

## EDITORIAL

### **Rural – Urban Divide**

We who live in the villages, both farmers and labourers, are on our own in the world. We make up over 80% of the population in the state of Uttar Pradesh while in the country as a whole, we comprise 70%. Thus 7 out of every 10 people in India live in the villages and uncultivated countryside.

The urban population consists of a mere 30% of the total population. This includes one-third who live on the streets and in shanty towns. They come initially from the villages where they still have their roots. They migrate to urban centers in the search of a livelihood.

Out of the remaining two-thirds, half are those who have come from the villages to the towns either for the education of their children or to set up businesses or to take up jobs, some in the administrative sector, others skilled or semi-skilled jobs such as carpentry, masonry, cleaning, security work and service trades.

Thus a staggering 90% of the population of the country has its roots in rural areas. Only 10% have their origins in towns and cities. No wonder, then, that Mahatma Gandhi said that India lives in her villages. He himself was from a town but he recognized the true soul of the country. He wholeheartedly believed that India is a country of villages.

### **Rural Culture**

But what is the culture of the villages? Living with less, following a careful, economic, simple lifestyle and being content with what we have. We live off the land and we mostly draw what we need from local natural resources. We do not exploit others and live happily. We may not have much but we always welcome a guest. We respect everyone who comes to our doors. Comparatively speaking, Hindus, Sikhs, Muslims and Christians all mix and live harmoniously. Communal conflicts do not begin in the villages. They originate in the towns.

This is basically our culture. Above all, it is our *own* culture. Urban culture, on the other hand, is based on consumerism and the overuse, misuse and wastage of resources. Urban culture is a crude copy of Western culture. It is not Indian. It robs rural areas of precious natural resources and takes the fruit of the farmers' labour.

### **Where are the country's resources?**

India's natural resources are all in rural areas. Water, land, minerals, cattle and forest are all in rural areas. Those who live in rural areas not only live off these resources but also conserve, replenish and expand them. We grow crops from land, we draw water from under the ground but do not dirty it, we look after cattle, we plant trees – we do not destroy anything. We produce.

Urban people manufacture goods. They are not primary producers. They eat and waste far more than we do and create widespread pollution.

So who makes more economic and better use of the world's limited resources? Who makes them last longer? And who is exploiting our natural resources without thought for the future? Even world scientists and economists have now declared that our future can only be assured if we follow a rural lifestyle. The urban lifestyle is not sustainable and will surely lead to a bitter end.

### **Politics**

Now let us look at this politically. The rural poor make up the majority of the rural population. We work hard but still do not have enough to eat. We are dependent on goods and services from the towns. This dependence increases every day. Children's education, health services, clothes, building materials, communications, security or transport – for all of these we are dependent on the towns. On the other hand, the wealth created in the villages goes to the towns. Politics as made by urban people ensures this.

Urbanites tend to say that this is because of their superior intelligence and knowledge. However, the truth is that this whole process of the movement of people and resources from village to town is unnatural. There is nothing logical or sustainable about it.

## **DEMOCRACY**

It is true that democratic governments have weaknesses. Those who like to grab power try to exploit these weaknesses. This includes international trading systems as well as internal industrial houses, the media and political alliances. All of them try to exploit the weaknesses of the democratic system. Is the cure for this to be found in partnership with the private sector? What guarantee is there that the private sector will not exploit the weaknesses of the democratic system in the same way as the media, international trading systems, internal industrial houses and political alliances?

### **If public/private partnership is not the answer, then what is?**

Those who breathe democracy, who have adopted democracy and those who believe in it, do not think that the private sector is the answer. Undemocratic systems and processes cannot power democracy. How can those who do not believe in democracy empower democracy? In any case, the rural poor are the first to suffer from the weaknesses of the democratic system. Those who enjoy exploiting the poor will not think about empowering them.

The true power of democracy is the voter. The weaknesses of democracy are the weaknesses of the voter – lack of knowledge, inactivity and insensitivity are just some. Only active, sensitive, well-informed voters can empower a democracy. Active citizens and sensitive human beings will keep themselves well informed. Their positive pressure is the most corrective and effective pressure on democratic governments. Private investment,

however controlled, lacks the basic motivation to help democratic systems. The amount of profit and ever increasing profit margins will always remain their main goals and motivation. In any case, the basis of their investment is building up and protecting their capital.

### **The Answer**

The distribution and redistribution of assets and decentralization of power can provide benefits and power to the poor. However, these all go against the main motivation of the private sector.

So what can we do?

We should ask ourselves whether we belong to the category of citizens who are active, sensitive, sensible and well informed.

Do we readily use our democratic powers?

We can reduce the autocratic and dictatorial tendencies of our elected representatives and our executive if we are active, sensitive and well informed.

By exercising our voting rights objectively and judiciously and by using the right of recall of unsuitable and failing elected representatives, we can make our democracy more accountable, effective and responsible.

Thus, the rural poor should be encouraged and supported to exercise their voting rights. They should be provided, in their language, with clear and succinct information on the candidates and the issues on which they stand, so that they can make objective decisions. The Election Commission must ensure this information and support to the rural poor.

Democracies have given us our voice. They are still our best option. Public/Private Partnership is not.