

poverty is the worst form
of violence

It is the first day of month and like always we were expecting him. chote singh, ritualistically, travelled by bus to our bank every month to withdraw his 400 Rs old age pension. frail body, cracked spectacles and a stained kurta with all sort of marks were his identifiers. If a painter would personify abject poverty it would look something like him.

Surprisingly, he did not come. It was a topic of discussion that day among our bank staff. By evening our worst fears came true. chote singh is no more. He has succumbed to hunger & disease. He is gone and we would not see the stained kurta anymore however this left a stain on our conscience which would

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always be there.

To be clear, Chote Singh, was not special in any way. He was not an anomaly rather invisible majority of our country. Government poster with ~~well~~ well fed, well dressed and smiling ambassadors of poverty alleviation programme keep population ignorant of what real poverty is. As if witnessing that would send our well-to-do population in a quest like Buddha.

However, such fears would be irrational, as most of us have a trained mind to switch off at the sight of uncomfortable truths. Indira Gandhi in her address to Stockholm conference recognised "poverty is the worst form of violence". Apart from prelude to Garibi Hatao Andolan it was

intended to make the upper section see everyday violence the pious were subjected to.

Why poverty is worst form of violence?

Poverty is a situation in which the resources are not enough to fulfill the bare minimum needs (World Bank). According to Tendulkar

Committee 22% population is Below Poverty Line (BPL). This section is deprived of education, good health, employment opportunities and therefore forced to live a sub human life.

A section of population or individuals who are victim of physical violence show signs of psychological trauma, become alienated and could not participate in the social process. Sometimes the well up anger becomes so

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strong that it results into revolt against the perceived causative factors. These all elements are also present in the poors.

The violence is visible in caste based discrimination, gender violence, communalism the basis of which is poverty. Handini Sundar in her subaltern study points out poverty not only allows persecution of groups but also leads to intergenerational poverty in the process.

Arvind Adiga in his book 'the white tiger' narrates the story of Balram Halwai who is from one such marginalised section. After going through all the injustices he becomes hardened & morally apathetic. In the end he kills the oppressive employers and runs away with money. The story portrays double violence, one which Balram undergoes

and the other that he unleashes.

However, the violence due to poverty should not be seen limited to on poor. It is multifaceted and affects everyone and whole of country. Present crisis such as farmer's agitation, violence for reservation, son of soil clashes are all having roots on bed of poverty and deprivations.

In this process, Nation itself becomes weak. It is deprived of demographic dividend, regional disparities (Bimaru states), and held back from realising the true potential such as becoming five trillion dollar economy. thereby the violent effects affect whole nation.

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Abraham Maslow in his hierarchy of needs shows unless material and physiological needs of individuals are met they can not pursue higher order needs such as social, spiritual and self actualisation. therefore, people at the bottom of pyramid get caught in violent struggle of meeting the ends meet and could not move up where they can be agents of social and national development.

In contrast, countries such as Scandinavian, European and USA where material resources are available for citizen show higher Human Development indicators. Health, nutrition and opportunities are availed by everyone. As a consequence they also rank high on Happiness Index.

Having seen the consequences of poverty as worst form of violence, we must also look at other forms of poverty. For example Ethical poverty is absence of ethics in our actions. It results into corruption, societal degradation and apathetic attitude. Present problems such as scams, criminalisation of politics and environmental degradation can be traced to it.

Similarly Leadership poverty is seeking narrow interests and shying away from tough but necessary choices. It is visible in wealth hoarders (oxfam 1% hold 60% wealth), US withdrawal from Paris deal, and ongoing Russia Ukraine war.

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other forms of poverty such as social poverty and intellectual poverty are equally detrimental and violent. thereby poverty is multifaceted and it has many violent manifestations. The question arises when it is detrimental then what factors are causing it?

the first reason is poverty is intergenerational phenomenon. Once a social group is caught into poverty it is deprived of resources to come out of it. secondly

psychological effects lead to internalisation of poverty which is adjusting to the reality and not able to see the path out of it.

thirdly the competitive age we are living in believe in 'owner's pride & neighbour envy'

where zero sum approach towards resources is taken. And lastly inability of government to take the fruit of development to the last man by creating inclusive economy.

It is not that steps and efforts have not been taken in this regard. Right from the independence planning commission had poverty alleviation its central objective. During the first two plans it was done through rapid industrialisation in the hope that resources would percolate to the bottom.

when that did not work, socialistic form by nationalisation of industries and through redistributive justice same has been

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tried. From 1970s onwards policies of reservation and affirmative action coupled with nutritional security had been tried.

Along with above supplementing agricultural production through green revolution, white revolution and allied activities taken up. Vulnerable groups were covered under NFSA, family planning programmes and social security schemes.

As a result between 2005-15, 271 million people were brought out of poverty. But that is not enough as still significant population is a victim of poverty. Our vision at Amrit Kal of Azadi is Sabke Sath, Sabke Vikas, Sabke Vishwas where no

one would be poor in line with SDG 1.

for this we need to make poverty alleviation a Jan Andolan where every organ of government and every institution of society see it as common objective. In line with Mahatma Gandhi's vision of Antyodaya and constitutional obligation of reducing inequality (Art 38, 39) we need to accelerate fight against poverty. If poverty is worst form of violence then equality is best form of love we can share. It is the India we had envisioned when Nehru gave his tryst with destiny speech from Red fort. Now is the time to stop not unless we have it.

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There is only one good, knowledge
and one evil, ignorance

Yuval Noah Harari in his book "Sapiens" trace the journey of becoming human through significant events. He finds emergence of consciousness 5 million years ago the most significant point as it enabled human species to create and consume knowledge. As a result human's evolution took different trajectory out of ignorance. They were able to do good for themselves by the knowledge of fire, stone tools and community building. Therefore we are living embodiments of what knowledge can do — good is survival, development and

ultimately being successful in every sphere. In contrast the ignorance among our cousin species like Neanderthal and Denisovans lead to their extinction thereby proved to be biggest evil for them.

The pursuit of knowledge can be traced to early roman philosopher like Socrates, Plato and Aristotle who propounded it be the biggest virtue and based on it gave virtue ethics. In India the same was intrinsic in Buddha & Mahavir's teachings where knowledge of reality separated the ordinary from divine.

Buddha during his early years lived the life of an ignorant where in palace he was shielded from the truth of life. When he encountered reality he left behind the material

happiness and lived a life of ascetic for true knowledge. His enlightenment did a larger good than for himself only. He in the form of Buddhism provided way out from caste based oppression and evil of ignorant rituals.

Due to early thinkers like him, the quest of knowledge has a high value in our culture. In varna theory, Brahmana is the one who has knowledge of vedas and for that knowledge one is accorded highest social status. In a way it was the beginning of knowledge based economy for us.

In contrast ignorance was the root cause of social evils like Sati, child marriage and casteism. To weed out these evil practices the candle of knowledge was lit by social reformers like Ishwar chandra vidhyasagar, Raja Ram Mohun Roy among others. As a result

ignorance darkness evaporated and good of society was achieved.

Similarly on one hand knowledge of Iron smelting allowed vedic society to clear forest and create Mahajhapa and at the same time ignorance of advance weapons caused defeat of Indian Kingdoms at the hand of British.

It's value can be understood by the fact that attackers and invaders in the past made conscious effort to destroy the knowledge centres of the places they occupy. It is said that Nalanda and Taxila library were burning for the days due to vast amount of stored parchments and books. Through destruction of knowledge of a community they can be made subservient rather easily.

In present time, knowledge is most cherished good. It is a vehicle of social mobility

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For the aspiring classes, means of wealth creation for the producers and means of regulation of society for the administrator. Today's knowledge is multifaceted spread across different domains such as science, literature and social sciences among others.

further, the efforts of Nation-States to promote knowledge driven economies have reduced the ignorance and evils thereof. It produces social goods like education, health, nutrition and happy living and material goods like infrastructure, transport and wealth.

It has led to countering of evils like health problems such as vaccines saved lives during covid, internet connected

people and created social bonding. At the same time existing problems like disease of haemophilia due to inbreeding was eliminated.

Similarly knowledge about sustainable practices helped in conserving flora and fauna e.g. artificial insemination in conservation of white Rhino brought them back from extinction.

However, it is debatable if knowledge is only one good. As we have seen manifestation of knowledge such as nuclear bomb, advanced arms have caused enormous destruction. Knowledge of sex determination before birth led to female foeticide and knowledge of advanced agricultural techniques has caused problems

of soil degradation.

further knowledge ~~is~~ consumes attention and a wealth of knowledge creates a poverty of attention. It is evident around us as attention deficit, reduction in familial bonds and psychological problems such as anxiety and stress.

Additionally, knowledge creation is not useful in doing good unless it is equitably distributed. It is said knowledge is the new oil highlighting its value.

However there exist, rural urban divide, digital divide and gender divide in knowledge.

which itself is a source of evil as it creates material inequality, allows dominant sections to control the masses.

Above arguments make a point that knowledge in itself is merely a tool and in order to do good that tool needs to be distributed equally and with safeguards that it is used for good only.

for these reasons steps like right to privacy (Art 21), draft data protection bill, 2019 and confidentiality clause such as medical records have been brought to protect knowledge in the personal sphere.

for non personal Intellectual Property Rights (IPR), cyber security framework and National Critical Information Infra Protection Centre (NCIIPI) have been

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Created.

for knowledge equity, education from grassroots to higher education centres of international standards have been created.

Along with that it is projected that Research & development expenditure would be tripled (0.7% presently) in this decade.

Lastly, knowledge does most good when it is applied ethically. In order to make it distinct from evil ignorance it has to be equitable, transparent and accountable.

Along with that we may also recognise that ignorance itself can be a blis as too much of anything is bad.