

suresh bhagavtula

5. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Medical_tourism_in_India

6. http://www.dnb.co.in/Travel_Tourism/Chapter_3_Challenges.asp

Deadly Contract

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II Year

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It was during the period of my research on sewer workers in Delhi that I first woke up to the irony and incongruity of the slogan of 'Nirmal Bharat Abhiyan' rolled out by our government. It is the class of these contractual sewer workers, who despite all the harassment and daily struggles of life, continuously strive to solve the sewage problems in the city. Commonly known as 'beldars', these contractual workers work for the Delhi Jal Board (DJB) without identification and also without the requisite identification cards. The rationale behind DJB and contractors not providing identification cards is that it prevents them from being accountable for any possible death or health hazard.

As I moved ahead with my survey, I found out that the beldars work on contract basis for several years, awaiting permanent jobs, which remain a farfetched dream for them. They are deprived of health benefits, despite the fact that they work in highly toxic circumstances. Even in the event of death, no compensation is received from the contractor (whom they go on without seeing for years) or from the government. Without any safety equipment, they not only face the debilitating reality of cleaning up human waste, but are also viewed with

contempt and disdain when they act on complaints of sewer jam in our neighbourhoods. They are deprived of basic equipments like litmus paper to check the toxicity of gases in sewer which is a major cause for deaths and health problems.

Apart from these, there were other much more disturbing facts that I came across, such as no provision of soaps and washrooms to take a bath in after they finish with their work. They are thus forced to walk about with the stench of sewer on them.

Most of these workers belong to the Valmiki community, of which a majority has reported problems with their eyes and skin. The test results of their lungpower and weight signalled a plethora of health problems. Also, no facility for conveyance to work leaves them without any savings, as transport facilities are expensive and they work on a meagre salary. Even though permanent sewer workers do get a salary which is three times their contractual counterparts, their predicament is no better. They have access to security equipments, but either they are faulty or at times better left in store rooms. These permanent health workers are made to undertake departmental health check-ups every six months, where each time their health reports turn out to be fine. However,, ironically, when they arrive at private clinics, they are diagnosed with various medical ailments. They shell out their salary in these clinics and no reimbursement is provided against the private treatment they are forced to undergo. Moreover, they find it difficult to avail medicines at government hospitals. Thus, even though government's antipathy makes a contractual sewer worker worse off, the permanent one is not better off either.

Hence, the need of the hour is to look into the basic needs of the sewer workers, who are the bearers of a city's mission for an efficient and effective sanitation.

Shudh Desi Recipe to Lose Massive Votes

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III Year

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NaMo (our famous neta, Narendra Modi) calls our very own naturally taciturn PM as a 'Rupaiya' doctor for putting the Rupee on a ventilator, while the Congress party is on drumrolls after passing two new, economically unsound bills. The two main ingredients of the government's shudh desi recipe to rope in votes include the Food Security Bill and the Land Acquisition Bill. The UPA hopes that these bills will prove to be vote winners in the upcoming general elections of 2014. In fact, these are delusions of grandeur. Ironically, the bills seem more likely to lose than win votes for the Congress.

Firstly, let me ask you a question: Can you think of any new bills that have delivered reasonably well? What?? Still thinking? Despite the Right to Education Act that was passed in 2009 after shifting of tectonic plates in Indian politics, talking about decent education for all even today seems to be a silly joke. Ouch, that may hurt the sentiments of our *netas*! Politicians think that the people cannot understand the strategies employed to gain brownie points during elections, but they forget one thing *"Yeh public sab janti hai!"*

Secondly, there is a trade off between microeconomic (personal) gain and macroeconomic gain (welfare of country). Elections are fought on local issues and not on so called national issues. This is also evident in the rising significance of regional parties in the political sphere of the country.

So let me ask, can the new bills lose votes?? Yes, although indirectly. The Food Security bill will cost around Rs 10, 000 crores extra this year (2013-14) and Rs 25,000-35,000 crores next year (2014-15). Whether this amount is 'affordable' or not is a matter of great debate. However, the recent financial crisis has certainly made it more alarming. A crashing rupee threatens high inflation, investment funk and lots of pain. Our finance minister, Mr P Chidambaram, has pledged to shrink fiscal deficit to 4.8% of the GDP. Now think, an extra Rs 10, 000 crores on food security means an equivalent amount less in productive plan investment to control the deficit within this red line.

Even worse is the Land Acquisition bill that mandates a social impact assessment for every project requiring land acquisition, delaying such projects by at least one to two years. Nowadays, there is a sudden rush in the cabinet to show quick dispatching in clearing projects worth lakhs of crores. But reality check!! Many of them require land acquisition clearance.

To foreign investors and rating agencies, India appears to be an epitome of deep structural flaws. In the quest for votes, the government is driving the economy downward. The result may be a downgrade in India's credit rating to junk status. The rupee will fall further, inflation will rise, unemployment will be more severe and income growth will further suffer.

So, the recipe of the party in power presently thrives on keeping people poor,