

The most Important Challenge Facing Asia Over this Decade

Priyamvada Jha (2nd Year)

Many young Asians have known only two kinds of economic growth- fast and faster. But what about the problems that cannot be resolved by growth alone? There are many key challenges to Asia's continued competitiveness and developing which need to be tackled and the most important one is the problem of huge inequalities in wealth distribution which must be addressed if Asia is to continue to develop.

The fact that most of the region's economies will continue to develop in the coming decades has no doubt. But how these benefits will be divided is not certain. The policymakers are impoverished Asians and thus, inclusive development must be offered. To all Asians.

It has been reported that 8 Indian states account for more poor people than in the 26 poorest African countries. Although India is going through a spectacular economic surge, this performance is nowhere to be seen in the measures of per capita income. Basically, the rich are getting richer and the poor poorer. Most importantly, the poor are trapped in an inescapable spiral which makes them deprived of credit, education or business opportunities. There is a strong correlation between higher socioeconomic inequality and the shorter life expectancy, higher morbidity, mortality, emotional depression and prison population. Also, this leads to certain demographic pressures, as rising poverty means more people. Without access to family planning which can be seen in the case of India with its rising population.

To address this problem of inequality, the government should have a mindset to offer equality of opportunities to the defined people. This will not eradicate poverty but will be an important step towards preventing it from growing further, without compromising the market forces that have driven Asia's economic growth. One of the prime areas for the funds to be directed in rural development. It is said that more than 50% of India resides in villages. Thus, we are required to take growth to the rural areas as well, instead of luring rural migrants to the cities. Sound rural development policies will enable families and communities to stay together and reduce migratory pressures on urban areas. This can be done through building up of infrastructure in rural areas and diverting funds to increase agricultural growth. In this respect tourism sector has to be given special attention in rural areas because India's culture resides in its villages. Also, the indigenous industries like handicrafts, pottery, etc should be given a reviving boost to increase rural employment and thus income growth in villages. The government, through advertising, should encourage cooperative initiatives among the villagers. This will lead to an exclusive and holistic development of not only the village community but the environment. Apart from the other measures, a less straightforward and even lesser obvious measure in this

situation could be abolition caste quota in educational institutions. This policy was adopted to bring about equality and equal opportunities for the deprived, however, its effect has been paradoxical. A remedy for this paradox can be introducing quota on economic grounds (based on financial conditions) and not on caste, which has started in some schools.

The surplus decaying in the store houses should be distinguished in affixed quota to starving people it might be argued that dissuade people from working. But this kind of free release of food grains to reduce surplus will only be for a span one year or so, that too with quota. It will serve the dual purpose of good utilization of grains and saving the starving people because the interest of such poor lot of people are being lost in the wake of free market.

Although people belonging to the upper strata may find it hard to believe this stark reality and find it easy to forget about the problems faced by the rural poor, but it is very important for these economies to understand the needs of this population are required to be met urgently and this is very essential for a continued development of the region.