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Ideas for a healthier India

Allow the private sector to partner the government in achieving common goals



In 2015, India lost 1.26 million children under the age of five years – more than half of them in the first month of birth. In the same year, we launched eight satellites into orbit simultaneously and executed the unique identification project across more than a billion citizens. This is the dichotomy we confront today – we can send a mission to Mars, yet not reach a village on time to save a mother in labour; we are one of the biggest exporters of software services to the world, yet pay little attention to the health and well-being of our young professionals who make that happen.

This dichotomy should startle us, shock our collective conscience and make us realise that it is time to give healthcare the attention it deserves, both in private life and in public policy. India's journey towards UN Sustainable Development Goal No 3 – “Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages” – will by no means be easy. India faces a difficult dual disease burden – NCDs or lifestyle diseases constitute 63% of overall disease, expected to go up to 78% in a decade. These diseases not only affect the most productive age groups, they also cost seven times more to treat than acute diseases.

Given the magnitude of the problem, it is important to acknowledge that the work of building a healthier India cannot be that of the government alone. If we look at the past decade, it is clear that the private sector has made a significant contribution to healthcare quality, and has emerged as a pivotal supplier of healthcare services. To do this, they have risked large amounts of capital to build infrastructure and import cutting edge technology. Despite facing several challenges, especially around attracting and retaining talent, the sector has managed to excel across the country and attract large numbers of overseas patients too. Truth be told, the private sector has been able to make this progress, because it has learnt to deal efficiently with extensive licensing and regulatory requirements. One can only imagine what it can accomplish when the government puts in place forward-looking policy frameworks, incentives to help the sector not only remain viable, but thrive, and bring down cost of healthcare services for patients.

For this to happen, the following ought to be done. First, accord healthcare “national priority” status both as an industry and in budgetary allocations, which will enable development of innovative long term financing structures for healthcare providers apart from creating an attractive environment for domestic production of medical equipment. Second, retain the industry under “zero-rating GST” category and provide a mechanism under which the industry can avail the benefit of input tax credit. Third, extend the 150% weighted depreciation scheme under Section 35AD of the Income Tax Act, 1961, for a minimum period of five years. Fourth, exempt the sector from Minimum Alternate Tax (MAT) which practically negates the impact of accelerated depreciation benefit provided under Section 35AD. Also exempt REITs/Business Trust structures from long-term capital gains tax, to ensure increased FDI inflows. Fifth, allow a longer window of 10 years to claim the

weighted deduction of 200% of approved in-house R&D activity, and consider increasing the deduction to 250% to provide genuine impetus to indigenous R&D work. Sixth, include “hospital” as an industrial undertaking under Section 72A of the Income Tax Act to create a favourable climate for mergers and acquisitions of hospitals, and revisit Tariffs and Classifications relating to import duty for lifesaving equipment to ensure they are consistently low or even fully exempt lifesaving equipment from duty to ensure lower cost of healthcare services delivery to patients.

Disease is not personal. It is a systemic problem requiring holistic solutions. Our healthcare ecosystem must focus on promoting healthier lifestyles and wellness. Building a healthier India is a joint responsibility of private players and individuals together with the government. There is no magic wand for the complex problems that confront us in healthcare. But there is no reason why we cannot ideate and implement solutions with a sense of urgency that will work effectively for our country. Let us not rest until we reach the youngest, poorest and weakest with the same agility and efficiency with which we reach the privileged.

THE ECONOMIC TIMES

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Five ways Budget 2017 can facilitate farmers



Agriculture should be the focus of this year’s Budget, according to a Twitter poll conducted by the ministry of finance last week that saw some 66% of more than 21,400 respondents seeking a more agriculture-focused Budget. Not infrastructure. Not the services and manufacturing industries. But agriculture. Clearly, to enhance the ‘feel good’ factor, agriculture has to pick up. Demonetisation compelled farmers to move towards cashless payments and digitalisation. Now they need greater ‘ease of doing business’ to harness that momentum. Here are five steps the Narendra Modi government could take to make that possible.

1. Strengthen tenancy laws: Agriculture needs economies of scale. The average farm in the country is 1.15 hectares in size and will shrink further by 2020-21. According to the 2013 Situation Assessment Survey of Farmers/Agricultural Households, you can’t earn a living from a farm smaller than one hectare. To survive, majority farmers rent land. Farmland tenancy is illegal in most states. But unlike manufacturing, farmers can’t relocate to favourably inclined states. In the absence of a law, landowners don’t sign rent agreements and tenant farmers have no rights. Often, the owner leaves land fallow rather than be ‘grabbed’ by a tenant. Tenants don’t invest in the land due to uncertain tenure. A scarce resource is wasted. Legal tenancy will permit effective consolidation for farming without depriving landowners. Tenant farmers will qualify for bank loans. Digitisation of land records will further strengthen property rights and turn rural land into a bankable asset.

2. Liberalise input markets: Unlike manufacturing, farmers cannot freely import or adopt technology. Of the 140 million hectares of cultivated land, nearly 120 million hectares are degraded. Soil health cards will not lead to precision agriculture unless fertiliser, machinery and seed markets are willing to deliver the right input at the right time and the right price to the farmer.

Erratic Pulse

But the fertiliser companies won't because the subsidy regime is choking their business. Politics has stymied new oilseed and pulses technology and distorted commercial pricing when sound science should be the deciding principle. Mechanisation gets 3% of farm credit. Until the upstream business models are corrected, farmers will be exploited by rent-seekers and counterfeiters.

3. Don't mix producer and consumer policies: No sector can survive the kind of political risk that farmers face. Farmers themselves contribute 80% of the capital invested in agriculture. Like other businessmen, they invest in a crop after carefully considering the odds. But often, what starts as a good deal comes a cropper because midway through the marketing year, government coercively 'corrects' prices to protect consumers. When capital is used suboptimally or destroyed, growth weakens. Other investors shy away. Consumers should certainly be protected from food inflation. But not through knee-jerk measures that ultimately ruin rural livelihoods.

4. Encourage loans against harvests: Entrepreneurs need capital. The harvest is a tenant farmer's only renewable asset. Especially for women farmers. Banks, however, are reluctant to lend against small quantities of a crop, with inconsistent quality, stored somewhere far. Moneylenders and middlemen, living close by, step in. Farmers should be taught crop grading and sorting on a war footing so that harvests have standard quality. A regulated electronic repository can digitally maintain records of stored physical crops. Asking financial institutions to lend against these electronic records should be the next logical step.

5. Provide access to efficient and assured markets: The market is efficient when farmers earn more and consumers pay less. Exchange platforms and other electronic markets are designed to enhance competition by connecting the largest number of buyers and sellers in the most cost-effective, transparent and regulated way. Farmer groups must be assisted to use them. Farmers also need a reliable safety net. Unlike other sectors, agricultural markets don't self-correct. Low crop prices neither make us buy more nor prompt farmers to significantly cut production. So, farmers face long periods of low prices interspersed with flashes of high prices. Government procurement is dysfunctional as pulse farmers discovered last summer. Food ministry data shows that for wheat and rice, the maximum procurement centres are in Bihar, where purchase is negligible. Instead, market-based tools should be deployed to include more crops and farmers.

Farm is Forked

Agriculture is a unique business that aims to create a food production, processing and distribution system that is, in all stages, economically viable, socially just, and ecologically sound. The current system does not meet these criteria and is, thus, unsustainable. India's small farmers face proportionally the steepest transaction costs if they wish to participate in modern food supply chains. Poor transportation, storage and communication infrastructure, no access to land, information and expertise, political risk and limited access to financing, which is rooted in the lack of collateral, all add to costs. This confines farmers to subsistence livelihoods. The New Year and Budget 2017 give us yet another chance to make things easier for them.

The writer is chief marketing officer, National Commodity and Derivatives Exchange

यह हिंसा विकास को रोकती है

भारतीय समाज में औरतों के खिलाफ जारी, बल्कि बढ़ती हुई हिंसा को लेकर चिंतित और भयभीत होने की कई सारी वजहें हैं। निस्संदेह, यह कोई नया लक्षण नहीं है, क्योंकि ऐसी हिंसा भारतीय समाज में ढांचागत और स्थानीय, दोनों रूपों में हमेशा से मौजूद रही है। हमें इस तरह की दलील भी सुनने को मिलती है कि इन दिनों ऐसी अनेक घटनाएं हमें इसलिए सुनने को मिल रही हैं, क्योंकि हमारे देश की महिलाएं और लड़कियां अब अपने साथ होने वाली हिंसा को लेकर पहले से अधिक मुखर हुई हैं और ऐसा करने में अब वे सक्षम हैं। लेकिन इसके साथ ही हमें यह भी मानना पड़ेगा कि ्रत्रियों के खिलाफ हिंसा की कितनी घटनाओं को कितना महत्व मिले, यह भी शहरी और वर्गीय पूर्वाग्रहों से तय होता है। उदाहरण के लिए, बंगलुरु जैसे शहर में घटने वाली यौन उत्पीड़न की घटनाओं को राष्ट्रीय मीडिया ने जितनी तत्परता और जोर-शोर से उठाया, वैसी सदाशयता उसने छत्तीसगढ़ की आदिवासी औरतों के साथ सुरक्षा अधिकारियों द्वारा सामूहिक बलात्कार की कथित घटना में नहीं दिखाई। निस्संदेह, बंगलुरु की घटनाएं भी समान रूप से घिनौनी व अस्वीकार्य हैं, पर छत्तीसगढ़ में तो जुल्म उन लोगों ने ढाए, जिन पर सुरक्षा की जिम्मेदारी है।

भारत में औरतों के खिलाफ हिंसा की ज्यादातर वारदातें यद्यपि घर की चारदीवारी में होती हैं, जिनमें दोषियों की पहचान किसी से नहीं छिपी होती, मगर अब सार्वजनिक स्थलों पर ्रत्रियों के खिलाफ हिंसा की घटनाएं तेजी से दर्ज की जा रही हैं, बल्कि ये उन जगहों पर भी होने लगी हैं, जिन्हें इस लिहाज से महफूज माना जाता था। हमारे समाज की इस बुराई के खिलाफ आवाज उठाने की नैतिकता बरतने के अलावा यह भी जानना जरूरी है कि ऐसे दुष्कृत्यों की कितनी बड़ी कीमत हमारी अर्थव्यवस्था चुकाती है। खासकर हमारे उन राजनेताओं (चाहे वे जिस भी पार्टी के हों) के लिए यह जानना काफी महत्वपूर्ण है, जिन्हें सकल घरेलू उत्पाद (जीडीपी) में ज्यादा से ज्यादा बढ़ोतरी सबसे पवित्र चीज लगती है।

भारतीय अर्थव्यवस्था की चौंकाने वाली विशेषताओं में से एक है- इसकी श्रम शक्ति में औरतों की कमतर भागीदारी। यह बात हमारी अर्थव्यवस्था को न सिर्फ बड़े विकासशील देशों की कतार से, बल्कि 'उभरते बाजारों' से भी अलग करती है। काम और रोजगार से संबंधित नेशनल सैंपल सर्वे ऑर्गेनाइजेशन (एनएसएसओ) के सबसे ताजा आंकड़े इस बात की तस्दीक करते हैं कि 15 साल से ऊपर की सिर्फ 25 फीसदी ग्रामीण औरतों को नियमित रोजगार हासिल है, जबकि शहरों की सिर्फ 17 प्रतिशत औरतें नियमित नौकरी करती हैं। ये आंकड़े ज्यादातर विकासशील देशों के मुकाबले हैरतअंगेज रूप से कम हैं। ग्रामीण इलाकों में तो औरतों के रोजगार की दर में पिछले कुछ समय में गिरावट ही आई है। यह स्थिति तेजी से विकास कर रही अर्थव्यवस्था के लिए एक अनोखी बात है।

दरअसल, यह भारतीय समाज में औरतों की दयनीय हैसियत दर्शाती है। उनकी इस हालत के पीछे उनके अवैतनिक उत्पादक कार्यों को नजरअंदाज किए जाने और घर के बाहर रोजगार पाने की इच्छा रखने वाली ्रत्रियों पर शारीरिक, सामाजिक व सांस्कृतिक दबाव बढ़ने, दोनों की भूमिका है। एनएसएसओ ने अपने उसी सर्वे में इस बात का भी खुलासा किया है कि 60 प्रतिशत ग्रामीण महिलाएं और 64 फीसदी शहरी औरतें घर की चारदीवार में अवैतनिक आर्थिक गतिविधियों में सक्रिय हैं। इनमें बुजुर्गों, नौजवानों, बीमारों व शारीरिक रूप से अक्षम लोगों की देखभाल के अलावा, खाना पकाने, कपड़े धोने व साफ-सफाई के साथ घर की दैनिक जरूरत के अन्य काम शामिल हैं। ये ऐसी अनिवार्य गतिविधियां हैं, जिनके बिना न तो कोई समाज, और न ही अर्थव्यवस्था चल सकती है। फिर भी इनकी अनदेखी की जाती रही है और

इनके लिए कोई भुगतान नहीं किया जाता। इस स्थिति के दो बड़े अहम निहितार्थ हैं। एक तो यह कि 'अधिकृत' अर्थव्यवस्था, चाहे वह औपचारिक हो या अनौपचारिक, पूरी तरह से इस अवैतनिक कार्यशक्ति पर निर्भर है, क्योंकि ये अवैतनिक कार्य परोक्ष रूप से अधिकृत अर्थव्यवस्था का आधार तैयार करते हैं। (हमारी अर्थव्यवस्था में सकल उत्पादकता के आकलन के जो तरीके हैं, वे इन अवैतनिक आर्थिक कार्यों का संज्ञान नहीं लेते, और इसलिए भ्रामक हैं- वे कामगारों की संख्या कम आंकते हैं, और इस तरह प्रति कामगार वास्तविक उत्पादकता ज्यादा आंकते हैं) दूसरा, अधिकृत अर्थव्यवस्था औरतों की योग्यता को कम आंककर अपनी आय की विस्तार-क्षमता खुद ही खत्म कर देती है। वास्तव में, औरतों की वैतनिक नौकरी की दर में गिरावट को अवैतनिक कामगारों की संख्या में बढ़ोतरी से सीधे-सीधे परिभाषित किया जा सकता है। इस तरह, औरतों के सशक्तीकरण का अभाव और कुल जमा समाज के स्तर पर कम उत्पादकता- दो ऐसी प्रवृत्तियां हैं, जो एक-दूसरे को बढ़ावा देती हैं।

श्रम-शक्ति में औरतों की कम हिस्सेदारी के पीछे उनकी शारीरिक सुरक्षा की चिंता एक बड़ी वजह है। सार्वजनिक स्थलों पर औरतों के खिलाफ हिंसा एक ऐसा माहौल रचती है, जिसमें न सिर्फ परिवार के लोग, बल्कि खुद औरतें आर्थिक गतिविधियों का हिस्सा बनने से कतराती हैं। जाहिर है, यह पूरे समाज का बहुत बड़ा नुकसान है, क्योंकि यह श्रमशक्ति का नुकसान है। आखिरकार ये महिलाएं अधिकृत अर्थव्यवस्था में अपना सक्रिय योगदान दे ही सकती थीं। सार्वजनिक स्थलों पर होने वाली हिंसा घर के बाहर की अनिवार्य अवैतनिक आर्थिक गतिविधियों में भी (जैसे पेयजल भरना या जलावन की लकड़ी चुनना) औरतों की क्षमता सीमित कर देती है। 'जन-सांख्यिकीय लाभांश' का शोर मचाने वाले नीति-नियंता श्रम-शक्ति से ज्यादा नौजवानों के जुड़ने की बातें तो खूब करते हैं, मगर औरतों के परोक्ष आर्थिक योगदान व उसकी संभावनाओं की पूरी तरह उपेक्षा कर देते हैं। और तो और, न समाज, न हमारे नीति-नियंता औरतों के खिलाफ हिंसा को काबू में कर पाते हैं।

जयति घोष, प्रोफेसर, जेएनयू (ये लेखिका के अपने विचार हैं)



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Play the new copyright act

Singers, composers are denied their due as music companies profiteer



A historic milestone was achieved in the Indian copyrights regime in 2012 during the tenure of Manmohan Singh, when Parliament extensively amended the Copyright Act, 1957, by making provisions that a portion of the earnings realised by music companies and film producers from the sale of film songs and other related materials will go to a corpus fund, which will be distributed among song writers, singers and music composers. The objective was to introduce a level playing field for different stakeholders in the music, film and other creative industries, eliminating unequal treatment to lyricists and music composers of copyrighted works.

But when I recently met Lata Mangeshkar in Mumbai, I was

appalled to know that she is yet to get any payment under the amended Act; it is yet to be implemented. Finance Minister Arun Jaitley was present and assured Lataji that the government will implement this very soon. Looking in-depth yields surprises. Several music companies have purchased copyrights of songs. There are more than 500 television channels in India, besides FM radio channels; every time these television or radio channels play a song, they pay these music companies who have purchased copyrights of the songs. In this way, the music companies earn hundreds of crores, from which they share a small portion with the film producers, making a huge profit from the rest. When Javed Akhtar became a Rajya Sabha Member, he took this issue to Parliament and appealed to the then-UPA government to suitably amend the copyright act so that lyricists, singers and composers can get their share and all the earnings don't go to music companies. Javed Akhtar in fact took a vow that he wouldn't speak in Parliament unless this legislation was passed; it was, despite stiff resistance from the music companies.

As parliamentary affairs minister, I also made an effort for the passage of the legislation and ultimately, it became a reality. The new Act brought the Indian copyright regime in sync with technological advances and prevailing international standards. But the amendments did not go down well with music companies and producers. There is the strong hand of the Indian Performing Right Society (IPRS) behind non-implementation of the legislation. It seems there are many music companies behind this organisation; decades ago, they got an order from a court in Barasat and are now creating hurdles in implementation under the garb of this court order.

When action was initiated against these companies by the Enforcement Directorate and Economic Offences Wing, they blinked and tried to meet Javed Akhtar for a compromise. No compromise has been reached but the hope is that some formula will be devised within a month or so. Now, the question is, will the music companies give lyricists, singers and composers their share of the money they have earned during the last three years, after the new copyright act was enacted? Even now, songs sung by Lata Mangeshkar, Mohd Rafi, Asha Bhosle, Kishore Kumar, etc., are on our lips. They still mesmerise millions around the world. Given that, I feel even sadder to think that we failed to ensure the dues to which these artistes are genuinely entitled. Next year, the 88-year-old Lataji will complete 75 years of her singing career. She started in 1942; the first song "Aayega aane wala" that became a huge hit was recorded in 1948. She was promised Rs 400 for this song — which she is yet to get.

Back then, neither singers, nor composers were given credit rolls or awards. Lataji says giving credit rolls to singers and composers started with "Barsat ki raat" by Raj Kapoor. With time, these artistes became popular across households, often through All India Radio, Vividh Bharati and Radio Ceylon. But despite that, today, senior singers and musicians live in a pitiable condition. Shamshad Begum even died, lacking vital treatment. The eminent poet Sahir Ludhianvi lived a miserable life. After his death, his flat was sold by his housing society; his manuscripts and awards were also sold by the society to scrap dealers.

Lataji lives in a simple Pedder Road flat, her furniture witness to her frugal living. The situation has changed now. Today, singers like Mika Singh earn more than what Mohd Rafi or Mukesh got. Javed Akhtar's battle culminated in the new copyright act. If this act is not implemented because of hurdles created by music companies, it is erroneous. All stakeholders, including artistes, composers and broadcasters, should get their dues. Artistes should get their share from television, radio and internet broadcast too. The present government should immediately implement the act, for which it will be blessed by senior artists who have been, and are still, contributing to India's cultural heritage.

The author is a member of Parliament and former union minister. Views expressed are personal

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Jallikattu questions

Ordinance may not be a good idea while the case is in court. Protests point to the limitations of reform by diktat

The Centre's apparent reluctance to meet the Tamil Nadu government's demand for an ordinance to allow the conduct of Jallikattu events is understandable. A verdict in the case is due from the Supreme Court. For the executive to intervene at this stage and promulgate an ordinance under pressure could amount to disrespect to the judiciary and due process. In 2014, the SC had banned Jallikattu, a traditional bull-taming sport held in rural Tamil Nadu during Pongal festivities, on grounds of cruelty to animals. A review plea by the state government was dismissed by the court, which also held the Tamil Nadu Regulation of Jallikattu Act, 2009 as violative of the provisions of the Constitution.

The Centre then issued a notification allowing the event to be held under strict supervision, which has been challenged in the apex court by Animal Welfare Board of India, People for Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) India, an animal rights NGO and others. However, the SC, while refusing to accept the argument that Jallikattu was a tradition and hence above legal reproach, had agreed to let its supporters press their case in the court. At this juncture, the protestors and the political establishment should wait for the judicial process to be completed and not insist on an executive order.

The Jallikattu debate raises questions about the viability of judicial diktat in reforming traditional practices and customs. Jallikattu has been an age-old — some claim a history of over 2,000 years — communitarian sport with deep cultural roots. The legal battle has transformed it into a matter of Tamil pride. Those who argue for a ban on the sport on the premise of animal rights have refused to engage with the social and cultural arguments raised in its support. The latter, of course, do not make a case for ill-treatment of animals: The SC ruling against Jallikattu had underlined the need to move towards a bio-centric ethics, instead of an anthropomorphic vision of rights. However, such course correction is impossible by diktat. A top-down approach that does not recognise communitarian sentiments is only likely to harden the conservative position and make reforms near impossible.

In the case of Jallikattu, the state government had initiated steps to monitor the rearing the bulls to ensure that they are not ill-treated, as alleged by animal rights activists. The regulation of the sport, rather than an outright ban, may be a better way ahead, given that those in favour of Jallikattu now frame the debate as an assault on Tamil culture and tradition by a deracinated urban elite. The Jallikattu has emerged as a lightning rod for a spectrum of issues, ranging from drought relief to farm debt in the state. In fact, protestors across Tamil Nadu have hinted that their passion for Jallikattu stems from anguish over rural distress. In dealing with the street protests, the political establishment in Tamil Nadu ought not to be blind to the big picture.

Date: 20-01-17

A new class act

Higher education in India is failing. Overhauling the system can salvage it



Let me start with a blunt statement: India's higher education is in general a decrepit, dilapidated system, it's afflicted by a deep malaise. The National Knowledge Commission—Report to the Nation (2006-9) put it only a bit more mildly: "There is a quiet crisis in higher education in India which runs deep". Three widely acknowledged criteria for judging an education system: Access, Equity, and Quality. We have failed our young people by all three criteria.

On account of financial hardship, inferior schools, lack of remedial education and social compulsions for early marriage for girls, the majority of young people from poor families drop out of school at or before completing secondary education. So they have no access to higher education. In addition, for socially disadvantaged groups discrimination at workplace and occupational segregation lower the rate of return from (and hence demand for) higher education for them compared to other groups.

Even for those who complete secondary education and are willing to enter, entry into premier higher education institutions is riddled with various kinds of inequity (only marginally relieved for some people by lower-caste reservations). For example, the currently almost indispensable intensive entry examination preparation in coaching classes (or private tuition) with high fees is often out of reach for poor students. (NSS data suggest that in 2014 nearly 60% of male students in the 18-24 age group cite financial constraints or engagement in economic activities as the reason for discontinuing higher education). The quality of most higher education institutions in India is abysmal. Let me elaborate on this. In terms of quantity the expansion of higher education has been impressive. At the time of Independence, we had about 20 universities and fewer than 500 colleges in the whole country. In 2014-15 there were 760 universities and more than 38,000 colleges, catering to about 34 million students. But the expansion in quantity has often been at the expense of quality.

There is extreme faculty shortage, apart from stark deficiencies in the matters of library books, laboratory facilities, computer and broadband internet, classrooms and buildings, etc. As much as 30 to 50% of faculty positions are vacant in many institutions. Many faculty posts are filled by under-qualified "temporary" recruits. Two-thirds of enrolment in higher education are in private institutions (the majority of them, according to NSS data, say that there were not enough government institutions nearby or where they could get admission). Fees at private institutions are more than double those charged at government institutions. In parts of western and southern India with a large expansion of for-profit private colleges with high 'capitation fees' and politically managed loans from public banks, politicians have entered into the business of higher education in a big way, turning colleges into lucrative degree-giving factories.

There are many familiar accounts of rote-learning, outdated curriculum, and just cramming for exams. There are severe learning deficits in our institutions of higher education. Just to give one example : in a recent survey of M.A. 2nd year students in Economics in a reputed state university in Maharashtra, reported in the Economic

and Political Weekly, students were asked 6 simple questions from the basic class VI school textbook in Mathematics; only 11 out of 200 students could answer all of them correctly.

The (erstwhile) Planning Commission had estimated that only 17.5% of our graduates are employable. Many of the graduates lack even basic language and cognitive skills. In the Information Technology sector the main chamber of commerce, NASSCOM, estimates that even for engineering graduates, only 20% of graduates of engineering colleges in India are employable in IT companies. In terms of quality of post-graduate research, while some of it is no doubt significant, over all our research quality is much below the world average. It has been widely noted that India does not have a single university in the top 200 in the world rankings (China has about 10 universities in that list). The international rankings are far from perfect, but many of the Indian complaints against them sound like 'sour grapes'. There is no doubt that India lags behind (compared to even some developing countries) in most metrics, particularly in terms of population or GDP—full-time researchers, papers published, scholarly citation impact, no. of patents taken out, and so on.

So if most of our graduates learn very little and are not employable, and the very poor drop out anyway, and there is meagre world-class research going on, what is the point of this higher education system?

Reformers, like many in the past, have tried to tweak the system here and there, with very little effect. One has to think in terms of a quantum leap. I know in today's circumstances thinking of a complete overhaul over the next 20 years or so may be recklessly utopian, but not completely useless if we want to think big and draw up a plan for fundamental changes. I am obviously skipping the formidable (though not insuperable) problems of transition and for now mainly concentrating on the major goals. Below is my suggested plan in broad contours. On account of constraints of time and space I am leaving out many of the nuances and qualifications which should be part of a fuller treatment. The financial requirements of the whole plan also need to be worked out.

In my plan all school-leaving students should have universal access at near-zero tuition fees with option to join two alternative streams: One towards local vocational institutes to learn different skills (like plumbing, welding, carpentry, auto mechanics, driving, nursing, policing, firefighting, and so on)

These institutes should be spread out all over a state, with facilities also for evening classes.

After 2 years students with enough class credits and after passing a test will earn a diploma.

Funding of these institutes should be shared between the state and the business community (with a special cess on medium to large business)—the latter will benefit for having the chance (and incentive) to monitor and directly employ (or get as apprentice) some of the graduating students, with recruitment offices in the institute itself. (This draws somewhat on the current German model). The other alternative stream will go to a 3-year local college where general science and humanities subjects will be taught. The main purpose will be to train school teachers, clerks, accountants, actuaries, lab and library assistants, basic programmers, and so on. After 3 years students with enough class credits and after passing a test will earn a degree. The funding will be borne entirely by the state. (This is somewhat like the California Community College model). The top 10% of streams (a) and (b), if they pass appropriate entry tests, will be allowed to enter two alternative streams at a higher level (d) or (e):

Professional schools (in subjects like Law, Business, Engineering and Medical). Here the tuition fees will be high, but with availability of a large number of student loans, repayable in the first five years of the student's getting a job. Some of these schools can be private, others state-funded. Public universities, of which there should not be more than 50 in the whole country. The subjects taught will be specialized branches of science and humanities. Again the fees will be high, but with availability of a large number of student loans, repayable in the first five years of the student's getting a job. The financial and faculty resources that are currently spread thin in more than 700 universities should be conserved and more effectively used in not more than 50 universities (roughly 2 for each major state). The top 1% of streams (d) and (e), if they pass appropriate entry tests, will be allowed to enter a World-class Research University, of which there should be not more than two in

the whole country. Tuition will be free and everybody will have a scholarship. The funding will be entirely by the state. For the sake of stimulating in India the current world-wide trend in collaborative research across disciplines, departments should be reorganized with a focus on multi-disciplinary research. With this structure in mind I shall now have some remarks on the functioning and administration, faculty recruitment and promotion, etc. in these higher education institutions, particularly in streams (d), (e), and (f).

No involvement by politicians, administrators or regulators (like UGC) in personnel selection, particularly in any of those three streams, neither in the selection of officials like a college principal or VC, nor in the appointment or promotion of faculty, nor in the conduct of the examination system. This is, of course, most difficult to achieve in India, and quite contrary to the persistent Government initiatives (including the new Education Bill with the Lok Sabha). Every education minister, either at the state or central level, believes that as the government provides the money, he or she (and the associated bureaucrats) have the right to interfere in the running of the college or the university. This is a curse of the Indian higher education system that must be exorcised. Every three years or so a public college or university should, after an independent audit, be accountable to the legislature on explaining how the total budget assigned has been spent, but the latter should have no say on personnel selection or internal governance matters. The best public universities in the world are mainly free of outside involvement. Faculty selection and promotion should be entirely the responsibility of the faculty in consultation with outside (both outside the department and outside the university) faculty members in peer review. In (a) and (b) institutions the main criterion for judging faculty will be teaching quality (partly depending on serious and anonymous student evaluations for each course). In (d), (e), and (f) institutions, of course, along with teaching, quality of research will be evaluated by peers inside and outside departments and impact of publications, including in recognized international outlets. In new appointments, instead of interviews by closed-door selection committees the candidates on a short list should be invited to present a research paper in an open seminar, where the candidates should be answerable to questions and criticisms by anyone present. After appointment, every three years each faculty member, junior or senior, should have a merit review by a departmental and university committee (with some outside referees). No seniority-based promotion is to be allowed.

With a positive merit review salaries should be adjusted upwards. The salary structure should be sufficiently flexible, within some well-defined general parameters, so that exceptional merit judged by peer review can be rewarded. The current system of academic salary structure linked to civil service rules and scales, periodically revised by the Pay Commission, should be discarded. The new technology of distance learning should be fully utilized in upgrading the teaching and knowledge standards. Particularly in streams (b), (d) and (e) we should take advantage of the basic courses currently being offered in the international Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) system, expanding on a big scale the current Indianised version being tried out in some of the IIT's and IIM's. These courses should be aligned with associated topic-wise tutorials by the current faculty. Apart from quality upgrading, this can also partly relieve our acute shortage of qualified faculty. Of course the constraints of inadequate facility of students in English medium of international teaching and dearth of internet access will continue to limit this for quite some time.

Our higher academic institutions remain in splendid Brahminical isolation from the surrounding economy and society in their locations, though, alas, not from the local sectarian and party politics. In the US the connection between the ongoing research in universities and the innovations in the local industrial and commercial economy is quite impressive. The Indian experience is often dismal in this respect. Just to give an example from a locality nearby: I have heard stories that Howrah, which used to be a major centre of light engineering products, declined over time throwing off thousands of jobs, partly because it failed to carry out some simple technical innovations (which its competitors around the world managed). Yet in Howrah there was a thriving engineering college nearby (BE college, now a university), which was a potential source of collaboration in these innovations, and but there was no established forum or mechanism for any connection or interaction.

Similarly in social sciences there is ample scope for our Economics and Sociology students to carry out their honours and post-graduate research projects using field survey data from the local bazaars and neighbourhoods (including slums where our maid servants and cobblers live). Let me now discuss an important

downside to the principle of non-interference by administrators and politicians that I have advocated. With full autonomy some colleges and universities can degenerate into cosy, nepotistic clubs of rampant mediocrity. Sociologist Diego Gambetta has described such a system of collusive mediocrity in Italian universities, which will not be unfamiliar in some Indian universities—a culture of mediocrity where mediocre people get other mediocre people around them and thrive in a cocoon of comfortable cronyism. Autonomy vs. cronyism is the inexorable dilemma of a higher education system. In the US this problem has been mostly averted by a culture of constant competition among the better universities—they raid one another for the best faculty, and try to generate a critical mass of good faculty and students. Students also gravitate to where the best faculty are. When professors move from one university to another they move with the whole paraphernalia of funded research projects, labs and affiliated students. So it'll be costly for a university to lose its good faculty members, if it fails to provide a stimulating environment.

It is, of course, not easy to reproduce this culture of competition and mobility everywhere, but one can try, with some external monitoring mechanisms in place. Periodic reviews of a whole department by outside professional peer groups (of academics, not bureaucrats), particularly if the review report is taken seriously by the external financial authorities in the allocation of faculty slots to the department, can be a significant deterrent to indulgence in mediocrity. In many fields research grants from external funding agencies are an important source of finance for a US university (in the form of overhead costs charged to the grant), and mediocre people failing to get such grants can become financially costly for a university. For this to work the Indian research funding agencies (like UGC, ICSSR, ICHR, CSIR, etc.) themselves need to be shorn of the current overload of bureaucratic control.

Apart from mediocre faculty, the other problem of autonomy may be in encouraging low-quality degree giving. The solution to this is not state or regulatory interference (we are familiar, for example, with many scandals in the examination system under such interference). The ultimate solution will have to be the market test. Job-givers will not value such degrees given by colleges or universities that abuse their autonomy, and students will soon find this out. Finally, a word or two on the acute and potentially overwhelming political and sociological issues. The vested interests in the current stagnation are quite powerful—politicians, bureaucrats, mediocre faculty, etc.

As Machiavelli had observed five centuries back: “The reformer has enemies in all those who profit by the old order, and only lukewarm defenders in all those who would profit by the new”. Nothing will happen unless the potential beneficiaries of change get organized. It is easy to run down any substantial proposal to improve quality as elitist. When it comes to academic excellence, I am unashamedly an elitist. Even in Communist countries, say in the erstwhile Soviet Union (or China today), the Academy of the various Sciences, for example, were (are) highly elitist. What is important to me is ensuring equality of opportunity to everybody. But that does not mean equality of outcome. In India the default redistributive option for politicians has been caste reservations in admissions to higher education institutions for the disadvantaged. But when these institutions keep on churning out graduates who are mostly unemployable, I believe the consciousness will rise among our poor and middle classes and castes that the way forward is to fight the vested interests and move in the direction of improving education quality, along with access and equity.

At the same time we have to understand that equity is not ensured simply by ensuring free and universal access, as we have proposed for our streams (a) and (b). It is also not just a matter of arranging for enough scholarships and remedial courses for students from disadvantaged backgrounds, many of whom are first-generation entrants to the higher education system. In the social churning that India is going through many of our colleges and universities have become sites of contestation for our larger social conflicts. Given this context, we have to nurture an enabling and empowering atmosphere and institutional culture for these new entrants in an alien environment of long domination by upper classes and castes. Rohith Vemula's tragic suicide and last letter at the Central University of Hyderabad last year point to the many challenges we face in our long road to equity in the field of education. But equity and quality need not work at cross purposes, and it is our duty to convince the political leaders of all groups about the importance and feasibility of these two goals

working together.



Date: 20-01-17

Safe childhoods for a safe India

Though belated, the decision to ratify two key ILO conventions on child labour makes clear India's intent of zero tolerance for the exploitation of children



After a long wait of almost two decades, the Government of India finally decided last week to ratify the International Labour Organisation (ILO) Convention 182 on the worst forms of child labour and Convention 138 on Minimum Age of Employment.

I would like to congratulate Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the Ministry of Labour and Employment on the firm decision which will soon catapult India from the status of a 'developing' nation to a 'developed' one. Most of all, I would like to congratulate the children of our country. This decision will have a path-breaking impact on the lives of those who are forced to remain on the margins of society and subject to exploitative conditions. About 4.3 million children wake up to a day of labour and not school. Another 9.8 million are officially out-of-

school. Child labour perpetuates illiteracy and poverty. It is the root cause of organised crimes such as human trafficking, terror and drug mafia. However, today, I feel optimistic and am experiencing a sense of fulfilment and satisfaction similar to what I experienced in 1997.

An African epiphany

I was about 50 kilometres away from Abuja, the capital city of Nigeria. The place I had travelled to was a high-risk zone, particularly for foreigners and those travelling alone. I was both, but I made the journey because it was important to identify individuals and organisations to join me for a physical march that would put forth a demand for an international law to ban the worst forms of child labour. By the time I reached the place, it was already dark and the local NGO had closed for the day. Since I was travelling with my passport and some money, I had to find shelter for the night, especially with men of dubious character stalking the area. Not left with a better alternative, I hid in a thick shade of bushes. When dawn arrived with the sound of the azan (the Muslim call for prayer), I found a way to interact with those returning from prayer. Through signs and actions, I brought them closer to the cause I worked for. A young man who understood a little English helped convey the message. After which, he very kindly dropped me back to the city.

A few months later, closer to the date of the march, I received a letter from the local NGO pledging support. They asked, "What did you do? What did you tell them?" I learnt that after my interaction all children of the ghetto were put in school and pulled out of labour by those I conversed with. I had found the crux of the march.

It was the language of compassion and humanity that would help accelerate the global movement against childhood exploitation.

The march began in January 1998. We traversed 80,000 kilometres across 103 countries and became a strong group of 7.2 million marchers. The Global March Against Child Labour, as it came to be called, culminated finally in Geneva on June 1, 1998 where the ILO conference was in session. We put forward our demand for an international convention to ban the worst forms of child labour. The voice of the marchers was heard and reflected in the draft of the ILO Convention 182. In June 1999, delegates of the ILO unanimously adopted the convention. It was the first time that a convention or treaty had been adopted with the full support of all members. Over the years, I have spearheaded its ratification by member nations. With 180 countries having already done so, it has become the fastest-ratified convention in the history of ILO. This clearly shows that support for the movement against child labour is gaining momentum worldwide.

Clearing the hurdles

The main bottleneck in the way of India ratifying Conventions 182 and 138 was addressing forced or compulsory recruitment of children and appropriately raising the age of employment in hazardous occupations from 14 to 18 years. Consequent to the passing of the Child Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Amendment Bill, 2016 by the Indian Parliament prohibiting the employment of children up to 14 years of age, and children up to 18 years of age in hazardous occupations, it was imperative that we ratified Conventions 182 and 138. Moreover, our failure to ratify the two conventions, which are two of the eight core labour conventions, despite being a founder-member of the ILO, reflected poorly on us as a nation.

My sense of achievement is heightened with India finally ready to join the fight it started. Our decision to ratify the convention makes our intent clear. We will not tolerate the exploitation of children any longer. As a matter of urgency, the government will take immediate and effective measures to prohibit and eliminate the worst forms of child labour: child slavery (including the sale and trafficking of children, debt bondage, and forced recruitment for armed conflict), child prostitution and their use in pornography, use of children for illicit activities such as drug trafficking, and exposure to any hazardous work which is likely to harm the health, safety or morals of children.

An ideal law guides the way and doesn't dictate. Under the provisions of the ILO Conventions 182 and 138, India will not adhere to a fixed deadline by which the worst forms of child labour must be eliminated. It will ultimately depend on the level of moral courage, public concern, social empathy, political will and the implementation of resources invested in the development and protection of children. We cannot alter the circumstances overnight. To achieve great reforms, one must continue to move in a singular direction with sincerity. Our government has shown steadfastness and strong resolve to uphold the rights of our children, and so must we. Investment in children is an investment in the future. Safe childhoods for a safe India. Nobel Peace Laureate Kailash Satyarthi is the founder of Global March against Child Labour and Kailash Satyarthi Children's Foundation.

The bottleneck in ratifying the conventions was removed with the passing of the Child Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Amendment Bill

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The limits to popular sentiment

Tamil Nadu is caught in a near-spontaneous mass upsurge in support of jallikattu, the bull-taming spectacle held during the time of the harvest festival of Pongal. Tens of thousands have gathered in public places, most notably on Chennai's Marina beach, on a day-and-night vigil, seeking the reversal of the Supreme Court-ordered ban on the conduct of the annual ritual. In the name of cultural pride and custom and tradition, students and youth have risen up. The show of solidarity has been peaceful, in sharp contrast to the aggression shown by some enthusiasts on social media in targeting certain celebrities for their earlier support to PETA (People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals). Chief Minister O. Panneerselvam felt compelled to respond to this movement, and rushed to meet Prime Minister Narendra Modi and wrest an assurance on an ordinance to nullify the Supreme Court ban. But whatever the views of the youth taking part in the demonstration, jallikattu in its present form is of relatively recent origin, intended to make bulls run amok for the sake of spectacle. Instead of the traditional form of one man against one animal, latter-day jallikattu is a mass-participant ritual of hundreds of men chasing a bull and trying to hold on to its hump or stop it by pulling at or twisting its tail.

Few other feudal traditions have survived in modern, progressive India in the name of masculine valour and cultural pride. When the Supreme Court banned this spectacle that took a heavy toll on both the animals and the human participants, it did so after attempts at its regulation and the orderly conduct of this "sport" were deemed a failure. In 2013, under the watch of the Animal Welfare Board of India, the onus was on the State of Tamil Nadu to ensure that jallikattu did not violate the provisions of the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act. But, the opportunity to ensure a jallikattu that was free of cruelty to the animals and injuries to the participating youth was frittered away. Efforts that are now on to nullify the effect of the Supreme Court judgment through the ordinance route thus carry a serious risk of judicial reproach. Last year, the Centre did try to get around the court order by issuing an executive notification that granted exemption from restrictions on the use of bulls as performing animals in traditional sports. The proper course for the Centre and the State government is to persuade the Supreme Court that a jallikattu that does not involve, or at least almost eliminates, cruelty to animals and that guarantees the safety of spectators and participants alike is indeed possible. It is all right if popular sentiment can influence legislation, but it cannot undermine the rule of law.



Date: 20-01-17

जल्लीकट्टू पर सियासत

तमिलनाडु में पोंगल के अवसर पर मनाया जाने वाला पारंपरिक सांस्कृतिक खेल जल्लीकट्टू के खिलाफ सर्वोच्च न्यायालय की ओर से लगाए गए प्रतिबंध का विरोध आंदोलन की शकल में तब्दील होता जा रहा है। जल्लीकट्टू सांडों को काबू करने का प्राचीन खेल है। राज्य की जनता इसे अपनी अस्मिता और सांस्कृतिक पहचान के साथ जोड़कर देखती है। लेकिन एक एनजीओ की याचिका पर शीर्ष अदालत ने इस खेल को पशुओं के प्रति क्रूरता माना। और मई 2014 में इस पर प्रतिबंध लगा दिया था। इस प्रतिबंध के खिलाफ और जल्लीकट्टू के समर्थन में पूरे प्रदेश में प्रदर्शन हो रहे हैं। दरअसल, देश की राजनीतिक पार्टियां अपने वोटबैंक को ठोस आधार देने के लिए संस्कृति और परंपराओं का दोहन करने का अवसर तलाशती रहती है। इसी के मद्देनजर केंद्र सरकार ने 8 जनवरी 2016 को एक अधिसूचना जारी करके जल्लीकट्टू पर लगे प्रतिबंध को हटा लिया था। कुछ पशुप्रेमी संस्थाओं ने सरकार के इस फैसले को शीर्ष अदालत में चुनौती दी थी। पिछले गुरुवार को अदालत ने प्रतिबंध को जारी रखते हुए अपना फैसला सुरक्षित रख लिया। जल्लीकट्टू के समर्थन में प्रदर्शन करने वाले प्रिवेंशन ऑफ क्रूअल्टी टू एनिमल्स एक्ट 1960 के सेक्शन 27 में संशोधन करके जल्लीकट्टू सांड को प्रशिक्षित पशुओं की श्रेणी में रखने की मांग कर रहे हैं। ऐसे पशुओं का इस्तेमाल सेना और

पुलिस में किया जाता है। दरअसल, चाहे राज्य की सरकारें हो या केंद्र की, लोक परंपरा और संस्कृति से जुड़े सवालों का विवेकसम्मत हल ढूंढने के बजाय उन्हें भड़काने का ही काम करती हैं। जल्लीकट्टू का मसला भी इसी नजरिये की उपज है। अगर देश के राजनीतिक दल आम जनता के बीच संस्कृति और परंपरा के नाम पर जारी सांस्कृतिक विकृतियों के खिलाफचेतना का प्रचार-प्रसार किया होता तो इस तरह की परंपराओं के खिलाफविरोध का वातावरण निर्मित होता। जिसका आज के जीवन मूल्य में कोई योगदान नहीं है। अन्य धर्मों और जातीय समूहों में भी ऐसी पारंपरिक सांस्कृतिक विकृतियां प्रचलित हैं। अगर जल्लीकट्टू जैसे अनावश्यक परंपरा पर रोक लगाने में सफलता मिलती है तो अन्य धर्मों में भी प्रचलित सांस्कृतिक विकृतियों के द्वार बंद हो सकेंगे। क्या राजनीतिक दल और सरकारें इतना साहस दिखा पाएंगी?
