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HOW TO LIFT PEOPLE OUT OF POVERTY IN INDIA?

REAL ISSUE

As far as poverty is considered, there is urban-rural divide apart from multiple other factors-- caste and community too plays a role. Tribal populace that suffers more from poverty and malnutrition, needs greater push upwards. Groups that were historically ahead had advantage, but certain communities have not been able to benefit as much due to lack of access to education or distance from state capitals and big cities.

The Asian Tribune

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Poverty remains the biggest challenge in South Asia, especially, for India. Despite progress, pushing people out of extreme poverty and welfare schemes for the benefit of poor, eradicating poverty remains a dream & tackling multi dimensional poverty is the toughest challenge for India and Pakistan.

India, the most populous nation on earth, has made fast strides in almost all the fields, and in the last few decades, the country has shown its economic might to the world. The Indian billionaires and business tycoons are now known for their global influence apart from extravagance, opulence and expenditure on events and ceremonies.

From space technology to the growing presence of Indian techies and professionals in the West and their skills that have helped them lead big companies in US, the country has changed a lot. However, the country with a population of 1.42 billion population in 2024 [as per current estimates], there is still a huge section of populace that survives in poor conditions and tens of millions are below the poverty line.

It is a fact that as India is a huge country, even a small percentage of population accounts for a large number, particularly, when compared to many European nations that are smaller than India's states in terms of both area and population.

But, it is a harsh reality that India is home to the largest chunk of poor in the world. The number of people who live in extreme poverty is more than 129 million or 12.9 crore, stated World Bank for the year 2024. Earlier, World Bank had noted decline in extreme poverty.

How big is the figure? That's more than half the population of Brazil, entire population of Japan and a bit less than population of Russia.

Clearly, there are multiple issues. Indeed, poverty is the inability to afford the basic needs--food, shelter, clothing along with indicators like ability or inability to afford health, access to clean water and education. The international poverty line which is now set at 2.15 dollars [extreme poor is one who lives on less than Rs 180 per day].

In India, the issue is multi-dimensional. There is a huge urban-rural divide. Secondly, the socio-economic status and earning depends on factors like caste and community. The tribal populace that suffers more from poverty and malnutrition, needs greater push upwards. Groups that were historically ahead find it comparatively easy to keep themselves up, but certain communities have not been able to benefit from the schemes due to lack of access to education or distance from state capitals and big cities.

Besides, an aspect is the religious minorities and their far lesser representation in government jobs as well as corporate world. Indians dependent on farming, have been the backbone of our economy.

But, small farmers, agricultural labourers are not as lucky. Agriculture is linked to weather and there is a role of corporate groups and middlemen. The farm sector is affected, badly, as a result.

The figure for those living in extreme poverty increases more if the other poverty line is factored in and the scale is earnings of 2.15 dollars daily, 3.65 dollars per day or 6.85 dollars a day. In the last case, the number for poor goes up, significantly. The metrics applied to determine the figure of poor and extreme poor, suddenly changes and so does the figure of poor. The spending capacity and reports about expenditure, provides more insights. But it

can't be denied that reduction of poverty is among the biggest challenges for India, in coming years.

The huge task to eradicate poverty can't be accomplished unless a serious push is given to multiple schemes aimed at welfare and uplift of the historically disadvantaged sections of the Indian society.

Higher cost of education, the cost of living in urban areas, increase in land prices and rent, affordability of health care, food, access to sanitation and water, are needed along with insurance schemes, special investment drives in certain sectors, empowerment of women and new programs to create jobs and raise income.

Unless, all these steps are taken and the think tanks come together to bring a major transformation, the situation won't change much. Indian political class, bureaucracy, intellectual class, experts, economists, scientists need to join heads to eradicate poverty.

Serious efforts to support marginalized groups through scholarships, easy loan, affordable education and emphasis on ambitious welfare measures like Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MNRREGS) are some of the steps that need to be taken.

Increasing pollution, soil contamination, water scarcity and depleting water table are some other major issues. There is need for new strategies and plans for economic growth and the focus on enhancement of skills for poverty alleviation.

Infrastructure building, pouring money in job creation and credit facilities are necessary but similar attention must be given to human indices. All this is a must to realise the aim of reduction in poverty level in India.

“Muslim leaders didn’t raise community’s issues forcefully within own parties & kept their leaders in dark about community’s concerns”

Prominent activist Md Mahir talks about his experiences in politics, society & on Muslim issues.

Mohammad Mahir is one of the most respected social activists in central India. For long an active politician, he turned to activism a few years ago and runs a social organization that is working in most districts of the state & takes up issues concerning Muslims.

In this interview, **SHAMS UR REHMAN ALAVI** ask him about his experiences, his vision and his plans.

Q. What drove you towards social activism & made you float a statewide organization to work among Muslims?

MM: I’d quit politics on my own because I felt it was important to engage more with community through activism and social work. I felt that I must devote myself to the cause that was close to my heart. By then I had realized that a neta or a political representative was more of a service provider to people in terms of civic issues, not a change-maker.

Q. What are the weak points in Muslim community & its approach?

MM: First is the failure to develop a strong social and political understanding among the members of the community. People, parties know it well. Secondly, there is too much of factionalism, mostly, centering around your sect or school of thought. Today, we have people from all sects, with us on this platform. Of course, those with allegiance to different parties, are also with us, as this is a platform for all Muslims.

Q. Tell us your view about role of Muslim youth in the current scenario?

MM: The foremost thing is that Muslims must realize that they need to speak up for themselves. They’ve to come forward, raise issues, act and get them solved. No one is going to come to us, ask us about our problems and then take up steps to redress them. And, no intellectual or liberal or secular individual will speak for you, the onus is on you, first your have to learn to speak for yourself.

Q. The organisation has been working to create awareness and focuses on eradicating social evils. What are your experiences during these drives?



Mohammad Mahir

MM: One of the sad aspects is that on one hand Muslim community has almost complete trust in our religious leaders—the religious leaders who have so much influence don’t take firm stand. There is so much pomp and show, lakhs spent on unnecessary rituals. Almost every Muslim has respect for Ulema, follows them in matters of religion—ranging from moon sighting to stand on any issue, but Ulema don’t take a stand. If even in the locality there is a man who runs a gambling racket, the cleric doesn’t try to stop it. The reply is ‘Allah taufiq ya hidayat dega to woh theek ho jayega’ (God willing, the person would change for good someday). The clergy, particularly, the influential Ulema, shun their responsibility.

Q. What are your views about Muslim leadership & fall in representation of Muslims in politics in central India?

MM: In politics, what we observed was that the leaders were not leaders of the community, served own interests or to some extent the interests of the party. It was a mistake to consider them as Muslim leaders. There was a huge disconnect.

They never told their parties about real issues concerning Muslims and kept them in the dark. They didn’t even put up the genuine demands of the community at the party fora. They used community to strengthen their own position but had little interest in raising the issues of Muslims. They kept parties under false impression that you just need to do particular things and the community would remain with you but the reality was different. In fact, they misled the parties, and the community too suffered as a result.

Q. You have been associated with social groups in the past too. Did your previous experience help you when MP Muslim Vikas Parishad was launched?

MM: Of course, these experiences teach us a lot. I had seen that when a society or group was formed and members would start with high hopes. But it often happened that when the meeting or event was called, suddenly there would be a politician as chief guest and he would be garlanded by a select few, followed by a long speech and all focus would turn on the politician & ability of establishing connection with him, even all attention during the event getting focused on the leader’s arrival, presence and his leaving the scene. All the agenda and issues would be forgotten.

Such forums would just hold events with a particular purpose. The person(s) behind the forum would take charter of demands for community to the politician later on, but the politician would instead ask him about what he personally needed and putting this charter aside, the personal demands (works) of one or two particular persons floating the forum, were taken care of. So it was also a personal benefit exercise and many such groups would come into existence before elections.

Q. After such experiences, how do you deal with politicians to get things done?

MM: We keep an eye on issues pertaining to Muslim community—raise our voice when there are excesses or when our rights are infringed upon. We spread awareness about schemes about Muslims and the budget meant for the community.

The community must know that there are funds for development and they must not be allowed to lapse, and for this officials have to be met. When it comes to issues pertaining to Muslims, we go to everyone, make an effort to reach a solution—raise issue of rights of Muslims, atrocities, false cases, wrongful confinement, demands, education and social issues. We meet everyone, we don’t invite politicians, rather invite bureaucrats and officials. We speak for justice for everyone.

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[This interview was first published online]