

Poverty and Peace: Finding a Better Way to Fight Poverty

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| 요약 |

저에게 주어진 주제는 빈곤과 평화, 그리고 빈곤을 퇴치하기 위한 더 나은 길을 모색 한다는 주제였습니다. 빈곤과 평화는 역의 관계를 가지고 있습니다. 빈곤한 곳에 평화가 있을 수 없습니다. 빈곤은 인간을 인간답지 못하게 합니다. 인간만이 빈곤의 영향을 받습니다. 빈곤은 역병, 테러, 인신매매, 마약 등의 근원적인 문제이기도 합니다. 현재 국가 간의 격차는 줄어들고 있는데 전 세계적으로 빈곤층은 오히려 늘어나고 있습니다. 가장 많은 빈곤층이 있는 국가가 인도와 중국입니다. 제가 이 두 국가와 밀접한 연관이 있습니다. 인도는 제 모국이고 제 출생지이기도 하고, 제가 아주 감정적으로 강한 교류를 가지고 있는 국가입니다. 중국은 제가 학술적으로 많은 관심을 가진 국가입니다. 인도와 중국은 수세기 동안 굉장히 유사한 모습을 보여 왔습니다. 둘 다 빈곤한 국가였고 그리고 또 결핍을 경험하고 있습니다.

양국의 사회들은 굉장히 전통적인 사회들입니다. 지금도 전통과 현대와의 갈등이 지속되고 있습니다. 전통과 현대화와 관련된 논쟁이 아직까지 이어지고 있고 끝나지 않을 것 같습니다. 전통에 기반을 둔 사회들이 빈곤하다고 말할 수는 없습니다. 한 개의 논문에서 이 다양한 빈곤의 차원을 다 다룰 수는 없습니다. 지금 현재 8억 명의 인도 사람들이 빈곤층으로 분류되고 있습니다. 인도 전체인구는 10억이 조금 넘습니다. 이 8억 중 2억이 절대빈곤층입니다. 오늘날 인도가 국제적으로 많이 관심을 갖고 있는데 그런데 관심

을 받는 인구는 1/4에 불과합니다. 빈곤층이 가장 취약한 계층인데, 자연재해 때문이건 아니면 종교 때문이건 역병이건 항상 가장 빈곤한 사람들이 가장 나쁜 영향을 받곤 합니다. 고대사로 거슬러 올라가 보면 인도는 카스트 제도 때문에 빈곤 했습니다. 카스트 제도는 굉장히 억압적인 사회현상입니다. 힌두사회에서만 찾아볼 수 있는 유일한 제도입니다. 인도인의 82%가량이 힌두교도입니다. 누가 언제 이걸 시작했는지는 아무도 모릅니다. 이렇게 사회를 상류 카스트 하류 카스트로 나눴는데 이로 인해 좋은 층으로 태어나는 사람들도 있지만 나머지는 굉장히 억압을 당하고 있습니다.

불교가 카스트 사회를 바꾸고자 했습니다. 상류 카스트에게는 위협으로 받아들였습니다. 그렇기 때문에 불교가 불교의 탄생지인 인도에서 성공하지 못했습니다. 많은 다수의 힌두교들은 전생에 나쁜 짓을 했기 때문에 지금 현생에 빈곤하게 산다고 믿습니다. 인도 역사상 중세 그리고 근대를 보면 빈곤이 지속되었고 그리고 또 다른 한편으로 굉장한 부유층이 생겨났습니다. 1947년 인도의 독립 이래 자유로운 민주주의 인도의 정부가 빈곤을 없애려고 나섰습니다. 모든 자원을 동원해서 빈곤을 없애자 했는데 아직까지도 인도는 빈곤을 벗어났다고 말할 수 없습니다. 인구가 증가했고, 빈곤층의 숫자도 해마다 증가를 하고 있습니다. 물론 다수가 빈곤을 탈출하긴 하지만 그래도 아직까지 너무나 많은 사람들이 빈곤층입니다. 지난 몇 년 동안 떠오르는 인도, 경제적으로 역동적인 인도, 미래의 슈퍼파워 인도 등등의 말들을 많이 들어왔습니다. 그런데 인도에는 지금 억만장자수가 가장 많습니다. 세상에서 가장 부자도 인도사람입니다.

그렇지만 인도의 실상은 조금 다르다고 할 수 있습니다. 제가 1960, 1970 년대에 인도에서 자라났습니다. 당시 인도는 굉장히 나쁜 상황이었습니다. 경제도 나빴고, 사회적인 갈등도 있었습니다. 인도가 변하리라고 믿는 사람은 아무도 없었습니다. 1980년대 들어서 변화가 있었습니다. 당시 1982년 뉴델리 아시안게임을 인도가 주최했습니다. 인디라 간디가 1984년에 암살당 합니다. 아들인 라지브 간디가 다음 총리가 되었습니다. 라지브 간디가 관료주의를 없애고자 조치를 취했습니다. 너무나 중앙 집중화된 경제에서 관료

주의를 없애자고 했습니다. 그 다음에 후속 총리인 비제이싱, 비피질인도 유사한 경제정책을 취했습니다. 정부가 경제의 상당부분을 통제를 했습니다. 진정한 경제의 자유화는 1991년에서야 있었다라고 말씀드릴 수 있습니다. 그 이후로 인도경제가 주목을 받게 되는 것입니다.

중국과 더불어서 인도는 굉장히 경제적으로 발전을 하게 되었고 세계에서 가장 역동적인 지역으로 꼽히고 있습니다. 그런데 아이러니하게 이 두 지역에 가장 많은 빈곤층이 살고 있습니다. 경제 개발로 인해서 인도 기업가 정신이 꽃피기 시작했습니다. 인도 경제계가 이 기회를 잘 포착해서 잘 활용을 했습니다. IT 영역에선 굉장히 성적이 좋았는데 IT쪽의 도움을 많이 받았습시다. 10년 이래에 인디아가 소프트웨어 슈퍼파워가 되었고, 경제전반에 걸쳐서 많은 긍정적인 신호를 보이게 되었습니다. 지난 회계연도에 8% 성장을 했고 올해는 9% 성장을 예상하고 있습니다. FDI랑 FII를 보게 되면 엄청난 성장이 있는 것을 알 수 있습니다. 그리고 IT업계를 이어서 바이오, 제약업계가 인도에 아주 강한 분야가 되리라고 전망되고 있습니다. 지난 10년 동안 서비스 분야도 상당히 성장을 했습니다. 그래서 많은 관찰자들이 인디아를 세계의 사무소라고 부릅니다. 중국은 세계의 공장이라고 불리고 있습니다. 이런 결과로 중산층이 일어났고 구매력도 그 만큼 늘어났습니다.

다시 말씀드리면 많은 수의 인도인들이 수입이 늘었고 인도의 부가 기하학적으로 늘었다는 것입니다. 인도가 상황이 나아졌다고 말씀을 드리면 좋겠는데 인도에는 아직까지 문제가 많습니다. 절대적인 빈곤이 인도에 너무나 많습니다. 이렇게 많은 경제성장이 있어도 절대 빈곤이 많습니다. UN의 통계치를 보면 너무나 많은 수의 인도인들이 절대빈곤입니다. 교육, 보건, 그리고 위생 쪽에서 인도는 굉장히 낙후되어 있습니다. 선진산업국이 되기 위해서는 우리는 문맹률을 낮추어야 하고, 건강한 인력이 있어야 됩니다. 그래야만 생산업계가 탄력을 받을 수 있습니다. 그런데 문해력이 지금 인도에서는 70%라고 정부가 내세우고 있습니다만 평균적으로 문해력이 굉장히 낮습니다. 초등교육의 수준도 굉장히 낮습니다. 왜냐하면 지방 단체들이 지방 지역정부가 별로 잘 하지 못하고 있기 때문입니다. 학교를 중퇴하는 비율도

너무나 높습니다. 빈곤 때문입니다. 아동노동도 아직까지 문제입니다. 인도 도시지역에 비교해 본다면 아직까지 농촌지역에 2차 교육이 제대로 되고 있지 않습니다. 빈곤층은 고등교육을 받지 못합니다. 대학의 등록금이 별로 비싸지 않은데도 빈곤층은 대학에 못가고 있습니다. 고등교육 기관들이 대도시에 집중 되고 있습니다. 대입시험은 굉장히 어렵습니다. 사교육을 많이 받아야 합니다. 빈곤층은 이러한 사교육비를 댈 수가 없습니다. 정부의 후원을 받은 인도의 교육기관들은 세계수준이고, 인도의 지식산업의 성장을 많이 도운 것이 사실입니다. 나중에 빈곤과 교육에 대해서는 조금 더 말씀을 드리겠습니다.

보건도 비용이 올라가고 있는 것이 사실입니다. 고등교육과 마찬가지로 인도는 전문병원이 아주 좋습니다. 물론 대도시에 있습니다. 그런데 일부 농촌지역에는 그냥 보건소조차도 존재하지 않는 곳이 있습니다. 1947년 독립 이래 인도는 예방의학 쪽에서 큰 발전이 있었습니다. 보건체제 덕분입니다. 그래서 사망률이 줄어들었지만 양질의 보건에 대한 접근이 아직까지 수백만 명 인도인에게는 요원한 꿈입니다. 정부가 운영하는 보건소가 많은 지역에 존재를 하는데, 이 보건소들의 시설이 뛰어난 것은 아닙니다. 여성보건, 특히 농촌 여성 보건은 너무나 낙후되어 있습니다. 출산시 사망률이 가장 높은 국가이기도 합니다. 그리고 또 빈혈 여성의 숫자가 인도에 가장 많습니다. 인도 인구의 약 반 가량이 깨끗한 식수에 대한 접근이 없습니다. 인도의 3분의 1이 제대로 된 화장실에 접근을 하지 못하고 있습니다. 건강한 문해력, 높은 인구가 없으면 인도가 선진국 대열에 진입할 수가 없을 것입니다. 중국과 마찬가지로 인도는 농촌사회입니다. 그리고 또 국민의 70%가 농촌에서 거주하고 있습니다.

도시 쪽의 빈곤은 사실 농촌 측의 문제라고 할 수 있습니다. 농촌 쪽을 보면 성장의 여지가 별로 없습니다. 토지를 소유한 농민들은 제 때 비가 내리지 않으면 빚을 집니다. 자연재해, 예를 들어서 홍수 같은 경우에는 크게 실패를 하게 됩니다. 보험이라든지 사회안전망이 전혀 없기 때문에 땅에 있는 농민들조차도 어려움을 겪습니다. 농민자살이 해마다 너무 많이 늘어나고 있습

니다. 정부의 빈곤퇴치 프로그램이 지난 40여년 동안 작동을 해왔지만 농촌 측에 끼친 긍정적인 영향이 별로 없습니다. 관료주의, 부패, 펀드를 제대로 잘 관리하지 못하는 것이야말로 농촌개발정책의 실패원인이라고 할 수 있습니다.

정부들이 지금 나서서 빈곤을 퇴치를 해야 됩니다. 많은 사회법들이 지금 인도 의회를 통과를 했습니다. 이런 시민사회 단체들이 요구해 지금 좋은 법들이 제정 되었습니다. 앞서 언급한 정보접근법이 2년 전에 입법화 되었고, 정부 관료들이 정보를 필요로 하는 국민들이 정보를 달라고 하면 그 정보를 제공할 의무가 있습니다. 만약 정보를 제공하지 않으면 아주 엄격한 법의 제재를 받게 되는 것입니다. 그런데 사람들의 문해력이 높아진다면 이 법이 더 잘 활용될 수 있을 것입니다.

많은 사회사업가들이 지금 비정부기구를 통해서 빈곤층에게 많은 도움을 주었습니다. 그런데 아직까지 가야 할 길이 있고 개선의 여지가 많다고 말씀드릴 수 있습니다. NGO를 통한 사회사업은 사실 그 자체로서 인도의 빈곤을 퇴치할 수 없습니다. 왜냐하면 인도의 빈곤이 너무나 만연한 문제이기 때문에 보다 다차원적인 포괄적인 노력이 필요하다는 것입니다.

제가 여기서 제안하는 것은 정부, 사회단체, 재계간의 대대적인 가입 노력이 필요하다는 것입니다. 모든 국가 지역이 망라되어야 합니다. 이 세 개의 주체들은 프로그램을 명백하게 만들어 내야 되고, 역할분담을 해야 될 것입니다. 시간 틀이 마련되어야 되고, IT를 최대한 활용을 해서 프로그램을 운영해야 될 것입니다. E-정부라는 컨셉트를 강조해야 됩니다. 각각의 주체가 서로 간에 체크를 하고 감독을 해야 됩니다. 정보접근권이 법으로 제정이 되었기 때문에 서로 간에 감독을 하고, 대중도 이 세 개의 주체를 감독을 해야 될 것입니다. 그렇게 된다면 부패가 좀 줄어들 것입니다.

The reverse relationship between poverty and peace cannot be exaggerated. There cannot be peace where there is poverty. Poverty is de-humanizing and a terrible curse which only human beings are afflicted with. Poverty is the root cause for a plethora of problems - from epidemics to terrorism, human trafficking, drugs and many more. In this period of globalization while the disparity between nations is reducing the number of poor people is increasing the world over. The largest numbers of poor people live in two countries -India and China. I have association with both these countries: India, my birthplace and motherland with which I have deep emotional association, and China, my academic area of interest with which I have a strong professional association.

Both these countries have striking similarities as for centuries both have experienced poverty and deprivation despite being resource rich. Even today they are referred to as 'rich country with poor people'. Historic and socio-economic factors make India and China similar in many ways. Of course the dissimilarities are also glaring. Both India and China experienced colonialism for fairly long periods of time in the post-Industrial Revolution era. Much of the poverty and backwardness are attributed to this fact that colonial exploitation came in the way of normal development which has led to mass poverty. India and China, unlike Japan or Europe, did not industrialize because of the kind of agrarian system that existed for centuries. Surplus created by agriculture was not used for industrialization as the village elite was anyway prosperous because of money lending.

The other commonality is that societies in both the countries have been strongly tradition-bound. In the modern era too the tussle between tradition and modernization continues. Public discourse on tradition and modernization clearly reveals that the debate is unending. Although there is no reason to suggest that tradition-oriented societies are necessarily poor yet it is true that without a scientific temper and attitude it is not possible to go forward. On the negative side, wealth and prosperity also lead to abandoning healthy traditional values. In the two countries mentioned here it has been found that family values like taking care of aged parents, supporting siblings in times of distress, etc. are declining among prosperous sections. In this paper, however, I would focus mainly on India as Indian poverty is something I see almost everyday. On China's poverty, I may have facts, figures and statistics, and primarily an academic interest but poverty in India strikes me at the bottom of my heart.

I have traveled in various parts of India both for pleasure as well as for academic purposes. The main difference between poverty in India and China has to do with geography. While in China poverty has a regional dimension - it is widespread in the western regions, in India poverty is all over. In terms of economic indicators some provinces may be better off than the others but every province has many poor districts. According to official figures, of the 600 districts in the country 400 has significant number of poverty stricken people.

I. Poverty in India

Poverty in India has so many dimensions that it is not possible to cover all of it within the scope and size of one paper. It is estimated that at this point there are 800 million poor Indians out of a population for a little more than one billion. Of these 800 million about 200 million live in abject poverty. The new India that is receiving so much attention globally is less than one-fourth of the country's population. The poor are also the most vulnerable section of society. Whether it is a natural calamity, religious riot, epidemic or any disaster, it is always the poor who are, in most cases, badly affected. The absence of a social security net for the poor makes their suffering unending.

Going back into history or rather the ancient times, poverty in India is associated with the caste-system. Caste has been an extremely oppressive social phenomenon. It has been a characteristic only of Hindu society. No one knows how, why and exactly when it started. Dividing society into upper and lower castes gave to some hereditary privileges while a vast majority remained exploited, oppressed and discriminated forever. The advent of Buddhism tried to transform this caste-dominated system and therefore became a threat to upper caste Hindu society. It is, therefore, not difficult to guess why Buddhism was not allowed to succeed in India, its birthplace. A large number of Hindus believed (and many still do) that poverty was their fate and the result of misdeeds committed in a previous birth. In the medieval and modern periods of Indian

history poverty continued, on the one hand, and wealth existed in small pockets, on the other. Since Independence in 1947 the government of a free and democratic India has taken upon itself the task of eradicating poverty using all the resources it has at its command yet poverty remains. With increase in population the number of poor people also goes up with each passing year even though a large number also comes out of poverty.

In the last few years one has frequently heard expressions like 'India rising', 'economically dynamic India', 'India- the future super power' and so forth. Strangely, India has the largest number of billionaires and the world's richest man is also an Indian! However, the true picture of the 'rising India' would be given in the next section.

II. India Rising: The Flip Side

As someone growing up in the 1960s and the 1970s when India was going through a very bad phase - its economic performance was far from impressive, there was social turmoil and political unrest, it was hard to believe that India would ever change. The enthusiasm and optimism of the 1950s when India emerged as a newly independent state had faded greatly. In these two decades India went through three wars, massive food crises, insurgency in its North-Eastern provinces, radical anti-government movements, and all of these culminating in the declaration of Emergency in 1975 by Prime Minister Indira

Gandhi. Thus India's USP viz. democracy was on hold for about two years. The Indian nation and the Indian State, nonetheless, managed to survive. Why and how that was so should be researched by scholars. There are no off the cuff answers. The point that is underscored here is that economically, socially and politically India was in a situation of near collapse. There was frustration and pessimism all-around.

The first signs of change came in the 1980s when India hosted the 1982 Asian Games in New Delhi. After the assassination of Indira Gandhi in 1984, her son Rajiv who became the next Prime Minister initiated some measures to loosen the tight grip of the bureaucracy on what was seen as a much-centralized economy. His successor Prime Minister V.P. Singh too pursued similar economic policies. Yet those were not enough to liberate the economy from the control of the government. It was only after 1991 when the Indian economy was on the verge of a collapse that significant efforts were made by the new government with Narasimha Rao as Prime Minister and Manmohan Singh as the Finance Minister. It is widely believed that this breakthrough would not have come without pressure from international financial agencies like the World Bank and IMF. Nonetheless, it is also true that within India the private sector was eager to be freed from state control and take charge of India's growth and development and a large section among economists and intellectuals supported economic reforms to put back four decades of slow growth. Thus the liberalization of the economy began in the early 1990s and as the new century

dawned India came to be seen as an emerging, robust economy. Along with China, India's achievements have resulted in a resurgent Asia and this region is now regarded as the most dynamic in the world in terms of growth and development. Ironically, this is also the region where the largest number of poor people live.

Opening up the economy has led to bringing out the best in Indian entrepreneurship. Corporate India that was waiting very long for this opportunity grabbed it and made the best out of it. The IT sector, which had anyway shown great performance in the earlier period, led this massive transformation. Within a decade not only did India become a 'software super power' but also began to show many positive signs in its economy. In the last financial year there has been 8 percent growth. It is hoped that this year it would hit 9 per cent. Both in FDI and FII there is remarkable increase. After IT, it is believed that in Bio-Technology and Pharmaceuticals, India would soon become the leading nation. The service sector's substantial growth in the last decade or so has made observers refer to India as the 'office of the world' (China being the 'factory of the world'). As a result of this economic boom one sees a huge middle-class whose purchasing power is increasing by the day. In other words, there has been an unprecedented rise in the incomes of a large number of Indians and wealth in India has multiplied exponentially.

I wish I could stop here and say with satisfaction that India has emerged and so have the Indian people. In fact, there is

another side to this story, which if ignored would be disastrous. As stated earlier, abject poverty is rampant in India despite phenomenal economic growth. Although India does not have the kind of regional disparity that China has but poverty exists in a fairly spread out manner all over the country. Some states (provinces) of India are wealthier than others but each one has a sizeable number of poverty-stricken people. The Human Development Index of the UNDP clearly indicates the low quality of life for an overwhelming number of Indians.

In the areas of education, health and sanitation India's record is far from impressive. To become an advanced industrial nation India requires a literate and healthy work force that could be significant for the growth of the manufacturing sector. The literacy rate in India may have reached close to 70 per cent as per government figures but the quality of education even of the literate population is still, on an average, low. Primary education in large parts of rural India is of a very poor standard mainly because it is badly managed by local authorities. Lack of funding is no longer a major drawback. Drop out rates at the primary level are very high due to poverty and the existence of child labor. Compared to urban India, secondary education in rural India is weak. As far as higher education is concerned the poor remain deprived of it even though expenses for a general education at the university level are very low. (In no other country of the world is higher education as inexpensive as it is in India). Mostly all of the important centers of higher learning are located in the big cities. Entrance to the best of institutions is

through tough tests that require coaching and training and the non-affluent cannot afford these. It must, however, be stated here that some of India's educational institutions (funded by the government) are world class and they have made a very meaningful contribution to the growth of India's knowledge industry. More on the issue of literacy and its relationship with poverty eradication would be taken up towards the later part of this paper.

Healthcare is becoming increasingly costly in the entire country. As in the case of higher education, India has excellent super specialty hospitals in the big metropolises but in some rural areas there does not even exist a proper primary healthcare center. Since Independence in 1947, India has made great strides in preventive medicine. This has been possible through a public health care system and has resulted in lower mortality and morbidity rates but at the same time access to quality health care has not been available to millions of Indians. Government-run health care facilities exist in all urban areas but barring a few, the quality of these establishments is far from impressive. The fact that healthcare for women, particularly, in villages is not up to the mark is indicated by the fact that the largest number of women who die at child-birth are in India, and India also has the largest number of women who are anemic. There are other glaring facts regarding health and sanitation. For example, nearly half of India's population does not have access to potable, drinking water and more than one-third of its people do not have proper toilet facilities. Without a

healthy and literate population, how can India hope to become an advanced country?

Like China, India is an agricultural nation and more than 70 per cent of its people live in the countryside. Again, like China, India wishes to industrialize and urbanize its countryside so that the non-performing and low productivity agriculture is not a hindrance to an all-round and balanced development. Today the situation in agriculture is dismal. Farming is no longer an attractive proposition. In spite of the fact that there is no taxation in rural India for agriculture, and the government gives heavy subsidies to inputs like seeds, fertilizers and electricity, the overall conditions in the Indian countryside is not at all conducive to growth. Land holdings are too small for substantial output, mechanization is still not available to many, shortages of water, and electricity, and fertilizers, etc. are common. To top it all, agro-industries have not been set up to absorb the surplus labor. Poverty and scarcity forces land less laborers and poor peasants to migrate to the urban areas in search of livelihoods. This results in slums and shanties in all small and big cities. The migrants have to live under the constant threat of being displaced, to avoid that they often bribe policemen, local officials and politicians. Urban poverty in India has rural roots.

In the countryside apart from the non-availability of basic amenities, the scope of agrarian growth is very limited owing to a variety of factors. Farmers who own some land are often in debt if the rains do not come on time or due to some other natural calamity like floods which causes crop failures. In the

absence of any system of insurance or social security even land owning peasants often find themselves in distress. The increase in the number of farmer suicides that takes place each year is simply appalling. The government's poverty alleviation programs, which have been in operation since the last four decades, have made only a limited impact to the lives of the rural folk. Corruption at all levels of the bureaucracy and poor management of funds, have been the main factors behind the lack of success in the rural development policies. According to government statistics large numbers of people living at subsistence level have moved above but the total picture in the Indian countryside remains grim.

Many in India, the government included, are well aware of these problems. In the year 2004 the ruling combination lost the elections as it ran its campaign with the slogan 'India Shining'. Rural areas of India, who have more seats in the Parliament, inflicted this defeat on the ruling party thereby giving the message that India cannot really shine if most of its people remain poor and get no benefits from the development process. The present government has announced some remedial measures to help the rural areas to develop. One such measure is the National Rural Employment Guarantee Program, which secures income for families with no earnings. The Union Budget of 2007 has announced schemes to help farmers and to develop areas in the agrarian economy that can grow. In 2006, as part of its affirmative action policy the government has announced that educational institutions under the central government would

reserve 27 per cent of the seats for the backward castes. This could help high school graduates from the countryside to seek higher education and improve their status not just economically but also socially. Another step taken recently is the passing of the 'Right to Information Act'. Already there are indications to prove that this Act is really pro-people. This Act threatens the otherwise insensitive government bureaucracy and makes it act and be transparent. On the importance of this Act more would be taken up towards the end.

All these schemes and measures are yet to show results and the results depend greatly on the political will of the Indian leadership. The only hope comes from the fact that the democratic spirit is vibrant among Indians. Democracy and electoral politics are sometimes a hindrance to rapid growth and development but at other times they help in balancing growth with equity. True half of India is still in darkness but one hopes that it will come out of it one day.

III. Possible Solutions to the Scourge of Poverty

For centuries humankind has suffered poverty and since then solutions have been sought. In the Hindu society of India, poor people always believed that they were destined to be poor. The rich believed that by being charitable to the poor they would be doing their duties. (However, charity and kindness towards the poor may be important but are no solutions to mass poverty.)

That explains why for centuries together the poor in India did not rise in revolt. Today the situation has fortunately changed. More and more people believe that through human efforts people can come out of poverty. What are these human efforts? The case of India demonstrates that despite the best of intentions, the Indian government, regardless of the party in power, has not succeeded in wiping out poverty even sixty years after independence. In order to appreciate the suggestion, I think some background information must be provided.

IV. Literacy and Education

Most scholars and social activists believe that poverty in India is mainly due to a large population of illiterates and semi-literates. It is ironical that a country that has some world class academic institutions has such widespread illiteracy. There is also an opinion, and a rather convincing one, that people are illiterate because they are poor and not the other way round. Poor people cannot afford to send their children to school as among the very poor the children are malnourished and cannot take the pressure of studies. Among the less poor, some do send their small children to school but most drop out before finishing even primary education. This happens because they are required by their families to earn in order to subsist. This in spite of the fact that primary education is completely free. There are no tuition fees, and books, stationery and uniform are

provided by the school, and no miscellaneous charges are levied. Most importantly in recent years a 'mid-day meal program' has been introduced under which one full meal is provided free of cost by the government to ensure that parents are motivated to send their otherwise malnourished children to school. This effort also has not been fully successful. One major reason is corruption at the local level. There are reports that the food served is often of a very bad quality because much of the money meant for it is siphoned off by officials and substandard food is provided. Moreover, officials who administer them often misuse other funds too meant for education.

Literacy and education may not always lead to income generation but it is widely acknowledged that they are means of awareness and more significantly empowerment. In a democratic society unless people are aware of their rights and empowered to demand them, democracy is meaningless. For instance, many poor and illiterate people, particularly in rural India, believe that to lodge a complaint in a police station or to apply for a ration card they have to pay. They, therefore, suffer and tolerate crimes and buy basic food items at market prices at a higher price. Such things aggravate their poverty and miseries. Awareness and empowerment are therefore crucial to fight against poverty.

The Indian government has made efforts to directly attack poverty through what are called the 'poverty alleviation programs'.

V. Poverty Alleviation Programmes

Planning has been an integral to India's economic development policies. Ten five-year plans have been completed. Although one cannot dismiss the significance of the plans in India's growth and development yet one cannot say that they have helped in reducing disparity or even lifting large numbers from abject poverty. In the late 1970s and early 1980s special poverty alleviation programs were adopted and implemented. Integrated Rural Development Program, District Rural Development Program, Development of Women and Children in Rural Areas, to name a few. Funds were pumped in for all these programs but these did not go a long way in making a substantial dent in the lives of poor people. The main reason for this was corruption at all levels of government. Former Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi had himself admitted that only 15 percent of the funds allocated for the poor reaches them, the rest of the 85 percent goes into the pockets of officials and politicians who run those programs.

Recently, the Government has initiated the National Rural Employment Guarantee Programme which provides a minimum of 100 days employment to all people 'below the poverty line'. It is too early to assess its impact but the policy itself will not succeed unless it is accompanied by other supportive measures. To my mind, two relatively recent developments can make a big difference. They are **Information Technology and Right to Information**. The word 'information', therefore, is significant.

I have made it sufficiently clear that official corruption at all levels is coming in the way of the spread of literacy, the success of all poverty alleviation programs or for that matter any governmental effort to reduce disparity and fight poverty. India has the resources- both human and material - to ensure that all its citizens are provided the basic necessities of life. It also has the required political institutions to guarantee the basic rights of people. What it does not have is a concerted effort and political will of all concerned - the government, the social activists/civil society organizations and the corporate sector. A partnership-cum- mutual surveillance between these three entities can make the difference. Here the recently enacted law on 'Right to Information' and the use of information technology where India has achieved much can be brought into effective use.

At the policy level the successive governments have never shied away from fighting poverty in all its dimensions - the problem has always been with implementation. Here as stated repeatedly, **official corruption, often in connivance with politicians, at all levels has been the main obstruction.** Governments per se have upheld the need to eradicate poverty. Corruption is so deeply ingrained in the officialdom that even honest politicians and bureaucrats (and their numbers are not small by any account) are unable to make a noticeable difference.

With the liberalization of the economy from the early 1990s the corporate sector in India, as stated above, has shown its dynamism and vitality. Their role in India's growth and

development is too obvious to be stated. For the corporate sector too, it is important that the country has a literate and healthy population who would be competent factory workers, managers and technicians. They would also benefit greatly from people who have a high purchasing power as it means more profits for their products. They are therefore important stakeholders in India's fight against poverty.

Social activism has had a long history in India. However, in the post-Independence period a large number of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and voluntary associations have sprung up all over the country. Not all of them are committed to the aims and objectives they formally profess. Still there are many groups and individuals that have made exemplary contribution to the uplift of many poor Indians. Many socially beneficial laws have been passed by the Indian Parliament as a response to the demands made by these civil society groups. The law on the 'Right to Information' is one such law. This was passed less than two years back and is already showing some encouraging results. This Right makes it mandatory for government officials to give in writing any information which is sought concerning any public matter. Non-compliance amounts to strict legal action. This 'right', however, can be more meaningful to the poor if their levels of literacy and awareness are high. Up till now many among the illiterate and the poor have benefited from this with the help of social activists operating through non-governmental organizations. But so far the numbers of such instances are few and far between. Social activism through NGOs cannot by themselves eradicate poverty in India. Considering the massive

dimension of poverty a more organized, multi-dimensional and comprehensive effort is necessary.

My main suggestion here is that a large-scale joint effort between government, civil society groups and business is made to fight poverty. Every district of the country should be covered under it. These three entities first require chalking out their programs after mutual consultation and dividing the responsibilities. There should be time-bound, step-by-step measures. Information technology must be used to the maximum to run the programs. The concept of e-governance must be stressed. More significantly, each one of the three entities must mutually check and supervise the other two. Under the 'right to information' the work of these three-in-one units must be available for public scrutiny. This would prevent corruption and the growth of vested interests in these groups. Also some amount of monitoring by international agencies would be helpful. Since corruption is the primary reason for the failure of poverty alleviation programs, this kind of a people's vigilance through a system of partnership can go along way in the eradication of many evils afflicting India. In my view this is a better way to fight poverty.