

SITUATION OF FOOD DEPRIVATION IN BACKWARD REGIONS OF INDIA DURING LIBERALIZATION

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Introduction

Planned development in India has been based on the notion of ensuring balanced regional development. Regional spread of heavy industrialization programmes, tax concessions for setting up industries in backward areas, easy and cheap lending facilities for small scale & cottage industries, priority sector lending programmes, investments in SOC building projects in backward areas were designed to meet the said objective. The result was urban growth through industrial townships, development of linkage industries and increase in options in livelihood in many areas. All these govt. supportive measures helped to have some positive impacts on reducing regional imbalances. This accentuated the fiscal deficits of the govt. without any competitive edge of these industries in the global market. This unsustainable situation compelled govt. to adopt LPG programme designed by BWI institutions. In this situation, we find that inequality between regions has grown farther.

Now the problem of uneven development in the country has become a cause for concern. The worst suffering area is the rural part where most of the disadvantaged people live in a precarious condition. These people have very weak access to the opportunities of globalization, because it demands special skills to compete or even to sustain but unfortunately most of the rural people lack in this respect. Capability enhancing investments in these backward rural areas were mostly done by the Govt. but in this age of liberalization, govt. is continuously withdrawing itself from such attempts. Private sector is not willing to invest in SOC in the rural backward areas. So capability enhancement is not taking place causing the magnification of sufferings of rural people. Moreover during globalization most adversely affected sector is agriculture which is the main source of livelihood of these people causing more and more deprivation in food, health, education & knowledge. The backward areas are becoming more backward for this reason.

Over the years, several Committees have identified backward areas, but with different objectives. List of Different Committee level attempts to locate backward regions are presented below.

Committee on Dispersal of Industries: 1960 This committee's approach was that they identified the 100 backward districts in an effort to impart some scientific rationale for pursuing the early avatar of the industrial location policy. The idea was to pursue industrialization of rural and under developed areas. The committee initially examined the possibility of using employment data to determine backwardness, but chose other macro parameters since unemployment was found to be a universal feature in any part of India. One interesting factor considered by the committee was the absence of exploitation of natural resources - minerals, forests and animals. It gives an idea of the distance the world has traveled.

Patel Committee Report: 1964 You could call this a pilot study in sense, because the committee was appointed by the Planning Commission and asked to suggest suitable steps for the development of Deoria, Ghazipur, Azamgarh and Jaunpur. The team suggested that the Planning Commission use new criteria of development. Namely: agricultural output per capita of rural population and yield per acre of principal crops, irrigated areas, industrial development, electrification, road and facilities for health and education. We don't know how much that helped the cause of the four districts.

Planning Commission Study Group: 1966-1971 In the run-up to the fourth plan, the commission asked state governments to devote special attention to the subject of development and backward areas were classified under five categories: desert areas, drought affected areas, hill areas, high tribal populace areas and high density of population. The committee also suggested 15 different parameters to identify under-development.

Pande Committee Report: 1968 This committee was set up to suggest strategies to enable the government to correct regional imbalances by encouraging the establishment of industries - big or small - in selected backward areas of regions through fiscal sops, including investments by banks and institutions. Appreciating the lack of resources, the committee suggested that the administrators and planners must select a few backward districts from industrially backward states and shower special attention on them.

Wanchoo Committee Report: 1968 Appointed by the National Development Council, the Wanchoo Committee was set up to study regional imbalances and suggest fiscal and tax sops that could encourage industries to invest in backward areas and more importantly, to suggest disincentives to discourage concentration of industry in any one or two localised areas.

Sukhamoy Chakravarty Committee Report on backward areas: 1972 The committee did not submit its final report, but the committee set out 12 parameters on which to identify districts for special treatment. One interesting parameter suggested was the percentage of non-household establishments using electricity to total non-household establishments.

National Committee on development of backward areas: 1978. Headed by B Sivaraman, Member Planning Commission, this committee studied the issue of backward areas and submitted 11 reports on different aspects of backwardness in 1980-81. Suggesting that the primary unit for identification of a backward area should be a development block, the committee suggested a six-point design. It was among the first committees to recommend that the primary unit for the identification of backward areas should be the development block. The committee also suggested that problem areas should be identified in terms of climatic and geographical locations: that is, those regions which were drought prone, Hyderabad Karnataka Development committee: 1981 The government of Karnataka appointed this committee for identification of backward areas.

The Dharam Singh committee report suggested 22 indicators for measuring inter-regional development and imbalance, as also measuring inter district variations in the level of development. In its very formation, the Dharam Singh Committee had partially identified that under-development or backwardness could be common to contiguous geographical regions.

Fact Finding Committee on Regional Imbalance: 1983 Headed by noted economist Dr V M Dandekar, the committee was appointed by the government of Maharashtra to examine regional imbalance. It was perhaps more an exercise in political crisis management than economic management. Triggered by social unrest driven by the rising hegemony of western Maharashtra's political class over the state, the committee aimed at studying the impact of this hegemony on the development of Marathawada and Vidharba. The report is still quoted at annual plan meetings in Mantralaya, Mumbai, by development conscious legislators

Committee for the Development of Backward Areas: 1983 Headed by Dr I G Patel, the committee was appointed in December 1983 during Mrs Indira Gandhi's last few months in government. The committee identified yet again a new set of criteria for identifying backward districts and regional imbalances, in its report delivered in August 1984.

100 Backward Districts: 1996 In 1996, when the United Front Government was formed, it charted in its common minimum program the need to prepare a Special Action Plan for infrastructure development in rural areas in the 100 most backward and poorest districts of the country. The committee headed by Dr E A S Sarma, studied existing reports on the issue and created the criteria for identification of the 100 most backward districts. In November 1997, the committee submitted its report and the list of 100 most backward districts in India. A few weeks later, the United Front Government collapsed. The Sarma committee's list makes for compelling reading in just the composition. India's biggest states, the most populous states and politically active states of Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Chattisgarh and Jharkhand account for 74 of the 100 backward districts with Bihar leading the race with 26 districts. Interestingly, the worst 100 of this list matches most research done in the period by private or government institutions. The National Commission on Population rated the districts in 2001 on a set of socio-demographic indicators. The majority of the batch of 1997 find place amongst the worst performers in the study desert areas, tribal areas, hill areas and flood-affected should be given special handicaps.

People of backward regions are generally deprived in the basic human needs such as food shelter health & Knowledge. **In this attempt we have tried to look into the food deprivation in backward areas.** Hunger is the deprivation of the fundamental 'right to food' that human beings have sought to achieve ever since the origin of mankind. The means and ways of attaining food security has undergone vast changes since the days of hunting and gathering to expansionary food production and welfare measures of distribution as civilization has traversed through different epochs with varying modes of production. The persistence of a scourge like hunger even today among large sections of the world population in spite of astronomical distances covered by science and technology, especially over the last century, perhaps remains the greatest contradiction and challenge within the contemporary world system.

In this light, the recent release of The Challenge of Hunger 2008 and The Indian State Hunger Index 2008 by the IFPRI brings forth some crisp facts regarding the situation of hunger across the developing world and in the different states in India. Constructing a Global Hunger Index (GHI) has been one useful initiative in the recent years in tracking the comparative levels of hunger in different parts of the world and across individual nations. The estimation of the Indian State Hunger Index (ISHI) this year comes as a new

endeavor to throw light on the prevalence of hunger in our country at a more disaggregated level. From this point of view, the two reports hold immense significance for policymakers of our country although there is some methodological hitch involved with the ISHI comparison of the Indian states with different countries. It uses three variables namely, the proportion of undernourished as a percentage of the population, the prevalence of underweight in children below five years and the mortality rate of children below five years. The index is a simple average of these three somewhat inter-related variables. The GHI classifies the countries into five categories of hunger situation based on their hunger index score (see Table 1).

Table 1: Categories of Hunger Situation Range of Hunger

Index Score	Situation of Hunger
< 4.9	Low
5.0-9.9	Moderate
10-19.9	Serious
20.0-29.9	Alarming
>30.0	Extremely Alarming

The Challenge of Hunger 2008 report finds 33 countries with ‘alarming’ and ‘extremely alarming’ levels of hunger. Another 32 countries come in the bracket of a ‘serious’ hunger situation. The GHI studies have been generally using the norm of a dietary energy intake equal to and above 2900 Kcal per day per person and an under-five mortality rate below 15 per 1000 live births as sufficient criteria for identifying countries with no hunger (The Challenge of Hunger 2008, Part I, Endnote 4, Page 20). In that sense, the GHI study actually represents the comparative hunger situation within the developing world. Intriguingly, the fast-growing economy of India, with a score of 23.3, figures among the countries with an alarming situation of hunger. The more worrisome fact, revealed upon comparison with last year’s situation, is that India actually marginally slipped in its ranking from 94 among 118 nations in 2007 to 98 among 120 nations in 2008. The Indian case emphatically underscores the non-inclusive nature of the recent phase of high economic growth in the country, which has had little positive impact for her vast majority of poor population. The dichotomy of high growth rates and persisting hunger among the Indian population has become an important area of study. The ISHI report published in 2008 constructs the hunger index for 17 major Indian states. The study compares the various Indian states with the GHI country rankings to find that most of the states rank somewhere in between the poor Sub-Saharan countries. While Punjab, Kerala, Andhra Pradesh and Assam has a ‘serious’ level of hunger; Madhya Pradesh fares worst in the ‘extremely

alarming' bracket of hunger with an index of 30.9. This conforms to the recent reports of a large number of deaths occurring amongst children due to malnutrition in Madhya Pradesh. All the other remaining states record an 'alarming' level of hunger, which is also the general situation for the country. Bibek Debroy in his work entitled District Level Deprivation in the New Millennium showed the incidence of poverty and hunger in districts of different states of India and the result is as follows.

Table 2: No. of Poverty & Hunger affected Districts (lowest 25%) in different States & UTs of India

Name of the State/ UT	No. of Poverty affected Dist.s	No. of Hunger affected Dist.s
Bihar	24	13
Uttar Pradesh	18	15
Orissa	23	23
Jharkhand	12	14
M.P.	22	09
Arunachal Pradesh	03	09
Karnataka	04	01
Chhattisgarh	08	08
Assam	13	14
Rajasthan	00	01
Nagaland	00	02
W.B.	06	14
A & N Islands	00	00
Andhra Pradesh	00	03
Chandigarh	00	00
D& N Haveli	00	00
Daman & Diu	00	00
Delhi	00	00
Goa	00	01
Gujrat	00	00
Haryana	00	03
Himachal Pradesh	00	00
J & K	00	00
Kerala	00	04
Lakshadweep	00	00
Maharashtra	11	05
Manipur	00	02
Meghalaya	00	00
Mizoram	00	00
Pondichery	00	01
Punjab	00	00
Sikkim	00	00
Tamilnadu	02	00
Tripura	00	01
Uttranchal	00	03
All India	146	146

Independent and broader view of hunger can be based on the recommendations of the Report of The Task Force on Projections of Minimum needs and Effective consumption demand, 1979 of the Planning Commission. Taking into account that per capita per day calorie requirement is age, sex and occupation specific, the 1979 Task Force divided the population into 16 groups and estimated the average calorie requirement. This was 2435 Kcal for rural areas and 2095 Kcal for urban areas, which was rounded off to 2400 Kcal and 2100 Kcal respectively for convenience. Additionally, for the rural areas, we have also used a norm of 2200 Kcal per capita per day, as this was the norm initially used to estimate poverty from the 1973-74 NSS data. Patnaik (2007) has made estimates of the proportion of the population with energy intake less than 2400 Kcal and 2200 Kcal per capita per day for rural India, which we can readily use for our calculations (see Table 3).

We have followed the methodology used by Arindam Banerjee in the article named Hunger and its Underlying Causes: A Broad Indian View where he constructed Hunger index as a simple average of three variables named Calorie Undernourishment, Proportion of Underweight among children below Five years & Under Five Mortality Rate per 100.

Table 3: The Broad Hunger Index: Rural and Urban India

Norms	Prevalence of Calorie Under-nourishment	Proportion of Underweight among children <5 years	Under-five mortality rate reported as death per 100	Broad Hunger Index
Rural				
2400 Kcal	87	45.6	8.2	46.9
2200 Kcal	69.5	45.6	8.2	41.1
Urban				
2100 Kcal	64.0	32.7	5.2	34.0

Source: The rural figures of variable A are taken from Patnaik, 2007. The urban figure is estimated by the author using NSS data on Consumption Expenditure and Nutrition, 2004-05. Variables B and C are taken from the NFHS-III, 2005-06.

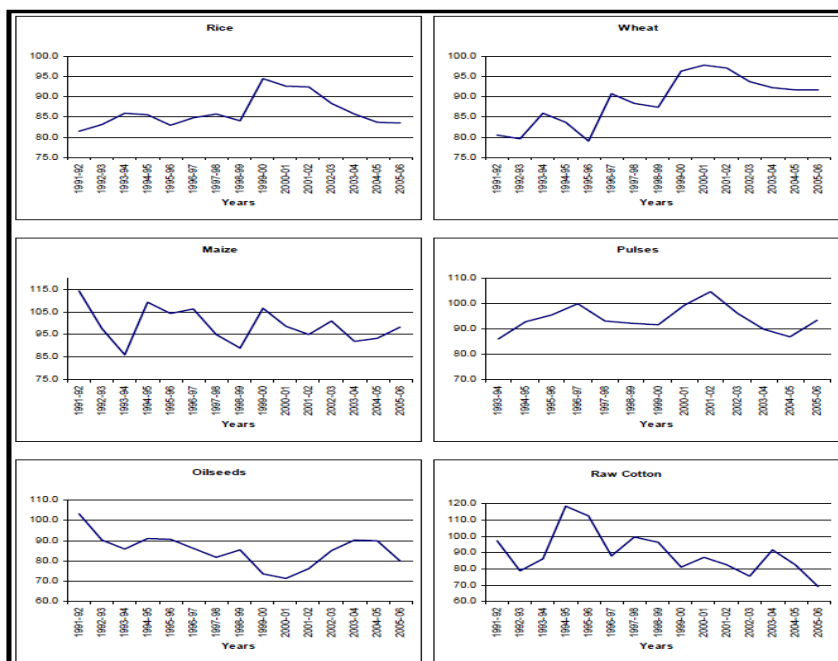
Based on these estimates, the Broad Hunger Index (simple average of the three variables) is a high 46.9 and 41.1 by the 2400 Kcal and 2200 Kcal norms respectively in rural India while in urban India the same is 34. India is a fast moving nation with high growth rate but still with an alarming prevalence of undernourishment and hunger. Now we shall try to make an enquiry about the possible reasons and subsequent consequences. With world prices affecting domestic prices under a trade-liberalized regime, the returns to agricultural production starts falling even within the domestic economies further compounding the problem for the large rural populace in these countries.

We make a modest attempt to trace these processes by looking at the domestic returns to agricultural activity in the Indian economy. Although India is still a net-exporter of cereals, there has been a significant shift of focus to cultivation of commercial crops for the export market since the mid-nineties. The last decade has also witnessed the precipitation of an agrarian crisis, particularly severe in dry land regions with commercial agriculture, leading to mass farmer suicides. The opening up of the Indian food and other crop markets was a disaster at the very beginning as the world prices of primary products declined heavily since the mid-nineties till around the end of the millennium as a result of an excess supply in the world market. The falling prices adversely affected the farmers in India, and across the developing countries, especially those who had shifted to the cultivation of commercial crops, entailing large investments. The rationale of producing and exporting commercial crops and importing food at cheaper prices did not work due to the price trends in the world market during this period. Food prices also declined towards the end of the nineties but at a far lower rate than the primary product prices. On the other hand, the prices started rising since the turn of the century but along with that food prices have also increased. The prices of food in the world market increased in the new century at least at a similar rate, if not faster. An implication of this phenomenon for the small-scale commercial crop producers in the developing countries like India was that the 'real' returns that they faced stagnated or declined over more than a decade. With non-increasing or declining returns in agricultural productions, the consumption levels of the rural population undergo deflation over time and hence the prevalence or aggravation of hunger incidence occurs. This, in turn, also causes distress-pushed migration of large numbers from rural to urban areas. The latter, though in a better economic situation, mostly do not have the capacity to entirely absorb the huge influx of job-seeking migrants from the rural countryside which is why urban areas also witness significant presence of hunger and deprivation. The movements in the 'real' returns in Indian agriculture are portrayed by Figure 1, where we have plotted the real Wholesale Price Indices for different crops and product-groups for the period between 1991-92 and 2005-06. The nominal price indices have been deflated to 1991-92 prices using the Consumer price Index for Agricultural labourers (CPI-AL). We have used the Wholesale Price Indices for Rice, Wheat, Maize and Raw Cotton and product groups like pulses and oilseeds available in the various reports of the Commission for Agricultural Costs and Prices (CACP). The trends in the wholesale price indices deflated by the CPI-AL represents the changes in the capacity of the producers to purchase

a particular commodity basket over time, assuming that the costs of cultivation as a share of output and the output share appropriated by middlemen and commission agents have remained more or less unchanged with time. The first assumption is particularly a strong one given that with deregulation of input markets under the neo-liberal economic regime, prices of inputs like seeds and chemical fertilizers have undergone significant upward revisions. The individual crops and product groups for which we have carried out this exercise covers around 80 percent of the area under cultivation and hence our findings are relevant for a majority of the cultivators in the country. The real producer prices for rice remained stable throughout the nineties and experienced a surge in the late nineties but this gain quickly tapered off and the real returns reached the early nineties level due to stagnated nominal prices and higher inflation in the new century. In contrast, the real value of wheat prices sharply increased initially when the economy was opened up in the mid-nineties and again towards the end of the decade. However, like rice, the real prices for wheat also faced stagnation between 1999-00 and 2001-02 and a downturn in the period thereafter. Similar trends are visible for pulses where the real prices fast declined post 2001-02 to the early nineties levels after a brief escalation at the turn of the century. On the other hand, the trend for maize have been more volatile, declining significantly in the early nineties followed by occasional upturns, but importantly, the real value of maize prices have consistently remained below the 1994-95 level throughout the period.

The trends for the real prices for the non-food products are significantly different from what we observe for the food crops. The real producer prices for oilseeds have secularly declined in the nineties to low levels. The subsequent rise for oilseeds after 2000-01 was more due to inadequate supply, owing to the drought conditions in the early years of the new century. This implies that no real benefits were accrued by producers due to this increase which also got partially reversed in the last three years of the period of analysis as the production started improving. Raw Cotton, which has been at the centre of the agrarian crisis in the country, exhibits an unambiguous declining trend in real prices ever since the markets were liberalized in the mid-nineties. From a high in 1994-95, the real prices have fast dwindled and even slipped under the low value that existed in 1992-93.

Figure 1: Trends in real Wholesale Price Indices for different commodities (at 1991 prices)



Source: Based on Wholesale Price Index data published in various reports of the CACP.

Note: The period of analysis for pulses is 1993-94 to 2005-06 as the price indices for Pulses as a group are not available for the years 1991-92 and 1992-93

These real price trends for the major crops explicitly reveal a more systemic income deflationary process under trade-liberalization for non-food crops rather than mere intermittent shocks, while for food crops, there has been a clear erosion of real value of prices in the current decade. In the event of rising cultivation costs in agriculture unlike what we have assumed, the decline in the purchasing power of the producers is even greater than what we observe from the graphs. Falling returns in cultivation also leads to declining or non-increasing real wages of the large number of agricultural labourers in rural areas. The fact that calorie deprivation has increased in the rural India between 1993-94 and 2004-05 by whichever norm we follow (see Table 4) is largely explained by this shrinking of purchasing power of the rural population.

Table 4: Rural Calorie Deprivation by various norms: 1993-94 and 2004-05

Calorie Intake Norm (Kcal/person/day)	%of Population below Prescribed norm	
	1993-94	2004-05
2400	74.5	87.0
2200	58.5	69.5
1800	20.0	25.0

Source: Estimates taken from Patnaik, 2007

A basic implication of these trends is the necessity to stabilize both food and non-food prices. This calls for increased interventions in both food and non-food commodities' markets in the form of enhanced procurement and food distribution operations such that there is an improvement in the economic returns in real terms for primary sector producers. An unidirectional policy seeking to further open up the economy and focus on export-oriented agriculture will be contrary to achieving this objective, especially with the shrink in world demand due to the current recession that is gradually setting into the North Atlantic markets. Such a policy will lead to further decline in the returns to exports crops in the world markets and within the domestic economy with disastrous consequences for the millions of primary sector producers in India as well as other poor developing economies. A more judicious way of tackling the problem of hunger within such economies will be to revisit and implement the goal of national food security that constituted the erstwhile 'Food-First' doctrine.

The Public distribution System (PDS) also has a crucial role to play in this fight against persisting and increasing hunger. Simultaneously with the deterioration of economic returns in the rural areas over the last decade, there has also been a progressive downsizing of the PDS in India. The Targeted PDS introduced in 1998 linked food distribution at subsidized rates to the poverty line. Targeting the food subsidy to the Below Poverty Line (BPL) population went awry as the official poverty line used for this purpose had long ceased to represent any of the objective or standard norms of calories deprivation that were prescribed by the 1979 Task Force.

A large section of the rural population, which has a calorie intake between the minimum and average calorie requirement is officially classified as non-poor and hence excluded from the benefits of the TPDS. Interestingly, after diverting further away from the Task Force norms successively for several years, the official rural poverty line in 2004-05 measured the population with an energy intake below 1820 Kcal per capita per day (Patnaik, 2007), which is also the minimum norm used by the FAO to estimate the proportion of the population with absolute calorie deprivation. In the process, nearly 50 percent of the rural population with an energy intake shortfall from their average requirements are not classified under the BPL population. The official classification is particularly important as the Central government while allocating food under the PDS to the states holds the lower of the official estimates and the states' own estimates of BPL population as the benchmark proportion of poor in the respective states. This necessitates either a correction

in the official poverty estimates re-linking them to standard consumption norms or de-linking of public distribution of food from the erroneous poverty lines which are underestimating the poor.

The revamping of the PDS to the pre-TPDS level is required on a priority basis to address the worsening well-being of the masses. Greater public procurement operations complemented by a universal PDS will serve a dual role in the economy. This will simultaneously increase and stabilize the prices received by the primary producers for their crops as well as achieve the provisioning of food to these sections at subsidized and cheaper prices, thereby leading to an improvement in their real production returns and purchasing power. Similarly, more public intervention is also crucial to stabilize the returns in non-food cultivation, which has been rendered more vulnerable by adverse price movements. In a nutshell, it is time for the government to move beyond the stereotype free market-free trade theories and build and strengthen a structure of public social welfare policies in order to reduce hunger and poverty in the country in any meaningful manner and also to bridge the great social divide between the rich and the poor that is fast widening under the current regime of economic policies.

Apart from this few other problems are magnifying this acute problem of hunger & poverty namely 1. Jobless growth in modern Indian Economy is pushing huge reserve of labour force to the uncertain world of unstable income through growth of informal sector & contractual employment regime. The result is expenditure in food itself has been one of the adjusting variable. And it has become more so due to inflation in general price level.

Also global spread of consumerism through powerful media has some impact through demonstration effect on the consumption basket of poor people. Lucrative offers on nonfood luxury goods are siphoning off part of poor people's income from food items. Figures of Planning Commission 2008-09 supports this view. According to them during the period 1972-73 to 2004-05 food expenditure of rural people in India has decreased from 72.9% to 55% and the same figure for india has decreased from 64.5% to 42.5%. Reflection of it is also seen on NSSO figures of 2004-05. According to NSSO percapita Callore intake during the period 1983 to 2004-05 has decreased in rural India from 2221 K Cal to 2047 K cal which is lower than the standard norm of 2400 K.Cal for rural areas and the same figure for the Urban India has decreased from 2089 K.Cal to 2020 K.Cal which is also lower than the standard norm of 2100 K.Cal for urban areas. This may in turn will affect the work efforts of these people causing more impoverishment of these people.

NSSO estimates only 5% of Indian are owning 38% of the resources of the country where as 60% people are owning 13% of the resources. This means income generating investable capital are not owned by maximum people and after banking sector reforms banks are no longer interested in investing social priority sector. To fill the gap Govt. are welcoming international capital on investor's favorable condition. Now in India Govt. has already permitted FDI in retail trade. This in turn will deactivate rural activities of artisans petty traders and will make them dependent on production activities on the imposed terms of these FDIs. This will weaken the income earning capability and economic independence of the large section of common people. Again deprivation of food will become a natural corollary of this activity.

Conclusion:

Globalization has increased the Indian GDP growth rate to the second highest level of the world but at the same time backward rural areas have become more deprived in many respects. Agriculture dependent rural unskilled or semiskilled artisans are loosing grounds at a high pace due to lack of skill factor. Accession to the basic needs are becoming hard to achieve for these people due to low accession to the work opportunities, uncertainty in employment & income, low bargaining power with high inflation. If this situation goes on for a long time then demand for industrial goods or even consumer goods will decline defueling the engine of liberalization and the dream of modern industrial India will be faded out. The need of this hour is the capability enhancement of these rural folk by govt. attempts not just the social security programmes as advocated by present day policy makers.

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