

Priorities in the New Millennium

Role of Social Scientists and Social Development

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"The Survival of this Present Civilization depends on the solution of certain serious intellectual problems in the social sciences"

Kenneth E. Boulding

Of late society has moved more towards technology, management and finance. All these inputs are pro-elite and generally tend to benefit the elite. Therefore, there is need to focus on relevance of social development to the modern day society and role that social sciences and social scientists may play in the development process of the Indian Society through the Century that has just commenced, and also the millennium.

Social Scientists are being marginalized while there is increased need for social science solutions to most problems. Provisions for social Science Research as a proportion of the budget are declining - these are more foreign support dependent-as compared to support for technical and engineering solutions. Relative wages and remuneration of social scientists are declining. These trends are to be checked if not reversed.

Role of Social Science in administration is declining in the face of considerable social unrest. Today, Narmada is no more in the domain of irrigation/water engineers as Bhakra may have been. It is much more in the domain of social scientists - the displaced persons rehabilitation, environment and allied areas. At the same time share of entrants to IAS and similar administrative services from social sciences is declining and that from engineering/Technology/Medical disciplines increasing.

Today inadequate social investments are providing a constraint on economic development. Upto a point under utilized social investments have provided space for accelerated economic development. That space is now exhausted. New social investments are required to make way for new economic investments and this will

need inputs from social scientists, in primary education, health, housing, poverty alleviation etc. China is often referred as a case in point where rate of growth exceeds that in our country in the context of globalization. The real reason may be that in China social inputs such as universal literacy, health, housing etc. were already in place when China entered the arena of globalization. Same is not the case of India, where these inputs are still being marshalled.

There is a time lag between technological and economic advancement of a society and its social adaptation/adjustment to such changes. In a semi-educated society like ours, where there are considerable illiterates the time lag between technology advancement and social adaptation is considerable. This needs to be shortened through increased social inputs by social scientists.

If we are sold on engineering let some of these inputs be in the nature of social engineering, others social development. A change in mindset in favour of social scientists appears today as a pre-condition to accelerated economic and technological development. Multiple strikes, social unrest, increasing breakdown of administration are pointers to the need for and role of social scientists to be increased.

If social scientists fail to play their due role at this juncture when society is in a flux and information technology and similar technology based institutions are almost dichotomizing the society between "haves" and "have - nots", "Knowledgeable" and "Others", the society may stand divided into conflicting postures. Social scientist have to play a role in bringing about greater social cohesiveness as the society undergoes major transformations under impact of technological changes partly necessitated by globalization and marketization of every conceivable area including education, health, housing etc.

There is also a space that is being vacated by religious leaders of yesteryears because of some degree of loss of interest in religion by the younger generation which appears more materialistic and what may be described as 'down to earth' and 'street smart'. Such people, tend to weaken a particular social

infrastructure, social attitudes and social environment that has been built over centuries around religious teachings and ethos. The stability of our society to date owes much to the values and systems provided by our religions and religious teachings which also provided us a scheme of living, mutual relationships and a way of life. As role of religion in our life style declines, the space so vacated has to be occupied by a set of new ethos, that may be described as ethical conduct. Ethics has to fill the space that religion is vacating or may vacate over time. Strengthening ethical conduct and social behaviour will generally fall in the domain of social scientists who should be prepared to discharge these responsibilities.

Social Scientists have also to pitch in into the development of the independent sector, be it in the form of non-government development institutions, the end of the street resident welfare associations, the sector specific institutions such as women development, gender equality, environment, prevention of cruelty to animals, and anti poverty institutions. The setting up and functioning of such institutions is much in the domain of social scientists whose knowledge of people and their thought processes is to be valued in the context of changing environment.

We are in the middle of a globalization process. Its natural path is to raise the average rate of growth of GNP, while disproportionately enriching the better off and often further impoverishing the poor. While in the global circumstances in which we are, globalization cannot be rejected or even resisted it needs to be suitably mended so that its localised effects are for the general betterment of the weaker sections. This can best be ensured by increased provision of social inputs that directly benefit the relatively poor population groups or favourably impinge upon the relatively backward areas. Where and how this mending of the globalization process is to be done is a task to which social scientists must attend with urgency and knowledge.

Role of Private Sector in Social Development

It is fortunate that at this juncture, private sector has become equally conscious of the role of social development which was earlier primarily in the domain of the Government. Since a large part of social development is to be delivered at household or community level such as housing, literacy, safe drinking water, sanitation etc., such tasks have earlier been assigned to State Governments, who in majority of cases have miserably failed to perform. Of late independent sector including NGOs' have pitched in to help in these tasks but delivery levels have not been adequate. Panchayats are seen as a new mantra for grass root planning and delivery of social inputs but Panchayats are still at learning stage and actually lack the management talent essential for delivery of social inputs. In this context coming in of the private sector to take care of social needs of its neighbourhood will be an important step in the right direction.

Such social inputs will be an important contributory factor to the mobilization of the poor and their increased contribution to GNP. If growth of GNP has to rise to 8 percent plus, it can only happen through mobilization of the poor, who are spread across the country and whose incomes can substantially increase with marginal capital inputs. Output capital ratio is high among the relatively poor, if capital is meaningfully utilized by the poor for which they need relevant skills. State intervention will be required to direct flow of capital to these Capital starved segments of the economy while global Capital will chase opportunities arising in hi-tech fields for the benefit of the elites.

Here again care is required since Liberalization, Privatization, and Globalization (LPG) has brought with it the phenomenon of mergers and acquisitions which necessarily kill competition rather than enhance it. Total Capital involved in mergers and acquisitions world wide increased from US\$ 465 billion in 1993 to US\$ 1146 billion in 1996 and approximately doubled to US\$ 2200 billion in nine months (Jan. to Sept.) 1999. The mega institutions so created tend to be monolithic and leave little scope for competition and survival of relatively smaller organizations except as their ancillaries. Since most of these

monoliths will be based in advanced economies, all developing economies world wide will become their ancillaries, and thus dependent upon them. This is a factor for which care should be taken in advance so that maximum of new development is internalized and indigenised with maximum benefits to the local population. Otherwise, a new type of neo-colonialism will come into operation, early in the new millennium, leaving little scope for enhanced well being of the poor in the relatively dependent economies as have limited access to resources under the earth, be it under land or sea, will face immense difficulties in sustaining themselves against such mega institutions.

Globalization of Knowledge and Labour

In The New Millennium, apart from globalization of Capital, intensive efforts should be made, specially by developing countries, to bring about greater globalization of knowledge and labour. Knowledge is being contained and priced out though IPR's, Patents etc. and labour through increased strictness in immigration procedures. USA proposes to reduce its HIB visa numbers and UK plans to impose heavy sureties on prospective immigrants. These actions do not augur well for a global integration of the economies, outside capital and finance. This globalization might prove hurtful to many, who may organize themselves against globalization itself thus paving way for new types of inter-country rivalries and possibly wars.

We are also faced with globalization of dress, culture, food habits, and the way we think and act. These processes need to be contained and reordered keeping in view that large section of our population is still deprived and not integrated into the development process.

We thus have to have a double agenda, an agenda to globalize, but more important an agenda to integrate the excluded into the development process.

This then is the challenge in the new millennium to the social scientists, to the economists and the political leadership. Our failure on either front can lead the country into a deep crisis.

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