

Managing Social Change: Challenge and Hope of 21st Century (Introduction)

The subject of this publication is a wide one. It is concerned with human development and the urgent need to foster some understanding of the factors in development implication and action consequent on such understanding. For instance the issues of poverty has been with us ever since. It is a possibility that world wide poor are increasing in number. Even if there is some decline in absolute poverty to the extent that the poverty might have become somewhat less painful, relative poverty has been on the increase and is a cause of substantial misery through out poor societies. This relative poverty is also creating situations where social conflicts are on the increase. The social conflicts do cross political boundaries and take forms and shapes that sometime become major issues between nations. Poverty, thus, should remain high on the agenda of the world society and should be brought back to centre stage as it was through 50s to 80s. Around 80s somehow though the problem of poverty was not resolved, it was shifted from centre stage and emphasis moved from poverty to resource management and further to liberalization and globalization.

Whatever be the paradigm of development through future years care has to be taken that issues of poverty are tackled with care and speed so that as the world society advances it becomes all inclusive rather than exclusive with extraordinary benefits to some leaving others in relative want and destitution.

In India alone little less than one percent of the population is living close to starvation at any point of time. This, inspite of considerable food stocks with the Government. An additional about 7-8 percent of the Indian population is in a state of destitution and if not reached urgently with some support system, specially in the area of delivery of food, will enter starvation zone. All these and other situations which are at the root of social and economic inequities are considered in Chapters like “Poverty, Development and Collective Survival”, “Self Reliant Growth and Alleviation of Poverty through NGOs” (Building Bridges of Development in South Asia), “Poverty and Development”, “Bringing Poor to the Centre Stage” (A Challenge Before the Indian Economy), “National Food Security System: Food for All” and other like papers.

While poverty persists, there has also been a widening of gap in per capita income and control on productive resources between countries. It is unfortunate

that with passage of time community feeling has been on the decline worldwide. Sixties and Seventies saw an upsurge in resource transfers from developed to the developing societies. This was never adequate to meet the needs or the absorption capacity of the developing societies. However, these transfers were considered desirable and useful in accelerating development in the south. Though 0.7 percent of the GDP of the donor countries was expected to be transferred and UN endorsed this level of transfer, but the actual level of transfers reached was only about .35 percent of GDP of the developed/donor societies. Over the years even this could not be sustained and is currently stagnating at less than .25 percent. How this trend is to be reversed is a matter of concern for the humanity at large and the UN system. The mankind will have to give itself a new social, economic and political charter, eschew culture of the vulture, and provide for a form of Government which is human, equitable and just across all social, economic and political groups of populations inhabiting the universe, just like it gave itself the form of a nation State and the Government in the beginning of the process of intelligent development, so that its survival and development was not threatened by a continuous and violent struggle between haves and have nots and a law and order system could function across the country. There is need to enlarge the scope of a functional and equitable law and order system that also works across nation states and has a universal presence.

Seventies and Eighties saw the emergence of North - South dialogue and spurt in advocacy of favouring transfer of resources from the rich to the poor, and from the north to the south. While this advocacy for increasing aid flows had a positive effect at the leadership level, at the level of the people in developed societies there was a gradual withdrawal from any magnanimous transfer of resources. This has led to further shrinkage of aid levels.

This attitude at the household level where taxes are to be collected for possible transfer to developing societies, vote dependent leadership will not be able to hold great promises for such transfers through future years. This route, therefore, has limited possibilities though a new attempt has been made in this direction through Monterey Conference in March 2002. There is thus need to re-arrange trade and production patterns as to maximise economic benefits world wide and more particularly in favour of the less developed countries.

Meanwhile, efforts are being made to look into other avenues of resource transfers that will be in the nature of private investments and, therefore, commercially desirable. Changing terms of trade in favour of developing societies may be another redeeming feature. As things stand, the future for the developing societies appears difficult. The natural economic system makes no provisions for the weak and the disadvantaged and unless world society takes positive action in the direction of aiding the economies in need, the stability of the world society will remain threatened. Serious thinking, therefore, has to be done to make this feasible and possible, through future years, and a more equitable distribution of population across land areas of the globe, the universalization of global resources and emergence of world citizenship may provide some escape routes for a world society that increasingly appears to be cross with itself and its own conditions.

If the world economy remains as fragmented as at present, only two types of economies have a possibility for the future. Those economies which use first rate technologies and those which are gifted with considerable resources under their soils. Economies, which use medium/mediocre technologies and do not have enough known resources under their lands are going to face difficult prospects. India, along with several other developing countries is in this category. Only escape route for such countries is to quickly readopt themselves to modern technologies and also, at the same time, pay greater attention to findings and exploiting resources from under the crust of their soils. Meanwhile, the world society collectively has to take responsibility for certain minimum needs of all, wherever they be located. Since the era of meek subjugation is over duly the less deprived are less combative. And if we want a combat free society it is important that the less privileged are reached quickly.

Environment has been another issue which has received substantial attention over the last three decades. This is one area where world society has become substantially conscious but continues to lack the resources and the will by which deterioration in environment is to be reversed. To meet the increasingly important requirements of combining Development with Environment preservation and its possible upgradation, nation states and the world society will need new institutional arrangements and perspectives. In this context several alternative institutional possibilities present themselves, as also perspectives. One such set of arrangements and perspectives is presented here, as an NGO view

point, for possible consideration of the authorities that be. A more equitable distribution of energy consumption is, therefore, required which can bring about relative reduction in environmental loss/pollution.

Technology is another which is increasingly becoming the engine of growth, world wide. Vertical shifts in technologies are increasing inequity in technological access as between nations and communities. World society, therefore, have to develop institutional framework which permit greater equity in technological access, while remaining within WTO framework, and other contingent of intellectual property and related matters.

While world society may consider ways and means of technological transfer, what immediately needs to be done is wider spread of horizontal technologies across the globe. This horizontal spread of technologies will help internalize the participation in development by the relatively poor and the disadvantaged. Loyalties other than to humanity as a whole are taking charge and increasingly becoming narrower because mankind, the way it is organised at present, has failed to assure all its constituents the security of their person and their basic needs in their respective geographic and ethnic divides. These adrift segments of humanity are not to be blamed if humanity at large has failed to provide them the assurance they expect from it.

These and related issues form the main contents of this publication and reflect the concerns as seen by the author from the environment of relative socio-economic deprivation of large majority. But since mankind has skillfully survived all contingencies and is continuously deliberating on new ways of human survival and happiness, there is hope, specially if the globalizing world takes responsibility for the global population and ultimately even though very gradually moves to “Worldization” of its resources and human rights, through world citizenship.

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