

Why Dalits Remain Backward?

Bharat Jhunjhunwala writes :

Many schemes have been launched by the government for the welfare of Dalits since Independence. The Community Development Scheme of the fifties, Garibi Hatao of the seventies and Rozgar Guarantee of the present time were all designed to do this. But editor of *Dalit Voice*, V T Rajshekar says in his recent book *Development Redefined* that the real objective of these schemes is to strengthen the upper castes and make them richer since the village power structure remains skewed in favour of the rich and dominating castes under these poverty alleviation schemes. On the Rozgar Guarantee Yojana he says it is destined to fail like its Maharashtra predecessor because the poor Dalits lack the mental capacity to benefit from such schemes.

Little attention is paid to social and cultural empowerment of Dalits hence they remain backward. Efforts must be first made to culturally empower the Dalits and raise their mental capacity to benefit from such schemes. Economic welfare of the Dalits cannot be secured without their cultural uplift. Rajshekar is right. A Dalit cannot benefit from easy loan from the bank if he lacks the capacity to buy a buffalo and sell the milk. A concept in economics is of 'absorptive capacity'. The input given for development must be according to the capacity of the people. An internet cafe is not successful in a village because the village does not have the capacity to send e-mail or browse on the net. A small town cannot absorb an airport because they have no urgent business to attend to in the capital city. A doctor prescribes drugs according to the body weight of the patient. Similarly, economic schemes must be made keeping the capacity of the Dalit beneficiary in mind. The Dalits are pushed into greater debt and misery by 'development' since cultural aspect is not taking care of just as a heavy dose of drugs causes harm to a sick infant. Dalits take loans for purchasing a buffalo but spend the money in buying liquor or purchasing a motor cycle since they do not have the mental capacity to do business. They are thus pushed deeper into the pit of indebtedness and poverty, courtesy 'development'.

It is necessary to raise the self-esteem of Dalits through glorification of their caste history. The recruits to the army are taking to 'Motivation Centres' where they are shown photographs of past victories of their Regiment and artefacts associated with it such as rifles and dresses. The new recruits develop a sense of pride in the attainment of their regiment. It is seen that Dalits establish statues of Dr Ambedkar holding the Constitution in one hand. They pride themselves on having produced such a great person amidst them. Likewise they should be told about the glories of attainments of their caste and sub-caste. The Maharashtra Government has published the collected works of Dr Ambedkar. Similar publications of the attainments of the many sub-castes should be undertaken.