

Wooing the Poor

B J writes :

Rahul Gandhi is eating and sleeping with the poor. His theory is that the Union Government is doing its best to reach relief to the poor but the State Governments are failing to reach the same to the true beneficiaries. About 25 years ago his father Rajiv Gandhi had said much the same thing—that only 15 paise out of a rupee sent from Delhi was reaching the beneficiaries. That Rahul Gandhi is giving the same explanation is a proof that something is basically wrong with this policy. No improvement has taken place in 25 years despite the Congress having been in power for about 18 of these years.

Writing in *Young India* of October 13, 1921, Mahatma Gandhi had said, "I must refuse to insult the naked by giving them clothes they do not need, instead of giving them work which they sorely need." The Mahatma made a distinction between distribution of clothes and creation of employment. Distribution of clothes does not lead to generation of a long term source of income. It does not remove poverty. It only alleviates poverty for a short time. Gandhiji started the programme of Khadi to make available a long term source of employment and income for the poor. They could not only fill their bellies but live with self-respect with the incomes from spinning and weaving.

Rahul Gandhi also speaks of employment. He sings glories of the Employment Guarantee Scheme. But one needs to examine whether this scheme is like the clothes which Gandhiji did not want to distribute or work which he very much wanted to give. The recipient stands begging in asking for clothes. No source of income is created from such distribution. So also from the Rozgar Guarantee Scheme. The village people beg the Sarpanch; and the Sarpanch begs the Government Officers for jobs. The people feel helpless and down trodden. Their inner energies are not manifested. Putting earth on the road and undertaking miscellaneous works does not create a stable source of income or employment. The beggar remains unemployed for 265 days even if he gets 100 days employment. Had the Mahatma been alive, he would have probably said, "I must refuse to insult the poor by giving them 100 days doles in the form of employment guarantee which they do not need, instead of giving them market for goods they produce which they sorely need." The main question, therefore, is not of reaching the relief sent by the Union Government to the people as made out by Rahul Gandhi. The main question is of implementing such economic policies which lead to generation of market-driven jobs. Thee Government should impose higher excise duty on the goods produced by big companies so that the jobs of weavers are saved and there is no need to run the Employment Guarantee Scheme. But Rahul Gandhi does not like this. He wants the poor to remain jobless and dependent on doles from Delhi.

Lord Shiva gave a boon to Bhasmasura that any person whom he touches will be burnt to ashes. Once Bhasmasura got the boon, he wanted to try it out on Shiva himself. Shiva had to flee to save his life. Similarly, Rahul Gandhi is giving the boon of Employment Guarantee Scheme to the bureaucracy little realizing

that it will bum the Congress to ashes. The people will lose their true livelihoods that the Mahatma had asked for and they will turn against the Congress. □□□