Sustainable Development without Amicable Growth Challenges of Societal Injustice

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Abstract

Sustainable development is taken to mean as the development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. It underlines the concept of needs, in particular the essential needs of the world's poor, to which overriding priority needs to be given (World Commission on Environment and Development, Our Common Future 1987). At the core of sustainable development is the need to consider "three pillars" together: society, economy and environment (OECD 2008). In a way, this demands harmony between resources and time, space and various social segments with preferential emphasis on the development of the marginalised social segments. The inclusive approach for sustainable development recognizes the need for *all people* to be involved in the process and decisions that affect their lives. Societies and economies which are embedded with lack or absence of harmony and practice exclusivity obstructing development of certain poor segments of society may neither develop well nor sustain development. In view of this, the Caste System and within it the de facto position of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (SCs and STs) emerge as a major point of intense consideration in relation to sustainable development.

Introduction

The available evidence shows that the SC/STs continue to remain a deprived lot. The importance of human resource capital, particularly education, for growth is duly recognised but the SC/STs are obstructed even in the institution of learning from acquiring potentialities for the required purpose. Also, they face psychologically aggressive environment on account of their birth-based (humiliating) status and this denudes them of self respect and nips their productive potential at the budding stage. Moreover, they acquire psychological sickness of sorts. At the end of the day, they emerge as burden even for themselves instead of being productive stake holders in the society and economy.

Can we move on the path of sustainable development by neglecting SC/STs? This demands an immediate as well as long term solution. The first and foremost need is to come out of denial mode. Or else, our economy and society is, in all likelihood, to face consequences associated with racism.

At the core of sustainable development is the need to consider "three pillars" together: society, economy and environment. No matter the context, the basic idea remains the same – people, habitats and economic systems are inter-related (OECD 2008). 'The long-term stability and success of societies rely on a healthy and productive population. A society (or communities within a larger society) that faces unrest, poverty and disease is unlikely to develop in the long term: social well-being and economic well-being feed off each other' (OECD 2008). 'Human resources are central to economic development and can be increased in value and productivity by investment in human beings e.g. in their education and health' (Clement Tisdell 2014) But the economists stressed the importance of the man-made physical capital for economic growth for a considerable period and neglected human resource capital. Since the second half of the 20th century the importance of human resource capital, particularly education, for economic growth came to be recognised (Clement Tisdell 2014). At the same time the inclusive approach for sustainable development came to recognize the need for *all people* to be involved in the process and decisions that affect their lives. *Inclusive development* is therefore

one of the principles written into the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) adopted by the member nations at the United Nations.

Do the SDGs address issues emanating from caste system and sustained by caste based social structures? The Dalit groups across South Asia have raised question marks stating that the new goals are not equipped to deal with isolation, exclusion and historic deprivation associated with the caste.

While numerous of the goals are phrased to specifically state growth "for all", Goal 10 addresses specifically the task of reducing inequality *within* (and between) countries. One of the targets within the Goal is — "By 2030, empower and promote the social, economic and political *inclusion of all* [emphasis added], irrespective of age, sex, disability, race, ethnicity, origin, religion or economic or other status" (OECD 2008). As such the document does not specifically recognise the caste, which was in negotiation for nearly three years. It is, therefore, significant for the Dalit rights activists to regard it as a 'critical lapse'.

Paul Divakar (2015), chairperson of Asia Dalit Rights Forum, induced that the SDGs' pledge to "leave no one behind" will remain handicapped by not specifically mentioning caste as a major cause for poverty and deprivation of opportunity. "Discrimination based on work and descent [caste] is an important determinant for the exclusion of a large section of the global population… When age, sex, race, ethnicity, origin is mentioned, why leave 260 million Dalits out of the document," he asked.

As the Indian Express (2015) reported that Men Bishwakarma, MP from Nepali Congress, echoed that the country's Constitution took some historic steps in affirmative action, including guaranteed 13 per cent representation of Dalits in all levels of government. "But India appears to block all efforts to allow caste to be recognised internationally as a major cause for exclusion. We are demanding that the issue of caste-based discrimination not be seen as simply an internal problem in India — there are Dalit communities across South Asia who are historically deprived," he said. Likewise, Senator Gian Chand from Pakistan, himself a Dalit, said Pakistan's estimated 25 lakh Dalits remain poorly represented in government processes: "We are demanding that India take the lead in recognising the issue. Other countries in the region will automatically follow," he added.

Discrimination on the basis of birth has been an essential ingredient of the caste system. The discrimination entails denial of the essentials of a dignified living, including education and learning. The discrimination is indeed as old as, if not older than the caste system itself. Guru Droncharya's legacy is still operative in various forms in our schools and institutions of higher learning. Reported attempts to commit and occurrences of suicides by students belonging to lowest segments in caste-based hierarchy, may, among other, be taken as a denominator of prevailing persecution in its wildest form. Between 2008 and 2015, it cannot be a coincidence that in higher educational institutions out of 25 cases of suicide, 23 were of Dalits across India. Let it be known that this number represents only official version, and this does not include all the SC students whose families failed to protest against the incessant discrimination that eventually led to the suicides. The suicidal acts have reportedly been committed in the highly prestigious and prominent institutions like All-India Institute of Medical Sciences in New Delhi, and Hyderabad based University level establishments.

Research studies underline the experiences of discrimination, exclusion and humiliation as being the predominant reasons behind committing suicides. As Sukhdeo Thorat reported (2016) that academic Anoop Singh who analysed some cases of suicide, has concluded that "there seems to be more than enough evidence to believe that caste discrimination played a significant role in driving these extraordinary individuals into committing suicide", and that even "elite professional institutions are the places where caste prejudice is so firmly entrenched that it has become normal".

Discrimination prevails in various and hues and forms. The identity of SC/ST students is manipulated. Name calling in colleges is quite common as they are characterized rather sarcastically 'reserved quota' students. In spite of SC/ST students' academic competence, comments like 'these reserved chaps will never be as good as us' are passed. Another issue is the non-admission of SC/ST 'merit' candidates in the 'open' category, despite a

standing provision that they must be. It is most often thought why enrol an extra low caste student when the institution has to admit a certain number of them? This follows two consequences, its brands (and denies) otherwise a reserved category brilliant student and it deprives another needy SC/ST candidate of a seat (Ramesh Chandra, 2005). 'The SC/ST students' contribution is hardly recognized in any area; they are always put in an environment which hampers their personal development and performance. Constant attempts are made to destroy their 'self'. In educational institutions, social media and even at work places discussions are held on reservation policy. The major objective of such discussion is not to find out the ideology behind the measure, but to create hatred among other students and employees in organizations. They are projected as encroachers, merit-less and devoid of competence. The worth of SC/STs is not prized at work place, though they have required potential. No one can deny that backwardness arises, rather very substantially, from lack of access to economic resources and facilities like quality education and employment opportunities. However, the two aspects are conveniently glossed over by upper castes Hindus' (Ingole 2011).

The cruelty of the caste system is that one is born into that caste - or non-caste, in the case of the Dalit, -- and from this there is no escape ever, no matter what one does or achieves. History is replete with the widespread instances of oppression inflicted on the Dalit people. They have been coerced to live with never ending deep psychological wounds and the trauma of low self-esteem. The elite castes have been, and still are opposed to genuinely abandoning Brahminical Hinduism in favour of a more modern idea of democracy and citizenship.

Constitutional safeguards have failed to yield desired results. Apprehensive of discrimination and mental harassment and facing it in day today life situations, the dalits often resort to adopting devices for self defence. They hide their identity by adopting higher castes' surnames such as Singh, Verma, Chaudhary, Malik, Chauhan etc. The act of assuming identity of upper caste is indicative of pervasiveness of caste-based discrimination and ineffectiveness of constitutional provisions at grassroots level. The unwillingness of university administration to assist and support Dalit students pushes them to wall, and those who fail to bear the brunt the psychological torture resort to committing suicide (News item dated Jun 25, 2012, Radheshyam Jadhav, TNN).

How? Being on the receiving end of overt or subtle nasty-racist attitude, the situation creates intense and constant stress, say some experts, which boosts the risk of depression, anxiety and anger -- factors that can lead to or aggravate heart disease (Sid Kirchheimer 2003).

Some may refer to caste is as race. In legal sense of the term caste is not equated with race. But practically caste based discrimination may be seen as India's native (indigenous) version of racial discrimination. Considering the caste-based discrimination racial discrimination as seems imperative for the sake of understanding impact of sufferings and adverse effects of discrimination on health, education, etc. This is necessitated further by the fact that unlike the impact of caste-based sufferings, adverse effects of racism on health are well documented.

To begin with, racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance in all their insidious forms are human rights violations; these are transmitted across generations and are manifest in the cultural values and patterns, institutional and national norms and practices, and everyday behaviour of individuals and groups in every society (Essed, 1991; Jones, 1997; Dovidio, Glick, & Rudman, 2005). Racism and racial discrimination serve simultaneously both to rationalize the hierarchical domination of one racial or ethnic group over other groups and to maintain psychological, social and material advantages for the dominant group, while producing cumulative and chronic adverse outcomes for its victims and those it has placed at a disadvantage (Jackson & Inglehart, 1995). Structural Racism is the most profound and pervasive form of racism as it continually re-produces old and produces new, forms of racism. It is infused into the entire fabric of society, including its history, culture, politics, economics and other systems. All other forms of racism (e.g. institutional, interpersonal, internalized, etc.) emerge from Structural Racism. Both active racism, and passive acceptance of race-based privilege, disrupts human rights to optimal mental health and psychological functioning of both victims and perpetrators of racial injustice (Jones, 1997). Despite some advances in decades of struggle, racism

and racial/ethnic discrimination, both overt and covert, continue as sources of global conflicts and inequalities, causing disadvantage and marginalization among people in all regions of the world. These inequalities are evident in disproportional poverty rates and limited access to power, justice, education, physical and mental health including psychosocial services; social security; access to basic needs like safe drinking water; equal protection against the ravages of climate disasters; political participation as well as protection against racial/ethnic profiling and police violence (Glaser, Spencer & Charbonneau, 2014). Groups most affected by historic and contemporary forms of racism and racial/ethnic discrimination include: Africans and persons of African descent, Asians and persons of Asian descent, Indigenous peoples, migrants, refugees, minorities, and the Roma/Gypsy/Sinti/Travellers (Durban Declaration and Programme for Action, 2001). Yet the Post-2015 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and Targets are disturbingly silent about eradicating the causes and effects of racism and racial/ethnic discrimination.

Studies have shown that racism impacts health, both physical and mental quite adversely. A group of Harvard researchers documented that a mere one per cent increase in incidents of racial disrespect translates to an increase in 350 deaths per 100,000 African Americans. One British study of 4,800 people finds that those who felt victimized by discrimination by various forms of racism were twice as likely to develop psychotic episodes in the next three years.

A team of researchers from the University of Melbourne studied 461 cases of racism linked to mental health outcomes, marking the first study of its kind to draw the connection. The lead researcher of the study, Dr. Naomi Priest, of the McCaughey Vic Health Centre for Community Wellbeing, said the study showed racism was an important influencing factor in kids' developing sense of self-worth. "The review showed there are strong and consistent relationships between racial discrimination and a range of detrimental health outcomes" which include "low self-esteem, reduced resilience, increased behavior problems and lower levels of wellbeing."

Research has mainly conceptualised racism as a stressor. An individual's perception of society as racist and the experience of everyday minor acts of discrimination are thought to constitute a chronic stressor. Individually, more overtly racist acts are considered as life events (acute stressors) that are superimposed on this chronic stress (Bhugra & Cochrane, 2001). In the USA, interpersonal discrimination has been associated with increased rates of hypertension, depression and stress; poorer self-rated health; and more reported days spent unwell in bed (Krieger, 2000). In the UK, both Burke (1984) and Fernando (1984) have documented relationships between depression and life events thought to be due to racism. Burke reported a 1.5-fold increased incidence of depression in a community sample of 'West Indians' living in Birmingham compared with Whites.

Specific attention is given to the topic of racism-related stress by Harrell (2000). According to her research, there are six types of racism-related stress that have the potential to affect the well-being of an individual: racism-related life events, vicarious racism experiences, daily racism micro stressors, chronic-contextual stress, collective experiences, and trans-generational transmission (Harrell, 2000, p. 45-47).

As a matter of fact, racial discrimination has a compounding effect on mental health. In a Victorian study (2013) by The Lowitja Institute, an overwhelming majority (97 per cent) of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people surveyed experienced racism multiple times. As incidents of racism rise, the risk of psychological distress also increases. This study also showed that subtle forms of racial discrimination such as 'being left out or avoided' were just as harmful to mental health as more overt forms.

Mental health research into the effects of racial discrimination runs the risk of 'medicalising' appropriate social struggle and distress. Focusing on those discriminated against in this way, may only serve to maintain the institution's power over the victimised group, while running the risk of stereotyping the group's identity as nothing more than a response to racism. It has been argued that there should be a closer examination of those bodies that discriminate, rather than their victims. Sashidharan (1993) has voiced concern that focusing on psychological differences between Blacks and Whites rather than on the power disparities inherent in a predominantly racist society serves only to reinforce the idea of racial differences.

In view of the overlapping nature of caste based and racial discriminations, impact of the latter may tentatively be regarded as common to both.

We need not remind the fact that Dalit and Tribal students come with zero and frequently indebted social, cultural and economic capital. Their birth amounts to free unpaid labour of the landowners across the nation. A Dalit child is taken as a reservoir for the privileged caste's profligacy. To make something valuable out of a tamed body, Dalit students look up to Ambedkar and choose for higher education. Since most of these are first generation learners their parents are distantly aware of their children's educational progress. Even if they try to understand they would have hard time in making sense of the complicated education their child is undertaking. They are just proud at their child going to school, as if their efforts and immeasurable sacrifices are coming true. Dalit parents who could not go to school to get matriculation cannot mentor their children like other parents. Indeed, the rubric of a Dalit learner starts with limited familial academic guidance.

The fact however remains that a Dalit, by virtue of birth alone, is forever condemned as an agent of pollution. The overall mindset which is targeting and hitting the psyche of Dalits may be treated as one of a terrorists' in that terrorism too is any type of action or effort made with the express or indirect purpose of causing fear and terror in other people. Terrorism primarily targets people's psychological well being and state of mind, with the time-tested intention of leaving a negative impact on those people. Psychological terrorism, in real sense, is a form of attack but does not leave any physical marks or visible impact upon a person or group of people, but eventually leaves psychological injuries or traumas, residual fear or panic impulses that have a lasting impact. In other words, any action which is practiced mainly by psychological methods with the aim of evoking a planned premeditated psychological reaction in other people is psychological terrorism. Rohit Vemula's post mortem report might be saying a pressure on wind pipe as the factor causing death. But what emotional and psychological pressure he beards could not be reported in any medical report. How he was (psychologically) terrorised which compelled a well educated and bright student to take an extreme step can be studied and understood by psychologists and sociologists. Such people as have been practising psychological onslaughts on caste-basis even if practised by 'fringe groups' should now be called "terrorist groups".

The caste addicts were, and still are, opposed to genuinely discarding caste-ridden discriminatory mindset in favour of a more modern idea of democracy and citizenship. If the people place creed and caste above country, societal development may, in all likelihood, be put in jeopardy. India can no more afford to be content with mere political democracy. The country must make its political democracy a social democracy that demands liberty, equality and fraternity as the principles of life. It is only with this view in operation that India can develop and sustain development. The state and the society are under the obligation to stopping the ongoing 'psychological terrorism' outright. India needs to adopt an effective operational system having inbuilt checks and balances, and provide psychological inputs of curative and preventive nature for realising the dream of sustainable development.

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