

3 Vadapavs a Day

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ONE VADAPAV IN MUMBAI costs Rs 8, if a person eats three Vadapavs a day (breakfast, lunch and dinner) it means Rs 24, so where is the money for other needs? If Montek Singh Aluvalia is true, urban Indian can live with Rs 32 a day, but for a normal person who lives in Mumbai can physically survive with three Vadapavs day. And he or she would be naked, unhygienic (lack money to buy toilet soap) and finally die at the earliest. This is not an exaggeration, instead it is the hard fact. This is perhaps the first time that Indian poor think of the modus operandi of fixing poverty line. Statistically it is possible for government to fix the criteria for estimating poverty.

Estimating poverty is still problematic in the system, for instance, the report of the task force on Projections of minimum needs and effective-consumption demands (Gol, 1979) was prepared taking into account age, sex and activity specific nutritional requirements and arrived at a per capita norm of 2400 calorie for rural and 2100 calorie for urban and based on this a monthly per capita expenditure (MPCE) of Rs 49.09 in rural and Rs 56.64 in urban was identified as the poverty line in 1973-74. This estimation continued up to 2004-05, however in 2009, Government of India appointed another expert group that reviewed 2004-05 estimates and introduced a new method. According to the new method the uniform recall period of 30 days for urban India and 25.7 percent poverty estimated in 2004-05 was considered as starting point. In addition to that the expert committee imposed on the mixed recall period (MRP) where five low frequency items of clothing, footwear, durables, education and institutional health expenditure had a 365-day-recall period from which an average for 30 days was constructed and the other items continued with a 30-day-recall period. These statistics talk about consumption expenditure of poor in a period i.e 30 days in a year. However, for the people concerned consumption capacity and welfare support are the real matter. Poverty estimation is increasingly considered as an issue of consumption capacity, which is limited to individual capacity. Here is the importance of Planning Commission's statements on poverty.

Rs 25 and Rs 32 is an absurd figure and indeed an insulting one. However, the contested question is whether government offers any secondary income sources such as PDS, Public Health and schooling? Who fix this criterion? Statistically, identifying average related to the number, hence, 25 and 32 is fine for the Planning Commission. 1.21 billion Population of whom majority are poor will significantly reduce average prices. This could be the reason why 25 and 32 came into being. The matter of fact is that poverty estimation is not intended for any plan of action, instead all these are aimed at reducing the government spending for poverty eradication programme. It is a fact that Rs 25 and Rs 32 help survive physically, but not for all.

Rice for Rs 2/kg and other-public distribution may help. Here government is not concerned about the quality of life and upward mobility. The structural inequality will remain same. This is in fact a policy too.

Poverty eradication is an un-finished agenda. This had been an agenda in budgets and five year plans upto 10th plan, however, 11th Plan and budget do not speak much about eradicating poverty. However, it does not mean that poor are getting rich. The 11th plan period marked for many serious policy issues pertaining to poverty and measurement of poverty. For instance Arjun Sen Gupta committee came out with disturbing figures, it said that 80 percent of Indian population earn Rs 20 per day, but, government has not accepted the findings and later appointed Tendulkar Committee to look into it. Moreover, Arjun Sen Gupta committee's findings have been suspended. Sen was trying to establish the fact that majority are poor and 80 percent of the population are impoverished by the government policy. This was in fact a disturbing figure for a country which spends Rs 1,47344 crore for defense and having achieved 8 percent annual economic growth. Reason for suspending Sen Committee's findings is questioned by Planning Commission's new revelations on poverty. What is the difference between Rs 32, Rs 25 with Rs 20?

Planning Commission has not mentioned about the percentage share of the population in urban and rural India who live by Rs 32 and Rs 25. This is in fact a politically significant statistical exercise, the political significance is evident from the lack of effective protest from political parties. Except some comments from Left parties, political parties in the country more or less accept the Planning Commission's statistics on poverty. In fact this Rs 32 and Rs 25 should have troubled the ruling party more than 2G and 3G scams. Even Anna Hazare has no issue with this figure. Why such a consensus?

The number of poor is the problem for both political parties and neo-liberal Ghandians, the reason is simple—lack of policy to tackle poverty and affiliation with corporatization of government and economy. Rs 32 and Rs 25 also illustrate among other things that it is inability of the government to find solution to increasing number of poor. So, 32 and 25 could be considered as an attempt to reduce the 'number' of poor and not 'poverty'. This attempt has got political consensus as well, hence, this will get accepted.

This is an insult to the life and dignity of majority of the people in the country. This is not just an insult, instead it could be considered as an attempt to exclude a vast majority from accessing available welfare measures. BPL status is a criterion to benefit subsidy, so, if government goes ahead with 32 and 25, there will not be many to avail subsidy. Health, education, water, public distribution etc become unacce-ssible to the majority. Who needs a government of this kind? □□□