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Please read other booklets of the series also.

Booklet 1 : Economy in Shambles

Booklet 2 : Constitution : Denied, Diluted, Dismantled

Booklet 3 : Promises Broken, People Betrayed

Introduction

This publication consisting of four interlinked booklets, marks the fourth year-on-year series on the policies of the Modi regime which started after its first year in office, in May 2015

A comprehensive look at the four years of Modi regime becomes all the more necessary given that these years have been marked by an unprecedented self-promotion drive by the Modi Government funded by public money. According to a recent RTI query, it is revealed that the Government has already spent a huge amount of Rs 4,343.26 crore rupees on advertisements through different media. Considering that the Government has refused to raise widow pensions by a single rupee in these last four years in the name of a resource crunch, such a huge expenditure on self-publicity seems obscene.

In its celebration of four years, undoubtedly dampened by its blunder in Karnataka, many claims are being made of the achievements of the regime with stress of it being pro- poor.

What is the reality?

The four booklets deal with different aspects. The first with an overview by General Secretary Sitaram Yechury is entitled Economy in Shambles and contains five fact filled articles on key issues such as the actual macro economic picture of the Indian economy, what happened to the promise of two crore jobs, on the issue of price rise, on flourishing corruption as opposed to the slogan of na khaonga na khane doonga and importantly the reality behind the hype on the flagship schemes of this Government.

The second booklet entitled Assault on the Constitution deals with the commitments made by the Government to the RSS which were never

made public but which in the last four years has become the priority concern of the Government, on how best to push the sectarian agenda of Hindu rashtra and all its attendant aspects. This is reflected in the attacks on basic features of the constitution namely secularism, democracy federalism. The booklet also has analysis on the situation in Kashmir. It deals with the foreign policy of this Government of making India a junior partner to the U.S and the dismay it has caused traditional allies and friends of India.

In the BJP election manifesto and later, there were numerous promises made to different sections of the people, to the kisans, the workers, to women and specifically to Dalits and adivasis. The manifesto had also promised health and education for all. These were promises to bring the acche din of BJP rule.

The third booklet entitled Promises Broken, People Betrayed and this the fourth, examine all these promises and their reality. The number of farmer suicides has gone up under this Government. The new fixed term rules in employment being brought by the Modi Government will give sanction to the hire and fire policies of workers, one of the key demands of employers; in spite of having a single party majority the Government has betrayed women of this country by refusing to bring the women's reservation Bill; Dalits have faced unprecedented attacks on their dignity, their status and their livelihood under this Government; adivasis are being displaced while the Forest Rights Act and other legal and constitutional provisions for the protection of adivasi land and identity are being diluted. AADHAR claimed to be a boon for good governance, is in fact nothing but an instrument to deprive the poor of their rights. These two booklets with a range of facts and figures expose the BJP's claim of being pro-poor.

We would request our readers to read all four booklets to get a comprehensive picture of the disastrous consequences India is facing as a result of having such a Government in office.

We hope these booklets will strengthen the struggles being waged across India to free India of its toxic rule.

The publication of these four booklets has been made possible by the hard work and contribution of many comrades. We thank in particular

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Brinda Karat

May, 2018

Education : Private Greed, Saffron Agenda

Four years of the Narendra Modi-led BJP government at the centre have seen continuous attacks on the education sector in the country.

Ever since the BJP came to power in 2014, the suffering of students has increased due to fund cuts, authoritarian attacks against campus democracy, attempts to further centralise and privatise education, and efforts to give a communal colour to education.

Fund Cuts

Public spending on education in India has historically been abysmally low. The Indian Education Commission (1964-66) headed by Daulat Singh Kothari had recommended that public spending on education should be raised to 6% of the GDP. This has been a core demand of the students movement since then. But even now, 52 years after the recommendation was made, public spending on education by central and state governments combined come to only 2.7% of the GDP (as of 2017-18 budget estimates, according to the Economic Survey 2017-18).

The record of the BJP shows that instead of increasing central government spending to meet the basic challenge of providing affordable education to a rapidly rising population, it has resorted to fund cuts in real terms. The rate of increase in budgetary allocation for education ever since the BJP came to power has not even kept up with the rate of inflation in India.

| Year | Central government budget allocation for education: | |
|---------|---|-------------|
| | as % of Central Budget | as % of GDP |
| 2013-14 | 4.77 | 0.71 |
| 2014-15 | 4.61 | 0.67 |
| 2015-16 | 3.89 | 0.50 |
| 2016-17 | 3.66 | 0.48 |
| 2017-18 | 3.71 | 0.47 |
| 2018-19 | 3.48 | 0.45 |

Source: Budget documents

Schools Under Threat of Closure and Privatisation

School education has also borne the brunt of the BJP's ruthless fund cuts and privatisation moves. The BJP government of Rajasthan has decided to handover 300 secondary and senior-secondary government schools on the public-private partnership (PPP) model from the 2018 academic session onwards. Handing over government schools to the private sector would make education costlier. Teachers' unions also point out that 15,000 employees, including teachers and mid-day meal workers would lose their jobs if the PPP model is implemented.

Last year, the human resources ministry circulated a proposal for merging or relocating 2.6 lakh small govt. schools. Acting like a corporate body, the govt. claims that schools with less than 30 students are not viable. But these schools are in remote locations catering to small tribal or other marginalised communities. Closing them would be a direct blow to the chance of getting education for them.

In Maharashtra, the BJP government has decided in December 2017 to shut down 4,093 schools with 10 or fewer students. The Maharashtra government has also cleared a bill which will allow private companies to open schools in the State! In Rajasthan, over 20,000 schools have been shut down. There are numerous reports coming in from States such as Madhya Pradesh, Odisha, Himachal Pradesh, Haryana and so on, where the governments are trying to close down large numbers of government schools.

Programmes such as the Mid-Day Meal Scheme have suffered due to inadequate funding. But instead of employing more teachers and improving the quality of public schools, the BJP is accelerating the process of degrading them with the purpose of ultimately closing them down and paving the way for private profiteering in school education.

All this is forcing parents to send their children to private schools. And, due to lack of regulation, these private schools are extorting very high fees from students' families. In fact it is only in Left led Kerala, that the reverse is happening where because of Government focus on improving the quality of education and infrastructure in Government schools, parents are shifting children from private schools to Government run ones.

In the past few years, there have been dozens of protests against exorbitant school fees and other charges across the country. But the Modi govt. is blithely carrying on, indifferent to the plight of people because it favours increasing privatisation of education.

Reducing Access to Public Education

The fund cuts have had serious consequence of reducing the ability of the vast majority of students to access higher education too. This has gone hand in hand with the very explicit moves by the government to reduce the number of students who would be able to join public universities to pursue higher studies and research.

More than 1000 M.Phil. and Ph.D. seats in JNU were cut in 2017-18, following the May 2016 notification of the UGC. There would be a reduction of 400 seats in 2018-19 as well. This has occurred even as huge numbers of faculty posts are lying vacant in universities and colleges across the country. Meanwhile the AICTE has decided to change the norms for faculty-student ratio from 1:15 to 1:20, further degrading the quality of technical education.

Funding for CSIR labs and universities have been reduced, research fellowships have been cut, disbursement of non-JRF UGC fellowships for research students have been irregular, and the disbursement of post-metric fellowships has been adversely affected due to absence of allocation from the centre.

Exclusion is the guiding principal for BJP

The burden of these policies fall heaviest on the poorer sections, on SC and ST students. The various provisions to assist students to complete their education are under attack. Welfare hostels for SC/ST students in various states are being closed and privatized. In the want of sufficient funds the condition of these hostels are s inhuman. There is a continuous attack on the fellowships and scholarship for the students from deprived sections. According to a recent report scholarship arrears of the last three years for SC/ST students amount to Rs. 11156 crores (Rs. 8000 crores for SCs and Rs. 3156 crores for STs). The education of around 71,36,934 students – 51,03,243 SC students and 20,33,741 ST students – would be thrown into uncertainty if the amount is not released on time. There are “centres of studies of social exclusion and inclusive policy” in 35 central universities with the stated objective of including the socially marginalised sections into mainstream studies. These centres are also on the verge of closure in absence of funds from the central government. The notification of UGC to change the unit of 200 point system of reservation for faculty recruitment and making department as unit of reservation has directly reduced the opportunities for the aspirant from reserved category.

Push for Privatisation

The government has been aggressively pushing for the privatisation of education, for instance by replacing grants for public educational institutions with loans. Loans would be extended to educational institutions through the Higher Education Funding Agency (HEFA), and the institutions are expected to repay the loans through “internal accruals” earned through fee receipts, research earnings etc. Effectively this would mean fee hikes. The public character of education would be lost, turning it into a commodity which the poor and marginalised sections would find difficult to buy. The HEFA has already approved projects for the IITs in Bombay, Delhi, Madras, Kharagpur & Kanpur, and NIT Suratkal.

The Rashtriya Uchchar Shiksha Abhiyan (RUSA), introduced by the Congress-led UPA-II government and continued by the BJP-led NDA government, has acted as a vehicle for the commercialisation of

education. Students are overburdened with exams and assignments, with sharply lower teaching-learning hours. There are numerous reports about delays and major discrepancies in the results of semester exams. There are even cases of evaluation work being outsourced to private companies!

Efforts to centralise higher education have continued unabated under the BJP. The Ministry of Human Resource Development (HRD) has proposed that the UGC and the AICTE should be replaced with a new body, called Higher Education Empowerment Regulation Agency (HEERA).

Communalisation

Communalising education has always been a key agenda of the RSS-BJP. People with strong RSS links have been appointed to head various educational and research institutions, such as JNU and the Indian Council of Historical Research (ICHR). School textbooks have been communalised in BJP-ruled States for a long time now. The dangerous agenda of the Sangh Parivar to spread communal venom further in society was exposed yet again by recent reports that the BJP government appointed a committee in 2016 to rewrite Indian history as per the RSS line of thought.

Authoritarian Assaults

All of these have gone hand in hand with the well-known authoritarian attacks that the RSS-BJP has unleashed on the students of various universities and institutions, such as FTII Pune, IIT Madras, JNU, University of Hyderabad, Banaras Hindu University and Aligarh Muslim University. These attacks are clearly geared to crush all resistance by students and teachers against the agenda of the RSS-BJP to push their agenda of commercialisation and communalisation of education. Democratic bodies are being overruled and the opinions of teachers and students ignored while the UGC and the MHRD push devastating changes through notifications.

Health: Healthy Corporates, Ailing Masses

The BJP in its manifesto for the 2014 general elections had promised that it would build an accessible, affordable and effective healthcare system that would reduce out of pocket spending by the people. Close to four years down the line, the central govt. announced a programme called Ayushman Bharat for providing health “coverage”, that is, insurance coverage for 50 crore people. A *swasthya bharat* (healthy India) would be *samridhha bharat* (prosperous India), they proclaimed.

But the reality has turned out to be far from this idyllic vision. Like all his other promises, Modi’s assurances on healthcare have turned out to be avenues for bringing in corporate business to rake in profits while choking the govt. run system of funds. For a country which is plagued by both infectious and chronic diseases on gigantic scales, and where a vast majority of people are unable to bear the cost of treatment, this policy of turning healthcare delivery into a profiteering opportunity has been disastrous.

BJP led governments at national and state levels have choked funds for public health services, seriously affecting health care for ordinary people

Health Spending

Despite so called “increases” in budget allocations, govt. spending on health continues to remain at about 1.4% of GDP of which about 0.3% only comes from the central govt.’s kitty. The rest is from state govts. In its last full Budget for 2018-19, the Modi govt. increased allocation by just about 2.5% even as several key programmes saw cuts in allocation.

- In the **National Health Mission (NHM)** which provides public health services for rural and urban areas of the country budget allocation went down from Rs. 30,801 crores

in 2017-18 (Revised estimates) to Rs 30,129 crore.

- For the **Reproductive and Child Health (RCH)** programme budget was slashed by 30% this year, from Rs 7,545 crore in 2017-18 (Revised), to just Rs 5,253 crore.
- Funds for **Communicable diseases** were drastically cut by 27%, from Rs 2,648 crore in 2017-18 (Revised) to Rs 1,928 crore this year.
- The **maternity benefit scheme**, now called the Prime Minister’s Matrutva Vandana Yojana saw a cut of 7.5% with allocations dipping from Rs.2595 crore in 2017-18 (RE) to Rs.2400 crore this year.
- Although the govt. announced that 24 new **medical colleges** will be set up by upgrading District Hospitals, the allocation for this has decreased from Rs. 3300 crore in 2017-18 (RE) to Rs. 2888 crore in 2018-19 (BE), a decline of about 12 percent.

A similar approach has been followed by the BJP led state govts. In 2017-18, despite worsening encephalitis situation, UP’s BJP govt. led by Yogi Adityanath slashed the budget for encephalitis programme from Rs. 10.19 crores to just Rs. 5.78 crores. Small wonder that 3-4 extremely sick infants were packed per ICU bed, oxygen supply ran out because of non-payment of dues and in one horrific week last August, 72 children died.

Ayushman Bharat

PM Modi proclaimed that the new ‘National Health Protection Scheme’ (NHPS), would give 50 crore poor people health insurance coverage worth Rs. 5 lakh each. As is typical with all Modi schemes, the announcements look good till you look at the details. Only Rs. 2000 crores have been allocated this year in the Budget for the scheme. That’s about Rs. 40 per person per year! Later, officials said that Rs. 11,000 cr. will be given. That is still less than half of the minimum required for this scheme.

But more importantly, the scheme is applicable only for in-patients, that is, for hospital admissions. Over two thirds of health spending by

families is on non-hospitalised conditions, mostly on medicines. So, the scheme will not benefit you unless you are seriously ill.

The biggest beneficiaries of this scheme will be big private hospitals and insurance companies since insurance covered people will be forced to go to them where they will be over-treated and over-charged as happens in all health insurance cases. The govt. will be transferring premium funds to the coffers of these companies as in the Fasal Bima Yojana. The earlier Rashtriya Swasthya Bima Yojana (RSBY) has shown the same trend and has increased rather than decreased out of pocket expenditure.

Private Hospital Profiteering

As several recent cases have revealed, the booming network of private corporate owned hospitals have become a menace because of their extreme profiteering from distressed patients and their families. One example of this was a 7-year old child who died after treatment for 15-days in Fortis Hospital, Gurgaon, but his heart broken family was billed Rs.16 lakh. This is not a unique case. The National Pharmaceutical Pricing Authority (NPPA) analysed hospital bills and brought out a report in February 2018 exposing huge profiteering by corporate hospitals. An analysis of bills from four reputed private hospitals in Delhi and NCR revealed that they are making profits of up to 1,737% on drugs, consumables and diagnostics, which account for about half of a patient's bill. Modi govt. responded by removing the chairperson of NPPA.

That the BJP govt. – both central and state - stands with the corporate hospitals is further shown by the fact that they have refused to vigorously implement the Clinical Establishment Act, 2010 meant to regulate private hospitals. They have not even notified the essential standards under the Act.

Rising drug Prices

Under Modi, a concerted drive has been launched to decontrol drug (medicine) prices in order to favour pharma companies. In April 2017, NITI Aayog recommended that the Drug Price Control Order be delinked from the National List of Essential Medicines, which means that prices of all essential medicines will no longer be controlled and they will

become more expensive. It has also proposed that the Central government can exempt any drug from price control if there is “sufficient competition” – opening the way for prices of over 350 essential medicines to be removed from price control. All this means that prices of common drugs will go up. There is also a proposal that only prices of such essential medicines would be controlled which are higher by 10% or more compared to the current ceiling prices. If this proposal is accepted, around 40 per cent of the drugs that are currently under price control would go out of it.

Provision of drugs at affordable prices is the mandate of the Jan Aushadhi Scheme run by the department of pharmaceuticals. only Rs.84 crore has been allocated to this scheme which is currently running some 850 outlets. How can this paltry sum cater to the need of cheap drugs by 120 crore people only Modi knows.

Declining Public Health Facilities

The existing health infrastructure is meanwhile going through rapid degeneration due to lack of funds and political backing from the Modi govt. The shortfalls in sub centres (SCs), primary health centres (PHCs) and community health centres (CHCs) were 19%, 22% and 30% respectively as on March 31, 2017, according to Rural Health Statistics (2017). Many of the centres lack electricity or running water and others are in dilapidated buildings. Lack of approach roads prevents ambulances from reaching them.

A similar condition exists in terms of health personnel functioning from these centres. Against the requirement, there is 82% shortage of Specialists (including Surgeons, Obstetricians & Gynaecologists, Physicians and Paediatricians) at CHCs. About 6,371 SCs are functioning without Auxilliary Nurses and Midwives (ANMs). Even if the posts have been sanctioned, the positions are lying vacant, for instance, 14% positions for ANMs at SCs and PHCs are lying vacant.

Far from building a swastha and samridha India, the above summary shows that the country is being inexorably pushed in the direction of a completely privatised healthcare system run by greedy corporates. This will not bring swasthya or good health to the people but it will surely bring samridhi to the corporate houses.

Food Insecurity Increases Under Modi Government

It is not surprising that the Prime Minister has chosen to speak only rarely, if at all, on the issue of food security and hunger in these four years of his rule. The 2017 World Hunger Index ranks India 100 out of 119 countries, the third worst record in Asia, with only Pakistan and Afghanistan ranked worse.

But instead of strengthening and expanding the food security system the Modi Government is at present in the process of diluting and sabotaging the right to food under the National Food Security Act (2013) in various ways.

The Act itself is inadequate and flawed as it does not ensure universal coverage and also reduces the entitlement to just 5 kgs per individual instead of guaranteeing at least 35 kgs of food grain for a household at subsidized prices. The Act provides for coverage of upto 75% of the rural population and upto 50% of the urban population at the all India level under TPDS in the priority household category. These priority households are entitled to receive foodgrains at just 5 kg per person per month at the issue prices of Rs. 3.00, Rs.2.00 and Rs. 1.00 kg for rice, wheat and coarse grains respectively. The Antodaya households are to receive 35 kg of foodgrains per household per month at the same subsidized price, instead of the lower price which was prevalent earlier.

In the very first year in office, the Modi Government issued a circular imposing a freeze on the numbers of Antodaya cards. The March 2015 circular read “. (3) ...Provided that when an Antodaya household becomes ineligible on account of migration outside the State, improvement in social or economic status, death, etc., no new Antodaya

household shall be identified in that State and the total number of Antodaya households shall be reduced.” This is against the law and deprives lakhs of families of the poorest of the poor the right to 35 kgs of foodgrains.

The circular also imposed a freeze on the number of families per State who are eligible to get rations as a priority household. “ For the purpose of allocation of subsidised foodgrains under Targeted Public Distribution System by the Central Government, there shall be no increase in the State-wise number of persons covered under Targeted Public Distribution System till the data from the next population Census, after the commencement of this Order, becomes available.” Thus those born in between or those who become new entrants into the priority list because of economic distress are excluded from getting the benefits.

This approach of cutting down in numbers of those eligible has been taken to new shameful levels in the last two years. In the name of digitization, lakhs of ration cards were cancelled on flimsy grounds and later termed as being bogus.

Even worse, the linkage of existing ration cards with AADHAR numbers has proved disastrous as large numbers of families have been deprived of their cards and therefore of rations.

The Prime Minister boasted in Parliament that the government had detected 3.95-crore bogus ration cards, using technology and Aadhaar numbers to plug leakage in its social welfare programmes. An RTI inquiry however got the response that the Government had no details of how and how many were found to be bogus.

Corruption in the rationing system has to be rooted out. But for that a proper transparent verification process and village level house to house surveys are required. But without any such survey, ration cards are being cancelled where the poor do not even have a chance to question why their cards are cancelled. Ground level surveys have found wrong data entry, faults in the AADHAR linkage and also exclusion of short term migrant workers are some of the main reasons. The net result is deprivation has grown.

The starvation deaths reported from Jharkhand in September-October

2017, also highlighted another reality. An 11 year old child, Santosh Kumari died of starvation even though her family had a ration card. But it was not linked to AADHAR. The girl was real, her family was real, the ration card was genuine, according to the NFSA she should, have got 5 kg of foodgrains. But the child died with “bhat bhat” (rice, rice) being her last words.

In February that year the Central Government had issued another notification. “...the Department of Food and Consumer Affairs has issued a Notification under Aadhaar Act which requires individual beneficiaries having ration cards under NFSA to furnish proof of possession of Aadhaar number or undergo Aadhaar authentication to receive subsidies under NFSA (i.e. subsidised food grains or cash Transfer of Food Subsidy under NFSA),” an official statement said. Santosh did not have an AADHAR card so she was denied rations and died of starvation.

Even those who have AADHAR cards have been denied rations. Often the PoS (point of sale) machines do not work, the finger prints do not match and other technical reasons.

This imposition of conditions for getting rations is totally illegal and a violation of the NFSA.

The actual reason is to cut down on subsidies, the resources required to implement the Act. The budgetary allocation is of 1.4 lakh crore rupees. This is less than one per cent of India’s GDP. But too much for this Government whose Finance Minister is on record against the Act. According to the Union Food Minister Ram Vilas Paswan, just the cutting down of ration cards has “saved” the exchequer an annual 17,500 crore rupees.

In fact those States which had a robust public distribution system like Kerala and Tamilnadu have found their allocations of foodgrains drastically cut by the Central Government affecting food security in those States where malnutrition has been under control.

The Central Government is putting pressure on States to switch to the Direct Benefit Transfer system or the food stamp system to give up providing foodgrains and give cash instead. This is the model that was pushed by agencies like the World Bank as a core part of new liberal

policies. The Government’s pilot projects on cash transfers have spectacularly failed such as those in Jharkhand. There is no infrastructure to ensure that the beneficiary actually benefits. Numerous trips to far off banks, no electricity, no internet, machines not recognizing thumb impressions are just some of the problems. This of course is apart from the social reality that for families so close to the edge financially, there may be a hundred reasons where cash subsidies are spent on other emergencies, not on food. Cash can never replace the provision of foodgrains to ensure the end of hunger. It will also mean the end of the public distribution system, the end of procurement and therefore a big blow to kisans.

The NFSA has other provisions and rights such as an allowance of 6000 rupees for pregnant women. This is the very minimum maternity benefit provision required. But this insensitive government had first ignored this legal right for the first two years in office. Last year it reduced the amount from 6000 rupees legally mandated to 5000 rupees and renamed it as the Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojna. It also imposed a condition that it would be applicable only for the first child. This is totally against the law.

The NFSA for the first time includes and recognises the ICDS as a Government programme to fulfil the rights of children to nutrition. However this too is being violated by the Modi Government in incremental privatisation of the ICDS and cutting down on budgetary allocations, thus directly negating the right given under the National Food Security Act.

India is facing increased food insecurity —the direct result of this Government’s policies. What is required to make India food secure is to strengthen the law by making the right to food a universal legal right, by strengthening the public distribution system, by expanding the list of subsidized items from foodgrains to edible oil, pulses, sugar, salt etc. This alone will help address the reality of widespread hunger and malnutrition rampant in India.

Environment be Damned !

Although BJP had proclaimed in its 2014 election manifesto that it will put “sustainability at the centre of our thoughts and actions” and it will reverse the policy of impunity in looting natural resources, four years of its rule have done the exact opposite. The BJP government has continued severely diluting the already weak environmental regulations in the country, as part of its drive to promote “ease of doing business,” for the benefit of the corporate class. Contrary to what was written in the manifesto, the BJP and PM Modi have always believed that environmental regulations are an obstacle to “development,” a term used as proxy for corporate industrialization and large-scale infrastructure.

The recent brutal killing of at least 12 people in police firing when they were protesting against the toxic pollution to air, water and land by Sterlite Copper in Thoothukudi, Tamil Nadu, has once again highlighted the way environmental clearances are given and violation ignored by state and central govts. In the Sterlite case, the BJP govt. had allowed the setting up of the plant without going through the process of mandatory public consultation.

Early in its rule, the BJP government made an attempt through the notorious T.S.R.Subramanian Committee to re-write the whole gamut of major environmental laws to reduce oversight, redefine environmental damage and to thoroughly ease procedures for granting environmental clearances. Modi as Gujarat CM had done just that leaving behind a trail of heavily polluted lands and water bodies while corporate houses made merry. Since recommendations of this Committee were blocked by the Parliamentary Committee, the Modi govt. has been systematically dismantling existing environmental rules and regulations, undermining current laws, and issuing a series of executive orders or notifications to

achieve its aims to promote corporate interests often causing irreversible environmental damage and harm to livelihoods of people. Recently, the Niti Aayog has initiated a relook at all the Subramanian Committee recommendations and the responses to it. According to press reports, it appears that the Government is keen to push ahead with its overhaul of environmental regulations before its term finishes.

Reform or De-regulation?

For Modi, as for all neo-liberal thinking, environmental law reform means dismantling environment protection legislation, disarming regulatory bodies and more or less giving carte blanche to industrial and infrastructure projects without concern for its environmental impacts. After the earlier abortive attempt at wholesale “reform” of environmental legislation, the government turned to diluting the regulatory norms, mechanisms and institutional frameworks that govern activities in a practical sense and, where necessary, give these the backing of official Policies, Notifications or executive orders pending any legislation in the future.

Official mechanisms at the Ministry of Environment & Forests and Climate Change (MoEF&CC) for granting environmental clearances have been completely bureaucratized, with few if any independent experts, and with a clear mandate to make granting of clearances, rather than scrutiny, the rule. The outcome soon became evident when obtaining clearances became a mere formality and rejections or even questioning became rare. Here are a few examples.

Wholesale clearances

Revamped environmental clearances committees at the environment ministry have taken to clearing projects without due diligence. Within months of assuming power, the Modi govt. had cleared 140 projects, most without considering the totality of environmental impact. Forest clearance were granted to over a hundred Projects in quick time. Numerous coal mining projects in forest areas have also been cleared under new guidelines. Displacement of tribals or other forest dwellers was not taken into account and neither was wildlife impacts as was seen in the case of the Ken-Betwa Link project that took over 6000

hectares of the Panna Tiger Reserve in MP which displaced 1600 households including 800 staying inside the reserve. The BJP govt. has given clearances to 570 category A projects till 2017 mostly in fast track mode and potentially without due diligence.

New Forest Policy

The New Forest Policy was recently announced by the Modi govt. It threatens the very nature of forests in India in both their ecological and societal dimensions in several ways. It treats forest cover and tree cover as interchangeable terms, which they definitely are not. By this sleight of hand, it wants to promote plantation activities on the fringes and inside existing forests themselves, with the private sector playing an important role. The Policy envisages that through this, chances of rapidly achieving the target of 33% forest/tree cover as declared for the Paris (Climate) Agreement would be achieved. Also, it would enable timber to substitute for steel, aluminium and other energy-intensive materials. This neatly side-steps the standing Supreme Court ban on clear felling of trees in forests, and the government no doubt will claim that since these are planted not naturally grown trees, felling should not be a problem! All this without changing the Forest Act!

However, the Policy has two dangerous implications. Ecologically, a mixed forest is very different from an area with planted commercial tree species. Commercial stands cannot provide the ecological services of maintaining bio-diversity, checking soil erosion, harvesting rainwater or snowfall and recharging surface or underground water bodies. Even carbon sequestration would not be the same as in mixed forests with diverse flora at different heights, there is higher potential for carbon storage. And socially, mixed forests but not plantations provide forest dwellers with fuel, fodder, non-timber forest produce and much else for their sustenance, livelihoods and well-being. The new Forest Policy would wreak havoc in India's already delicately poised forests, and would open the floodgates to ecological destruction and commercial exploitation by corporate interests.

Coastal Regulatory Zone

Another example of Modi govt.'s changes in environmental regulations is the proposed amendments to the Coastal Regulatory Zone (CRZ)

rules. The prevailing CRZ Notification of 2011 has already been amended 11 times, diluting its provisions considerably. The recent Notification reduces the No Development Zone along the coasts from 100 metres for highly populated areas and 200 metres for less densely populated areas to just 50 metres for all categories of activities. Over 3000 fishing village or hamlets operate along the Indian coasts and use this narrow strip of land for parking fishing vessels, drying fish and fishing nets, salt production and various other activities including temporary shelters. This strip also contains salt marshes and a variety of salt-tolerant trees which protect the coasts from erosion and from cyclones etc. While the earlier 2011 Notification earmarked activities such as building structures for coastal erosion protection, land reclamation, dredging for ports and waterways etc. for further studies, the 2018 Notification, without waiting for or taking into account any such studies, has given blanket permission for all such activities besides "eco-tourism." This would render this narrow coastal zone highly vulnerable to ecological damage and also harm the interests of hundreds of millions of fishers and other coastal peoples.

Without any explanation, the 2018 CRZ Notification also shifts the decision-making powers for all activities in coastal waters, inter-tidal regions, and ecologically sensitive zones from the States to the Centre. Further, delineating High Tide Lines and Low Tide Lines was to be done by the States, which had wanted the Centre to specify guidelines for the same of uniformity. But CRZ 2018 has grabbed this opportunity to give all such powers under the umbrella of a specialized agency under the Centre. Read along with the Niti Aayog's moves to craft new laws covering the major areas of air, water, forests, coasts etc., all these piecemeal notifications, policy announcements and government orders highlight the impending and dangerous overhaul of the environmental regulatory framework of this country.

Climate Change

During the Paris Climate Change Treaty negotiations, and subsequently in monitoring exercises, the Modi govt. has made no effort towards adoption of low carbon emission measures that promote access to modern energy for the poor especially in rural areas including electricity, cooking

fuel and mass public transportation. It is carrying on with its so called mitigation and adaptation policies with no vision of how modern energy needs of the deprived sections in India will be fulfilled. This means that in the future, the present dichotomy of the elite using huge amounts of energy while the poor live in low energy consumption existence will continue and in fact get aggravated. What was needed a programme for introduction of mass public transport, non-renewable sources of energy, etc. to meet potential needs of the people. The govt. is continuing to claim that it is meeting the Paris Treaty standards – but at the cost of keeping the vast majority of Indians shackled to low-energy lives.

Undermining Science, Promoting Pseudo-Science

In its election manifesto in 2014, BJP had made all kinds of grandiose promises that it will promote “scientific education and technology” and “create an ecosystem for fundamental research and innovation”. In fact in the past four years of BJP rule, science has reached its lowest point since Independence in the process of development, education and building of a scientific attitude among the people at large. This is not at all a reflection of the tremendous potential or quality of work of Indian’s scientists, but almost completely because of the RSS agenda of taking a blinkered approach towards modern scientific research and development based on bizarre claims that “ ancient India” had full knowledge of everything being developed today and therefore the only science that India needs to know is already available in the shashtras.

Further, the BJP government and its Sangh Parivar affiliates, are undermining scientific attitudes among the people by spreading myths, pseudo-science, and manufactured histories of a fake past when India possessed the best contemporary and even futuristic science and technology, ignoring genuine achievements in ancient India, and running away from facing the real S&T challenges of the present while also making India a laughing stock in the eyes of the global scientific community.

Nations which were at the same level of development as India a few decades ago, have gone far ahead in terms of expenditure on R&D, quality of science education and emphasis on research, except in a few strategic sectors such as nuclear energy and space.

Dismal R&D Spending

The Government's own data shows that India's expenditure on R&D has dropped to a miserable 0.7 percent of GDP, not only less than the US, but much lower than China, South Korea and Israel. And most of the R&D expenditure by the government is in defence, space and atomic energy, while basic research and R&D in other areas is languishing.

While statistics may show private sector R&D increasing in percentage terms, the picture reveals disturbing trends. Bulk of private R&D is in just three sectors, namely pharmaceuticals, automobiles and software, that too dominated by multi-national corporations. The Government has been touting its success in attracting FDI into research in India. In fact, however, this R&D in India by MNCs takes advantage of Indian talent and relatively lower-priced human resources to do research to their own corporate advantage alone.

The percentage of Indian patents held by Indians has dropped sharply from 40 percent in 2001-02 to just 15 percent in 2015-16. Further, over 80 percent of US patents granted against applications from India are from MNCs. Clearly, while home-grown R&D has been losing ground, India has failed to absorb knowledge or technologies generated through FDI in R&D, defeating its very purpose, unlike China which has leaped ahead in S&T capacities.

Prime Minister Modi, while addressing participants at the Indian Science Congress in Tirupati in 2017 declared that India would become a global scientific power by 2022. Going by what is happening in reality, this is just another grandstanding boast by the PM.

Meanwhile, higher education and research in S&T has been floundering, and the government has been systematically cutting down on funding while encouraging private universities and FDI in education, the latter focusing on profits and having little interest in investing in research. Research, never greatly emphasized in the Indian university system, has suffered even more during this period in both quantitative and qualitative terms.

The number of scientists and engineers engaged in R&D in India has been virtually stagnant, going from 9 per 1000 in 2011 to 10 per 1000 in

2015, comparing very poorly with China's 47!

Research expenditure by Indian universities is a mere 4 percent of the total government R&D spend. Support for S&T institutions of higher education has been dwindling. While only the IITs have gained in budgetary terms, mainly due to the additional of several new institutions, funding for Indian Institutes of Science Education & Research (IISER) have actually gone down from Rs.720 crore in 2016 to Rs.600 crore in 2017, and Indian Institute of Science and Central Universities, where most basic research would be conducted, have not received any boost. State Universities do not figure anywhere in the government's thinking on research.

S&T Ignored in Policy Making

Even on the applied or development side of application of S&T, numerous schemes floated by the BJP government during these past four years, such as Smart Cities, Skill India, Start-up India etc. have not been conceptualized with any significant S&T inputs. In the grandiose Make in India scheme, the essential focus is on attracting FDI with an eye on exports, not on identifying and investing on critical gap areas in knowledge and capabilities. This is best evidenced by the huge import dependence in electronics, solar panels and semi-conductors, and other sectors. Defence manufacturing faces the same problem, with schemes to attract FDI drawing a blank despite steadily increasing incentives, and the substantial earnings from offsets not resulting in any meaningful technology acquisition or absorption, again because the focus is on money rather than on technology and capabilities.

Thus the youth of India are being denied access to research and to knowledge of scientific developments, essential for their future development.

Pseudo-science Flourishing

Instead, they are being dragged backwards, taught to live in a haze of uncritical acceptance of myths and false pride in a pseudo-historical past. BJP Ministers, and even the Prime Minister, besides leading Sangh Parivar luminaries, proclaim that India possessed spacecraft capable of

inter-planetary travel, cosmetic surgery, stem cell research, in vitro fertilization etc. many thousands of years ago, and that Darwin's theory of evolution is incorrect, that the Vedas contain scientific theories "superior to those of Einstein"! Such statements were repeatedly made even from the podiums of the Indian Science Congress, prompting leading international scientists and Nobel Laureates to flee, sharply criticize such blatant falsehoods and myth-making at scientific events, and promise never to return. When scientists from India criticize such statements, they are accused of being Westernized, anti-national and followers of Macaulay!

What are the students and youth of India supposed to do? How will they acquire the critical thinking and scientific, problem-solving attitude that all experts say they will need in the future, when their own education system is not allowed to impart these qualities, when inquisitiveness and inventiveness is suppressed and blind faith is encouraged?

It is a bleak scenario in spite of the huge potential India has in terms of talent, aptitude and potential of its human resources.

Four Years of Modi Govt Misrule

Why it has to end

When Lives and Futures are Endangered



Courtesy : Mumbai Meri Jaan by Manjul

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