It generated 1500-2000 million man days' employment during 1985-89 by spending Rs.2940 crores on development of rural infrastructure. The wage rate paid under this programme was lower than market wage rates. The selection of beneficiaries was also not proper. To supplement NREP Government launched 'Rural Landless Employment Guarantee programme (RLEGP) in 1983. Since the objectives of both were same, Government merged them into a single programme called 'Jawahar Rozgar Yojana (JRY) in 1989. The programme solely targeted to help the rural poor below the poverty line but preference was to be given to schedule castes, schedule tribes and freed bounded labourers. The programme is being implemented under 80:20 centre-state assistance. In 1993-94, the JRY programme was modified and implemented in three streams: Indira Awas Yojana and Millions of Wells Scheme is the first, additional allocation to identified 120 backward district is the second and the third stream is special innovative projects. Watershed Development, Waste Lal Development, Operation Black Board etc innovative and special employment projects were implemented generate employment opportunities in rural area However the target of remained as distant goal.

The United Progressive Alliance (UPA) centre Government launched National Rural Employment Guarantee Programme (NREGP)

in February 2000 under the provisions of National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, 2005. It is 80:20 centre-state funding programme. The NREGP gives the guarantee of minimum 100 days employment in a year for at least one adult member in a family. The NREGP is differer from the other employment generation programmes. Gives people work entitlement and makes the administration responsible for accountability. All the anti-poverty programme so far implemented by the Government have two objectives namely (i) creation of Self-employment and wage-employment and (ii) food security for rural poor. The former president APJ Abdul Kalama too suggested investments in diary and animal husbandry, poultry, forestry goatry, fisheries, cottage and smallscale industries etc. under his PURA (Providing Urban amenities in Rural Areas) programme.

Which is the right approach to eradicate the rural poverty?

In rural India, the poorest among the poor are women. The women empowerment through self-help programme could help to prevent the feminization of poverty. The Self-Help Group (SHG) is an informal organization of 10-20 persons from the homogeneous poorer section of the society. It is controlled and managed by the members. The regular saving contribution to corpus fund is the eligibility to join the SHG. The mutual trust is the spirit of the organization. It has its own set of rules and regulations. There is transparency and accountability in SHG transactions. The SHGs are formed by the promoters like banks, NGOs and Government Departments such as Department of Women and Child Development etc. There are various categories of SHGs. Some are women SHGs and some other are men SHGs. My present research study is concern to women SHGs. Some SHGs have bank linkage programmes and some other SHGs have development linkage programmes. There are direct and indirect SHG models, it depends upon the type of promoter.

To promote self-help and mutual help, savings, micro-enterprise, credit linkage with credit institutions etc are the main objectives and functions of SHGs. The self-help groups are functioning as the agent of development at the grass-root level and the primary units in the development process of the country. The SHGs empower women in various respects. They provide women access to economic resources. They enable women to participate in decision-making at every level on

every financial and non-financial issue. They improve the socio-economic status of the women. They change women from housekeeper to organizer, manager and decision-maker.

The Self-Help Group movement has been initiated in India, with a view to facilitate poor rural women to avail bank credit, a pilot project for micro credit by linking SHGs with banks has been launched by NABARD. Reserve Bank of India directed the commercial banks to actively participate in this linkage programme. However the SHG movement was initially started as micro-finance institution movement has now taken the form of women empowerment paradigm as a group approach to eradicate rural poverty. The constitutional support to socio-economic justice and the international obligations have encouraged India to endeavor to initiate the self-help movement in the country. In India, the number of SHGs has increased from 2122 in 1994-95 to 21.01 lacs in 2005-06. Meanwhile the number of SHGs having bank loans increased from 1502 to 4.83 lacs; the total amount of bank loans increased from Rs.179 lacs to Rs.3096.13 crores and the number of families loan availed increased from 25534 to 7238835. There is uneven geographical distribution of SHGs in the country. Andhra Pradesh alone has 30.5 percent of the total SHGs of the country. The lowest percentage i.e. 0.19 is in Punjab. The growth is very low in states like Assam, Bihar, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan where the social environment is totally unfavorable to rural women empowerment. However, 488 districts in all the states and Union Territories are covered under SHGs-banks linkage programmes having linkage with 444 banks including 44 commercial banks, 191 RRBs and 209 co-operative banks with the association of 2155 NGOs. The Union Government has shifted its approach from minimal approach to integrated approach so it established Micro Finance Development Fund with NABARD in 200-01. Moreover the Government also allowed foreign investment in micro-credit field. In return SHGs have achieved the expected results in income and employment generation activities. They have organized productive activities and enhanced their savings and investment levels. They have empowered the rural poor women to some extent and enabled them to cross the poverty line.

Conclusion:

The entire comprehensive poverty eradication programmes implemented by Government, however, have two different objectives

viz creation of self-employment and wage-employment in rural area and food security to the rural people. But the major problem of these programmes is to organize public works to create durable assets by assigning them to contractors. The contractors recruit the labourers at low wage, complete the work in short-period and maximize their profits. But the solution to the rural poverty will require that the small farmers must be also given an access to land-augmenting innovation along with programme of well-conceived public works.

In addition, the rural industrialization with labour-intensive technique should also be taken seriously for alleviation of rural poverty. As suggested by the former President Dr. APJ Abdul Kalam, "Providing Urban amenities in Rural Areas (PURA) programme needs to be implemented to create new growth centers to take up investments in dairy and animal husbandry, poultry farming, fishing, forestry, goatry, small scale and cottage industries etc." Encouragement of minor irrigation, creation of self-employment opportunities and development of educational facilities in rural areas programmes will definitely help to eradicate the rural poverty. Self-Help Groups Programme is the right approach to create self-employment opportunities so as to supplement the income and assets of the rural poor. The SHG programme provides the rural poor women the access to micro-credit. It encourages rural women entrepreneurship and rural women empowerment. To resume the SHG programme is the right participatory approach for eradication of rural poverty and a paradigm of rural development.

References:

1. Dash, BM, Self Help Groups; Viable tool for financial inclusion, financing Agriculture. A National journal of agriculture and rural Development December 2000, pp 09-11
2. Bardhan P. and C Udry (1999) Development Micro Economics, Oxford University Press.
3. Feurestein, MT (1997) Poverty and Health, Reaping a Richer Harvest, Macmillan'
4. Ray Debraj (1998) Development Economics Princeton University Press.
5. Narayan D (2002) Rural Poverty Alleviation SHGs and Panchayats ND Publishers New Delhi.

