THE TIMES OF INDIA

Date: 11-11-26

Who Deserves Free Rations When Poverty Declines?

60mn Indian households spend more than they earn. But the strongest case for food assistance lies among economically vulnerable families struggling to meet everyday needs

Rajesh Shukla, [The writer is MD & CEO of a non-profit research centre]

When you don't know whether your earnings will cover essential expenses like food, transport, education and healthcare, GDP growth rates and poverty estimates become immaterial. Millions of Indian households know that feeling. Our surveys show that, in 2022-23, routine expenditure exceeded annual income for every fifth household (19.8%) in the country, which isn't as bad as 30.4% recorded in 2020-21, but far worse than 11.3% observed in 2015-16.

Does it mean all of those roughly 60mn households in 2022-23 were financially distressed? No. Some might have been drawing upon savings, managing seasonal earnings or temporarily borrowing against future income. So, it becomes important to find out which households lack sufficient economic resources to manage such imbalances, because this data can provide a legitimate basis for govt assistance.

That isn't easy because a financially pressured household can be part of any occupational category. Geographically, 44% are in UP, Bihar and MP. Sectorally, 40% of non-agricultural labour households spend more than they earn, compared with nearly 30% agricultural labour households. There are twice as many rural households in this category as urban households. What might surprise you is that one-third of all financially pressured households are part of the regular salaried class. That means expenditure income imbalances extend beyond casual employment.

Bottom 40% matters | So, which households should be considered financially "distressed" rather than "pressured"? For that, we have to look at per capita routine expenditure. Our 2022-23 survey microdata shows that, among the bottom 40% of households, median monthly income was approximately 11,800, against routine expenditure of 10,500. Yet, nearly 29% of these households – altogether some 34mn – spent more than they earned. And they made up almost six of every ten financially pressured households.

Unlike better-off households with a temporary expenditure-income imbalance, these families merit particular attention because their low expenditure levels, combined with insufficient current income, suggest limited capacity to finance essential needs.

This does not establish that every household in the bottom 40% is financially distressed, nor that all households above are secure. But it identifies a more relevant population for examining the need for social protection.

Consider a construction worker who can just about make ends meet when there's work, but faces several jobless weeks, or a small trader whose sales fluctuate sharply, or an agricultural household that earns around harvest a couple of times in a year. Even salaried households can experience pressure when one income supports several dependents, or housing, schooling and healthcare absorb a large chunk of earnings. These examples show that income adequacy, earnings regularity and the ability to finance unavoidable expenditure are related but distinct dimensions of household vulnerability.

Economics of free rations | As poverty levels decline, questions naturally arise about India's large-scale foodgrain assistance, eligibility for it and number of beneficiaries. These are legitimate questions, given the fiscal resources involved. But the question we should be asking is, what economic vulnerability is food assistance intended to address?

Hunger, and food, cannot be put off. When earnings weaken, families can't simply stop feeding their children. Free cereals reduce the cash required for basic consumption, potentially releasing scarce resources for vegetables, pulses, transport, education and healthcare. Their economic value may, therefore, extend beyond conventional poverty relief by providing a predictable in-kind benefit when cash income is uncertain.

And the strongest case for such assistance lies among households with limited resources and weak financial buffers, rather than everyone whose expenditure temporarily exceeds income. The bottom 40% is a sizeable group where low expenditure and household budget pressure coincide. That's why expenditure adequacy and financial vulnerability deserve consideration alongside conventional poverty measures when evaluating coverage and eligibility.

Making protection effective | The policy challenge is not to expand or reduce food subsidy coverage, but to ensure that public resources protect households whose essential consumption is most vulnerable to inadequate or uncertain earnings. This requires identifying those who are economically vulnerable, qualify under existing eligibility rules, and whose household well-being increases with assistance.

A better evaluation would examine whether foodgrain support reduces distress borrowing, protects nutritional consumption and helps families maintain essential expenditure during income interruptions. Such evidence could inform future targeting without assuming that all expenditure-income imbalances represent hardship.

Free foodgrains cannot be a substitute for productive employment, adequate wages or stronger household savings, nor can they resolve the wider costs of healthcare and education. But for vulnerable families, predictable food assistance can protect part of the household budget when cash income is uncertain. The case for free foodgrains should therefore rest neither on poverty counts alone nor on the total number of households spending more than they earn. It should rest on identifying those whose limited resources make essential consumption genuinely vulnerable, and ensuring that assistance reaches them effectively.

THE HINDU

Date: 11-11-26

Caste and class

Exclusion of creamy layer is essential, but must be done consistently

Editorial

If public resources are to dismantle both caste hierarchy and class inequality, OBC reservation should resist the notion that caste disadvantage makes economic differences among OBC families irrelevant. The 'creamy layer' rules are responsible for identifying those OBC members who have advanced sufficiently to no longer require affirmative action. However, the government has implemented them inconsistently. The Supreme Court in March corrected one inconsistency, that the government cannot hold the salary alone of an OBC candidate's parent as evidence of social advancement. In Indra Sawhney (1992), the Court upheld the government's 27% reservation for OBC candidates in central government services if it also excluded economically advanced sections, i.e., the creamy layer, among OBCs. Following the equivalence requirement issued in 1993, the Department of Personnel & Training (DoPT) issued a "clarification" in 2004 that the government used, from around 2015, to deny dozens of OBC candidates who had cleared the Civil Services Examination their benefits because their parents' salaries exceeded the official threshold due to pay revisions that did not always reflect changes in occupational status. The Cabinet also approved equivalence guidelines in 2017 but a parliamentary committee criticised it over a number of issues.

In Rohith Nathan (2026), the Court rightly rejected the government's use of the 2004 "clarification" to arbitrarily exclude OBC candidates based on their parents' salaries alone. However, the government stalled service allocations following the 2025 examination and appealed that retrospectively applying the ruling would create administrative chaos. On November 6, the Court conceded that it had not asked the government to reopen completed selections, as it could set workers against one another while leaving government misapplication unaddressed. A proactive policy is essential now as the government must create supernumerary posts for legitimate claimants and apply the 1993 rules to pending allocations without vouchsafing these remedies for only those who can afford litigation. Access to public employment continues to be grossly unequal: per the 2024-25 DoPT Annual Report, OBC representation in central government employment was 26.3% but declined steadily towards higher positions. As the Justice G. Rohini Commission also indicated, the benefits of reservation are distributed unevenly among OBC communities. However, the report, submitted in 2023, is still not in the public domain. The coming Census includes caste enumeration but policymakers also need data on each caste's education, occupations, assets, and landholdings. Defending redistribution among caste groups while ignoring major inequalities within them, and constraining OBC reservation assuming relatively more high-income families capture the benefits without first establishing the extent and the causes are equally difficult to justify.

Date: 11-11-26

Transparency is essential to institutional credibility

Minority institutions opposing the FCRA amendments must demonstrate transparency and accountability themselves

Clement Arockiasamy, (A public and social policy analyst, a British Chevening Scholar, and a Master's graduate in Development Studies from the Institute of Development Studies (IDS), University of Sussex, U.K.. He is the author of the book, "Dalit Christians -Exclusion by State, Church and Society')



The proposed amendments to the Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Act, 2010, have triggered strong reactions from civil society organisations, Opposition parties and Christian institutions. The concerns are not without substance. What it seeks is tighter regulation of foreign-funded organisations, including provisions concerning assets created or acquired through foreign contributions. The Government maintains that the objective is greater transparency, accountability and prevention of misuse of foreign funds, while critics fear possible restrictions on legitimate civil society activity and minority institutions being disproportionately affected. With the Bill referred to a Joint Parliamentary Committee for further scrutiny, there is an opportunity for a reasoned debate.

Foreign contribution cannot become a pretext for suppressing legitimate charitable, educational, health care or social-service activity. At the same time, the receipt and utilisation of foreign funds cannot be placed beyond scrutiny.

Transparency is not an assault on minority rights; it is a condition of public trust. This raises a question for minority institutions opposing the proposed amendments: are they prepared to put their own houses in order? This is not about greater state interference, but about voluntary transparency and accountability to those they claim to serve.

Consider the Catholic Church in Tamil Nadu. The dioceses have established numerous social-service structures and societies dedicated to the poor, vulnerable and marginalised. Their contribution to social development is substantial, but how many ordinary faithful have meaningful access to even the basic financial picture of these institutions? How many can readily see annual income-and-expenditure statements, audited accounts, major sources of funding and the broad utilisation of resources? The more fundamental question is this: should institutions that speak forcefully about accountability to the state, not voluntarily practise an equally high, if not higher, standard of accountability to their faithful, beneficiaries and stakeholders?

Institutional power, financial accountability

The question becomes even more pertinent when one considers the enormous educational and social footprint of popular religious orders such as the Society of Jesus and the Salesians of Don Bosco, as well as

the many premier institutions run by dioceses, including medical colleges, and numerous congregations of women religious. Their contribution to education and public life is undeniable. Yet, influence carries responsibility.

Across the educational sector, there have long been allegations and public concerns regarding admission-related donations, capitation and other payments in institutions offering sought-after courses. Such allegations must not be treated as established facts against particular institutions without evidence. But where institutions receive substantial fees, donations, grants or other contributions, a legitimate question remains, a demand for transparency is not an accusation of wrongdoing. On the contrary, the most effective answer to allegations of financial mismanagement or diversion is transparent, independently audited and accessible accounting.

The same principle should apply to religious and social-service organisations. If institutions appeal to the faithful and the public for donations in the name of the poor, education, health care and social development, their stakeholders should reasonably expect a clear picture of how those resources are utilised. Transparency need not mean exposing confidential individual transactions or compromising institutional autonomy. It can simply mean publishing audited annual accounts, broad income-and-expenditure statements, major funding sources and the purposes for which resources are deployed. Such voluntary disclosure would strengthen the moral authority of organisations that are now demanding greater accountability from the state.

The unfinished question of Dalit Christians

The issue becomes particularly compelling in the context of the Church's advocacy for Dalit Christians. The Catholic Bishops' Conference of India (CBCI) has raised concerns over the FCRA Amendment Bill with the Union Government. Its memorandum has also raised the continuing denial of Scheduled Caste (SC) status to Christians of SC origin and sought an early resolution of the matter pending before the Supreme Court. The CBCI has undertaken initiatives on the issue and its policy documents have acknowledged the persistence of caste discrimination within Indian society and, importantly, within the Church.

For decades, Dalit Christians have awaited a resolution of their claim to SC status. The Church possesses considerable institutional influence, extensive organisational reach and substantial financial resources. Has that influence and capacity been mobilised with the same sustained intensity for the constitutional rights of its most marginalised faithful as it is now being mobilised when the regulatory framework governing its institutions is threatened?

There is an inherent irony here. The Church rightly argues that caste does not disappear when a Dalit becomes a Christian. If that is so, and if caste-based exclusion continues beyond conversion, then the constitutional marginalisation of Dalit Christians should occupy a central place in the Church's public advocacy. It is difficult, therefore, to avoid asking what institutional accountability means if the voices of the most disadvantaged members of the institution remain comparatively weak.

Accountable autonomy

The answer should lie neither in unchecked state power nor in unchecked institutional autonomy, but in accountable autonomy. Minority institutions have made an invaluable contribution to India's educational, healthcare and social landscape, and their right to function freely must be protected.

But institutional freedom carries institutional responsibility. The credibility of their opposition to excessive FCRA regulation will ultimately depend not merely on what they demand from the government, but on what they are willing to disclose to the people who sustain and depend upon their institutions.

Perhaps the most important test of an institution is not how loudly it protests when its own autonomy is threatened, but how openly it answers questions from the poor, the faithful, the beneficiaries, parents, students and the communities it serves. Minority rights and institutional accountability are not opposing principles; they are complementary ones. The state must not use transparency as a pretext to weaken legitimate minority institutions. But minority institutions, in turn, cannot demand transparency from the state while treating transparency to their own stakeholders as optional.

Before asking the state to put its house in order, minority institutions should be willing to open their own doors and demonstrate that their houses are in order.

Date: 11-11-26

More women work but in informal and less secure jobs

Despite the rise of women's participation in the labour force, women still carry the burden of unpaid domestic work and childcare

Tanu M. Goyal, Shravani Prakash, Ketaki Gaikwad, Arjun Tandon



The rise in women's work-force participation in India is now well-documented. Yet, it conceals a less encouraging reality - men and women are ex- periencing India's structural trans- formation very differently.

Between 2017-18 and 2025, the number of working women nearly doubled, from 104 million to 201 million, and the female worker population ratio rose from 22% to 38%. But most of the increase has come from rural India, largely in agriculture and in own account and unpaid family work on farms and in household enterprises.

The positive here is that a larger part of women's daily work is finally being counted. For decades, the labour women did on the fields and cattle sheds went mostly unre- corded, and was thereby left out of policy and budgets. Simply count- ing, however, has just revealed how many women work but says little about the work itself. The re- cent ICRIER report, "The Participa- tion Paradox', uses the Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) and the Time Use Survey to look at these dimensions. Five data points stand out.

Most of the surge in women's employment has been absorbed by agriculture, the sector that structural transformation expects workers to move out of (Chart 1). The number of rural women work- ing in crop and animal production rose from 54 million to over 100 million. Rural men, however, did move out as their

share in agricul ture fell from 54.1% to 47.2%, while women's rose from 70.7% to 73.3%. Surprisingly, urban women employed in agriculture rose from 2.6 million to 6.3 million, becom- ing their largest single employer in 2025. Outside agriculture, wo-men's employment gains were concentrated in garments, retail and construction, sectors where work is largely informal and domi- nated by micro and own-account enterprises. The shift towards self- employment is particularly pro- nounced in rural areas where wo men in own-account work quadru pled, while the share of regular salaried jobs among them slipped from 10.5% to 9.3%.

Despite the rise in women's workforce participation, average weekly working hours have fallen for every group between 2017-18 and 2025. The decline was steep- est for rural women, who worked a little over six hours less per week. The combination of rising participation and falling hours sug gests that much of the new em- ployment is marginal and low in intensity (Chart 2).

Manufacturing reflects this pat- tern most clearly. In rural textiles, the gender gap in weekly working hours widened from 11 to 21; in wearing apparel, from 19 to 21. Garments and textiles are expect- ed to draw women into regular fac- tory work, where their hours would gradually rise towards men's. The widening gap suggests that many women in these indus- tries remain in home-based, piece- rate, or own-account work.

The wage gap

While women's earnings have ri- sen, men's wages have risen faster. A rural woman now earns roughly 45% of what a rural man earns, down from 53%. The sectoral pic- ture is equally telling. The widest hourly earnings gaps are in the sectors that employ most women. Per hour, men in rural tobacco ma- nufacturing earn 2.1 times what women do; in education, 2 times; in textiles, 1.8; in crop production, 1.7. By contrast, women earn on par with men in about 20 urban sectors, including scientific re- search, publishing, advertising and management consultancy which employ a small fraction of working women.

When asked why they are not in the labour force, 60% of women cite childcare and household com- mitments. Among men, fewer than 1% give these reasons.

These patterns have barely changed since 2021-22. Skilling and job creation can expand women's employment only if women have the time to take up these oppor- tunities. That time is already ab- sorbed by unpaid work at home that remains invisible in national income accounting. The Time Use Survey Shows that in 2024, Indian women spent an average of 3.7 hours a day more than men on domestic work and nearly one hour more on care.

Concerningly, taking up paid work does little to ease this bur- den. Working women still spend around four hours a day on unpaid domestic work and nearly two on care, in rural and urban India alike. Working men, in contrast, spend under three hours on both type of activities combined.

These paradoxes suggest that the gains from India's structural transformation have gone largely to men. Beyond raising participa- tion, women should be pushed to- wards more productive, better- paid work without adding onto the unequal burden of unpaid care.

First, reduce that care burden, the main supply-side constraint. This means affordable, good-quali- ty childcare, paid paternity and shared parental leave financed partly through social insurance. Second, make

industrial and MSME policy work for women. MSME support should reward hir- ing women, widen access to fi nance and technology, and open hostels and arrange transport in textile parks and industrial areas. Third, create paid work for rural women close to home through place-based enterprise clusters, li- velihood missions, and women-led producer organisations.

India has brought women's work into the data. The next step is making that work more produc- tive, better paid, and more secure.



Date: 11-11-26

दुनिया के लोग आर्थिक विषमता से आंदोलित हैं

संपादकीय

दुनिया के तमाम मुल्कों में फिर चाहे वे समृद्ध यूरोप के हों या गरीब अफ्रीका और एशिया के लोग सड़कों पर हैं। आंदोलन केवल भारत में ही नहीं, फ्रांस, स्पेन, सर्बिया, अल्बानिया, पुर्तगाल, इटली, चिली, बेल्जियम, ट्यूनीशिया, इंडोनेशिया, नेपाल, केन्या, नाइजीरिया, मेडागास्कर में भी हो रहे हैं। भले ही इनमें से कुछ देशों की प्रति व्यक्ति आय अन्य कुछ देशों से 20-30 गुना ज्यादा हो, लेकिन जो बात इन सभी आंदोलनों में समान है, वो यह कि ये समाज के निचले वर्ग से स्फूर्त हैं। नाराजगी गरीब-अमीर की बढ़ती खाई, सम्पत्ति के विषम बंटवारे और निवेश के तरीकों को लेकर है। भारत में ही 80 साल की आजादी के बावजूद एक बड़ा वर्ग आज भी पक्की सड़क, बिजली, पानी की किल्लत से जूझ रहा है, उनके बच्चे शिक्षा की जगह रोटी कमाने को प्राथमिकता दे रहे हैं। वहीं दूसरा वर्ग अपने बच्चों की शिक्षा, स्वयं के इलाज या गर्मियों में घूमने के लिए विदेश का रुख करता हो तो सामाजिक समरसता पर इसका प्रतिकूल प्रभाव पड़ता है। वी-डेम की रिपोर्ट के अनुसार आज दुनिया के कुछ देश ही वास्तविक प्रजातंत्र में सांस ले रहे हैं। गरीबों का वोट लेकर सत्ता तो पा ली जाती है, लेकिन नीतियां पूंजी की पोषक होती हैं गरीब आजीविका के लिए कुछ न कुछ तो करता ही है, लेकिन खोमचा लगाना रोजगार नहीं, प्रायः उसकी मजबूरी होती है। अगर शिक्षा और स्वास्थ्य में बजट का कम हिस्सा खर्च हो रहा है और चमकती सड़कों, हवाई अड्डों पर अधिक, तो ये आंदोलन इस विसंगति की अभिव्यक्ति भी हैं।

Date: 11-11-26

हिरासत व गिरफ्तारी में फर्क को खत्म करना न्याय के लिए जरूरी

विराग गुप्ता, (सुप्रीम कोर्ट के वकील और 'डिजिटल कानूनों से समृद्ध भारत' के लेखक)

सुप्रीम कोर्ट के जज उज्ज्वल भुयान की पीठ के नए फैसले के अनुसार हिरासत में लेने के 24 घंटे के भीतर गिरफ्तार व्यक्ति को मजिस्ट्रेट के सामने पेश करना जरूरी है। 24 घंटे की यह समय-सीमा व्यक्ति की स्वतंत्रता पर रोक लगने से ही शुरू हो जाती है, न कि औपचारिक गिरफ्तारी पर। इस फैसले पर अमल हुआ तो आरोपी से पूछताछ, जांच, तलाशी, जब्ती में लगा समय भी 24 घंटे की हिरासत अवधि में शामिल रहेगा। इससे जुड़े 4 कानूनी पहलुओं को समझना जरूरी है :

1. त्रिपुरा में ड्रग्स के कारोबार से जुड़े उक्त मामले में एनडीपीएस कानून के तहत कार्रवाई की गई थी। ऐसे मामलों में माल की बरामदगी, पंचनामा और बयान दर्ज करना जांच एजेंसियों के लिए चुनौतीपूर्ण होता है। नए फैसले के अनुसार अब मजिस्ट्रेट को हिरासत की तारीख और समय को अपने आदेश में दर्ज करना होगा। ओडिशा, मद्रास और केरल हाईकोर्ट के पुराने फैसलों में औपचारिक गिरफ्तारी से पहले की हिरासत की अवधि को 24 घंटे की समय-सीमा से बाहर रखने की अनुमति दी गई थी। सुप्रीम कोर्ट के जजों के अनुसार हाईकोर्ट के पुराने फैसले संविधान के अनुच्छेद 22(2) और बीएनएसएस की धारा 56 के खिलाफ हैं, जो गिरफ्तार व्यक्ति को पुलिस की मनमानी हिरासत से बचाने का कानूनी कवच प्रदान करते हैं। लेकिन फैसला दो जजों की पीठ ने दिया है। ऐसे मामलों में पांच जजों की संविधान पीठ के फैसले उनकी न्यायिक स्वीकार्यता को बढ़ाते हैं।

2. इस फैसले में निरंजन सिंह मामले में जस्टिस कृष्णा अय्यर के चार दशक पुराने फैसले और डीके बसु की संविधान पीठ के फैसले का जिक्र है। सुप्रीम कोर्ट के पुराने फैसलों के अनुसार रिमांड के मामलों में तर्कसंगत आदेश पारित करने के बजाय मजिस्ट्रेट यंत्रवत तरीके से आरोपी को जेल भेज देते हैं। नेशनल क्राइम रिकॉर्ड ब्यूरो के 2023 के आंकड़ों के अनुसार जेलों में बंद 5.3 लाख लोगों में 3.9 लाख विचाराधीन कैदी थे। 2023 में 150 से ज्यादा विचाराधीन कैदियों की जेल में मृत्यु हो गई। संविधान के प्रावधान पुलिस के साथ अदालतों पर भी लागू होते हैं। बेवजह जेल और न्यायिक हिरासत में मृत्यु के मामलों में विलम्ब के लिए जजों की जवाबदेही भी सुनिश्चित होनी चाहिए।

3. नागरिक अधिकारों की सुरक्षा के लिए सुप्रीम कोर्ट के अनेक फैसले हैं। गलत गिरफ्तारी के लिए जिम्मेदार पुलिस अधिकारियों से हर्जाना वसूल होना चाहिए। जमानत की अर्जी को 2 सप्ताह और अग्रिम जमानत की अर्जी को 6 सप्ताह में निपटाना जरूरी है। जमानत की शर्त पूरा करने में असमर्थ विचाराधीन कैदियों का पता लगाकर उन्हें राहत देनी भी जरूरी है। जजों ने इस फैसले की प्रति को सभी हाईकोर्ट और राज्यों के डीजीपी के पास भेजने का आदेश दिया है। हिरासत और गिरफ्तारी के फर्क को खत्म करने वाले इस फैसले पर अमल करने के

लिए भारतीय नागरिक सुरक्षा संहिता, एनडीपीएस और दूसरे अनेक कानूनों में संसद से बदलाव करना जरूरी होगा।

4. बेवजह व गलत गिरफ्तारी जीवन की स्वतंत्रता के संवैधानिक हक पर प्रहार है। निरीह जनता के लिए यह जीवनभर का नासूर है। इसे रोकने के लिए विधि आयोग व सुप्रीम कोर्ट ने लाखों पन्ने लिख दिए, लेकिन धरातल पर अमल नहीं होता। संविधान के अनुच्छेद 141 के तहत सुप्रीम कोर्ट के फैसले बाध्यकारी हैं। इनका जिला अदालतों और हाईकोर्ट में पालन नहीं होना दुर्भाग्यपूर्ण है। गलत गिरफ्तारी रोकने कानून के चक्के को सही रास्ते पर चलाने की जरूरत है। खतरनाक अपराधी जेल में रहें और मामूली मामलों में गिरफ्तार लोगों को जल्द जमानत और रिहाई मिले। इस आशय के फैसले फाइलों और किताबों में ही कैद ना रहें। गलत गिरफ्तारी का हर मामला सर्वोच्च न्यायपालिका की अवमानना है।

Date: 11-11-26

मॉडरेशन यानी चीजों का भरपूर आनंद लेना, बिना उनके गुलाम बने

नंदितेश निलय वक्ता, (एथिक्स प्रशिक्षक एवं लेखक)

आज के इंस्टेंट दौर में सभी एक दौड़ में शामिल लगते हैं- बेचैन और अधीर। हर अधिक, हर बार कम पड़ जाता है और उसके साथ ही कम पड़ जाता है वह सबकुछ, जिसकी समाज को बनाने में सबसे ज्यादा जरूरत होती है। ई-कॉमर्स प्लेटफॉर्मों पर बेचने-खरीदने का मौसम सदाबहार रहता है। सभी खरीदने में लगे हैं- सस्ता, इससे सस्ता, उससे सस्ता। जरूरत हो न हो, पर इकट्ठा करते रहने की वृत्ति बन गई है। हमें पता भी नहीं चलता कि हम अति की ओर बढ़ चुके हैं। बाजार से घर, व्यवहार से आदतों तक- सभी अपने अवचेतन को उस अवस्था में पहुंचा चुके हैं, जहां वो जो भी करते हैं, वह अति की ओर ही बढ़ेगा। बाजार से लेकर एल्गोरिदम्स को भी मालूम है हम अति के सिंड्रोम से ग्रस्त हैं।

खुद को हो सही मानना इस युग का दर्शन हो चुका है और आज तो बात-बात में लोग आपा खो देते हैं। उन्हें किसी तरह का प्रतिबंध पसंद नहीं होता। अपनी स्वतंत्रता के अधिकार को वे मॉडरेशन से मुक्त कर स्वच्छंद रखना चाहते हैं। मालूम होता है सम्प्रेषण और जीवनशैली में अब सिर्फ उसी स्वतंत्रता की वैल्यू है, जो स्वच्छंद और उन्मुक्त है। प्यार करेंगे तो अति, घृणा में अति, जगे हैं तो जगे ही हैं, सो गए तो सो गए, खा रहे हैं तो खाए ही जा रहे हैं, फास्टिंग में भी अति के प्रकार हैं, फोन पर चिपके हैं तो बस स्क्रीन के हो गए। बेपरवाह, बेलगाम, बेसब्र और बेबाक। इसलिए गीतकारों को भी 'बदतमीज दिल' को महिमामंडित करने में संकोच नहीं हुआ। लेकिन जीवन-दर्शन हमें आगाह कराना चाहता है कि किताबों पर जिल्द, पेड़ों पर पत्ते, शरीर पर कपड़े, घरों में पर्दे, आचरण

में मर्यादा, भाषा में भद्रता और मनुष्य में मूल्य अच्छे लगते हैं। और मॉडरेशन ही वह संयमित समाज बनाता है, जो उस आत्म-नियंत्रण, उस प्रतिबंध, उस संतुलन को हमेशा बनाए रखता है।

क्या आपको भी ऐसा लगता है कि हम आज ऐसे दौर में जी रहे हैं, जहां हमारी जीवनशैली में, खुद को व्यक्त करने के तरीके में, एक सुचिंतित संयम की जरूरत है? मॉडरेशन न तो बेस्वाद तटस्थता है और न ही हमेशा खुद को चीजों से दूर रखना; यह चीजों का पूरा आनंद लेने की क्षमता है, बिना उनके गुलाम बने। इसकी जरूरत इसलिए है, क्योंकि हर बात पर अति की ओर बढ़ना समाज के लिए शुभ नहीं। घर हो या बाहर, व्यक्ति की अभिव्यक्ति में मध्य-मार्ग की जगह बनती है। लेकिन सबको अपनी सुनाने की पड़ी है। सामने वाला अपनी अति छोड़ना नहीं चाहता। अगर कोई किसी एक विचारधारा को मानता है तो दूसरी विचारधारा वाले अस्पृश्य हो जाते हैं। क्या बड़े, क्या बच्चे- सभी अति को ही सही मान रहे हैं।

आज मॉडरेशन या संयम की जरूरत विचारों में है, अभिव्यक्ति में है, सम्प्रेषण के हर पक्ष में है। खान-पान और जीवन-शैली में है। पसंद-नापसंद में है। पैसा होने और सामान इकट्ठा करने की आदत में है। खुशी को अनैतिक तरीके से अभिव्यक्त करने से बचने में है। उस जानकारी के नोटिफिकेशन को सीमित करने में है, जिसकी जरूरत नहीं पड़ती। आराम में है। स्क्रीन-टाइम में है। डिजिटल प्लेटफॉर्म्स पर प्रतिक्रिया में है। उस हर आचरण में है, जो समाज में सकारात्मकता और संतुलन की संभावनाएं बनाए रखने ने मदद करता है।

न भूलें कि जिन देशों ने अपने नागरिक-व्यवहार को प्राथमिकता दी, उनके नेतृत्व ने समाज की संस्थाओं को संयम के इर्द-गिर्द ही रखा है। आखिर हम सभी सिर्फ ग्राहक या एआई तो नहीं हैं, इंसान हैं और इस दुनिया को तमाम तरह की चुनौतियों और कठिनाइयों से तभी बचाया जा सकता है, जब नागरिकों में अतियों से बचने का बोध हो- इस भाव के साथ कि मिला हुआ जीवन अपने आप में कभी कम नहीं होता।