

THE INSTITUTIONALIZATION OF SOCIAL PURPOSE
(DURGABAI DESHMUKH MEMORIAL LECTURE - 1992)

By

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To Honour a Very Special Person

Dr. Karan Singh, Dr. Amar Kumar Singh, Dr. Prodipto Roy, ladies and gentlemen, I am deeply honoured by this invitation to deliver the first Durgabai Deshmukh Memorial lecture. It gives me an opportunity to pay my tribute to the memory of one of the most dynamic and courageous women I have ever known, a freedom fighter and founder of independent India, whom I have deeply respected, and a close relative whom I have cherished and admired.

Dr. Amar Kumar Singh introduced me as Dr. Deshmukh's niece. I am Dr. Deshmukh's niece only by marriage. So I do not carry the precious Deshmukh genes. But, Durgabai and I had a very special relationship. Both of us entered the Deshmukh-Chitnis family the same year as brides. She a wise, mature, experienced, confident woman in her forties already established as a dignitary on the national scene. Me, a fresh graduate, just turned twenty and on the threshold of adulthood. Separating us was a massive gap in status, in wisdom and experience. But across this gap, binding us in a unique closeness as new brides in the family was a shared eagerness to be accepted, appreciated and to belong to our new family. Within a couple of years, this initial concern that had brought us close had faded away but the bond that it had created remained. In fact, it grew stronger over the years, probably because, as a Sociologist, I was closer to Durgabai's work than anyone else in the family.

The Theme...

I have struggled hard to find for this lecture a theme that will do justice to Durgabai's distinctive personhood, to the rich spectrum of her service to the social purpose, and to the very special relationship that I had with her. The causes she served are so many and so varied that it should have been easy for me to choose one for a lecture in her memory. The Nationalist struggle for Freedom, Literacy, the Education of Women, the training of Balwadi workers, of medical personnel, Law, the Planning Commission, the Constitution, Family Planning, Social Welfare, Social Development, Social Research ... Every single one of these issues would make an interesting theme. Or for that matter, I could put all these issues aside, and from the vantage point of my interest in women's studies try to explore the identity of this remarkably strong and liberated woman, and share with you some of my precious memories about her life with a husband who, in turn, was liberated enough to cope with her extra-ordinarily independent and powerful personhood with gentleness and admiration. But, impressed all my life by her tremendous drive and competence, and fascinated by her capacity to succeed at whatever she touched, I was looking for a theme that would help me understand and portray the strength and dynamism that marked her work.

The Failure of Planned Development

As I looked through her own autobiography, some biographical material on her and writings on the work she has done, I was struck by an anguished comment made by her at the time of the establishment of the Council for Social Development in 1964. Explaining the objectives for which the Council was being set up, she says, "two decades of planning have shown that results have not been commensurate with the effort ... The why of this cries for an answer. Is it the over-emphasis on economic development? Is it the lack of correlation between ends and means? Is it that outmoded administrative techniques are inadequate to the new tasks? The true answer can be found only after prolonged search into several complex factors ... "Durgabai 's question is essentially a question about the failure of planned development or the inability of the State to successfully implement programmes for social, economic and political development. At a more generic level, it is a question about the failure of the State to obtain the successful functioning of the institutions set up to serve social purpose. Disturbed by the realization that we do not yet, more than twenty years after Durgabai first posed her vital question, have a satisfactory answer, I found myself reflecting upon the contrast between the firm drive and dynamic effectiveness with which she herself had, throughout her life, served every cause she took up and the poor performance of the institutions she had helped establish as one of the planners for independent India. Knowing that it would be presumptuous for me to try to answer this complex question, I felt nevertheless that I might at least begin to tackle it, by briefly looking back at Durgabai's own social and political work with a view to identifying some of the key elements of her success, and then try to look at these elements where these elements stand in the State's effort to achieve political and economic development after independence. This will be the theme of my lecture.

Durgabai's Service of Society

Durgabai was born in a progressive family. Her maternal grandfather Manohar Rao Pantalu was the first Indian to become Superintendent of Police in the British period. He was a close friend and supporter of the famous crusader for women's rights, Veerashalingam Pantalu. Her father was a man with many lively interests and a deep sense of public service. From Durgabai's accounts, he also seems to have been a warm and a loving father and far more freely demonstrative of his affection for his children than was customary for fathers in those days.

Despite her enlightened background, Durgabai was married to a cousin at the tender age of eight. Fortunately, her schooling did not terminate with her marriage. In 1920, at the age of eleven, Durgabai had the maturity to recognize that the marriage was not for her for she decided to join the Indian National Congress and plunge into public service. At about the same time, she ended her own formal education because she felt that she had to heed Gandhiji's call to boycott all schools where English was taught. However, she started a school of her own - the Balika Hindi Pathashala, to teach Hindi and to prepare volunteers for the Congress Session at Kakinada the following year. In a touching reference to her initiative in starting this school, one of her biographers mentions how as a little girl of eleven she had described herself as the

"principal teacher, and servant" of this school, where more than 400 women, many twice her age, were enrolled. Durgabai's biographies reveal many other interesting incidents from her childhood -As a volunteer at the Khadi exhibition at the Congress Session at Kakinada she stopped no less a person than Jawaharlal Nehru from entering the exhibition because he had no ticket! -Was this little girl an activist? Was it social action that she was involved in? Definitions are a tricky business. But, in each of the instances listed so far, what stands out is the clarity of Durgabai's purposes ... the courage, determination and competence with which she pursued every cause she chose to serve even as a little girl, and the mature, focused and direct character of her action.

Later, in 1929, barely twenty years old Durgabai took on the leadership of Salt Satyagraha in Madras after Shri Sri Prakasam was arrested. After a month, she too was arrested. At her trial, she insisted that she be given C Class in her confinement because she considered the practice of dividing prisoners into different classes a part of the policy of the British to divide and rule. Durgabai's work for the Salt Satyagraha brings out her ability to measure up to an emergency and to handle a difficult organizational task with efficiency. Her insistence on Class C as a prisoner underlines her willingness to suffer in the interest of social justice. The course of Durgabai's University education reveals some other remarkable facets of her personality and her way of handling any challenge she took up. Since her school education was continuously interrupted by the nationalist movement, Durgabai took a crash course of private tuition for one year and passed the matriculation examination of Banaras Hindu University. Impressed by her performance, Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya who headed the University gave her a scholarship, and she completed her Intermediate examination. She would have continued here, but she wanted to graduate with Political Science, while Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya, with a somewhat conservative attitude to the education of girls, insisted that she do literature. Unwilling to compromise, she decided to return to her own province and to try for admission at Andhra University. The Vice-Chancellor of the University of Andhra refused her admission because she had no place to stay. She requested the Vice-Chancellor to start a hostel. Having initially refused to do so, he finally agreed on the condition that he had at least six women students. Determined to bring together the six students required, Durgabai put an advertisement in the local newspaper inviting applications for admission to a University Hostel for Women. She received twelve applications. She took these to the Vice-Chancellor. He had no alternative but to keep his promise. In 1939, Durgabai passed her B.A. with Honours, standing first in Political Science and Constitutional History. In 1940, she received the M.A. degree. Two years later, she earned her B.L. degree and was enrolled as an Advocate in the Madras High Court. With determination, perseverance, ingenuity and relentless pursuit of purpose, she had won.

But perhaps the best illustration of the quality of Durgabai's work and the character of her personhood is available in her work for the Andhra Mahila Sabha. In 1937, Durgabai's family had shifted from Waltair to Madras where her brother Narayanrao had found a job. Durgabai was still at the hostel at Waltair. They took a house in the Brindawan Gardens, at Mylapore. Eager to do something for the children in the neighbourhood, Durgabai who often visited Madras, and her mother, started to teach the children dance and music, to tell them stories,

and to teach their mothers Hindi. Before long, they had 100 children and 50 women on their hands. Durgabai named this group the Little Ladies of Brindawan.

As this organization grew, it came to be necessary to house it in proper quarters and to employ paid teachers. At about the time that she sensed this need, Durgabai came in contact with the Chennapuri Andhra Maha Sabha, which was essentially a men's club. In 1939, Home in Madras after completing her B.A. degree, Durgabai had found time to help this club design and plan its Silver Jubilee celebrations. This association enabled her to affiliate the Little Ladies' of Brindawan, now named the Andhra Mahila Sabha, to the club as its Women's and Children's wing. By 1940, she was able to house this wing in separate premises. Bit by bit she added to the Andhra Mahila Sabha's programme of need-based activities ranging from lessons in tailoring, spinning, bamboo and cane work, weaving and paper making, to condensed courses in school education for adult women ... As the organization grew stronger, she added a women's hostel and Mahila Vidyalaya (1944-46), a printing press (1953), a Nursing and Maternity Home (1950-52), a Children's Ward to this home (1954-55), a hostel for nurses working at the Nursing Home (1955), a Shishu Vihar Montessori School (1955-56), a Vanita Bala Vihar (1957), an out-patients' block (1956), a Dental Clinic (1957), a family planning clinic (1957-59), another Vidyalaya (1958), an Operation Theatre and Surgical Block (1957-59), an Orthopaedic Centre (1958-60), and a Tourist Hostel (1962-64).

The shape of the growth of the Andhra Mahila Sabha at Madras as well as later at Hyderabad indicates, par excellence, Durgabai's sharp sensitivity to societal needs, her ability to take growth in proper phases from one stage to the next, her ability to find resources, her watchful monitoring of work and her gift for stimulating voluntary effort. Her conception of the Central Social Welfare Board, and of the Council for Social Development, and her administration of both these bodies later in the course of her career, reveal these capacities on a larger canvas in a national context.

Social Action

While commenting on the failure of planned development, Durgabai was obviously looking at two decades of planned effort from the vantage point of her own track record. Often over the course of the last few years, reflecting upon the work of social activists like Durgabai, of nineteenth century social reformers, and of our own contemporaries like Mother Teresa or Baba Amte, I have been impressed by how different basically the approach and mode of functioning of these social activists is from State-run programmes established to serve the same or similar purposes. I have similarly been impressed by the difference between development or welfare programmes handled by the State and the same kind of work organized by social activists like Christian missionaries. I am sure many of you have drawn to make the same comparisons.

The comparisons lead to a very basic question about the range of the character of social action. Social action is the effort to solve a social problem, remove a societal disadvantage or

disability, meet a societal need. It may be put in by individuals, groups of individual local, regional, national or even international organisations. The individuals, groups and organisations engaged in social action may be motivated by some larger, social, religious or political purpose or simply inspired by the single specific issue towards which their efforts are directed. Their action may be aimed at directly solving a problem, instituting a facility, meeting a need, or removing a disability, at obtaining legislation, establishing policies, or setting up programmes in that direction. The range of possible combinations of these four sets of factors is vast and complex. In Durgabai's work we witness the achievements of a socially and politically committed autonomous individual engaged in a personal mission of service to society. Durgabai may be described as a social and political activist. Her social and political work was inspired by two related but distinctly different impulses. First, a spirit of altruism and social service. Second, a spirit of nationalism.

From the beginning of the nineteenth century, on to the achievement of freedom from British rule in the middle of the twentieth century, these two impulses had shaped the lives of many eminent Indians who dedicated themselves to social reform, to the nationalist movement for freedom, or to both. The history of the period through the nineteenth century on to the achievement of freedom is rich with the achievements of a string of social reformers and freedom fighters who, moved by these two impulses, made outstanding contributions to the service of society. For instance, reformers like Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Pandit Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar and Jyotiba Bhule, thinkers and social activists like Agarkar, and Maharshi Karve, freedom fighters like Lokmanya Tilak, and Mahatma Gandhi. They tackled challenges ranging from the removal of practices like female infanticide, sati, child marriage to the establishment of schools, and eventually to the achievement of freedom from colonial rule.

Handing over the Management of Social Action to the State

In India's programme of planned development after freedom, most of the responsibility for social action of the kind earlier taken up by social reformers and political activists was, at least initially, left to the State. How much the State will take on, and for that matter how much the State will permit non-governmental bodies to do, depends on the character of the State. In India, independence and self-rule brought about a sea-change from colonial times, in the extent of the responsibility that the State was prepared to take. In fact, as the instrument of a democratic welfare state, the Government of India has, in principle, not only been charged with responsibility for welfare, but arranged a highly interventionist role in the matter of solving societal problems, meeting societal needs, and removing societal disabilities.

But, the complex implications of placing the State in the role of full authority for planned development were never really understood. It was somewhat naively believed that with the removal of colonial rule, the establishment of self-rule, and the assignment of the

responsibility for democratic, social welfare and social justice to the State, the dreams that nationalist freedom fighters and subsequently the planners for independent India had dreamt for their country, would somehow be delivered. But, no matter how committed or responsible a State is, the quality of its delivery of any programme is defined by the scale on which it has to operate, the several responsibilities it must balance, the competing demands for the resources at its command that it must accommodate, and above all by the quality and commitment of the bureaucracies through which it must function. The results the State is able to produce are, therefore, very different from what can be secured by a committed individual social activist, a group of committed social reformers, political or ideological activists who are involved in social action as part of some radical or revolutionary programme -for instance, the social reformers and nationalist social reformers in pre-independence India, or missionaries driven by religious fervour.

Above all, and this is the point that I would like to underline, the manner and the extent to which the State serves social purpose, or for that matter any purpose, eventually depends on the extent to which the State can do so without compromising its own stability or power.

Lessons From History

In this connection, it might be pertinent and useful to place the issue in its historical context and look at how social reformers were treated by the British in India. As is well known, the Indian movement for social reform was basically inspired by European Liberalism, by European humanist values of social justice, and by the Christian concepts of brotherhood, compassion and love. These were the values that the British rulers professed to live by and to rule. Yet, as may be seen with respect to Indian pleas for legislation against sati, child marriage, the ban on the remarriage of widows etc., the British rulers repeatedly dismissed Indian requests for reform oriented legislation. Historical records reveal that the British unabashedly admitted that they hesitated to legislate in favour of reform for the simple reason that they were reluctant to interfere with indigenous customs and religious practices for fear that such interference would jeopardize the stability of their rule in India. Indian social reformers were slow to recognize this. In fact, initially they were totally confused by the British reluctance to support their cause. Their faith in the British commitment to Liberal, Christian and Human Values was so firm that they never doubted that the British Government would help them with their efforts at reform.

But, later towards the end of the seventh decade of the nineteenth century, more than forty years after the movement for social reform had been launched, some Indian leaders started to doubt whether the British genuinely intended to honour, in their governance of India, the ideology, values and principles by which they claimed to live, and to govern. As is only too well known, it was the sharp rift between those who continued to have faith in the British commitment to reform and those who had lost this faith that triggered the separation of the nationalist movement from the movement for social reform. This break, which occurred during the decades of the seventies and eighties of the nineteenth century, is poignantly

illustrated in the rift between Tilak and Agarkar in Maharashtra.

While the social reform movement, the nationalist movement for freedom and other events of that era have now receded into history, the basic lesson that surfaces from the behaviour of the British *vis-a-vis* the reformers continue to be relevant, with a freshness that makes it immensely valuable to understanding why planning for development has failed. The lesson is that Governments may, without compunction, turn their backs upon the ideologies and values that they profess if the operationalization of these is destabilizing or dangerous to their power, their stability, or survival. As a freedom fighter and planner for independent India, Durgabai could not even imagine that a nationalist government would display the same weaknesses that the country had witnessed under colonial rule. But, if we cast our sentiments and emotions aside and face the facts of our situation, it is evident that, in balancing the objectives of developments with its own survival, the government, in post-independence India, has often had to bypass or at best do notional service to the spirit of planning and to the ideals and principles by which planning was inspired.

The Unfolding of Planned Development

It is not surprising that planners, at the dawn of independence, were unable to visualize the constraints to the Government's management of development. Planned development is such a complex undertaking that it was only when the Plans were launched that the character of the problems involved started to be evident. When we look back, we can see how both the feasibility of State administered development and faith in the ability of the State to deliver to promises have deteriorated over the four-and-a-half decades since independence.

The decade of the 1950s when policies and planned programmes were first launched, was a decade of new beginnings. Many difficult challenges confronted the young government. But, though inexperienced, the government was fortified with a sense of unity, conviction, confidence, determination and hope in the country. The difficult struggle for independence and the wounds of partition had brought the country together. The euphoria of its newly acquired freedom and nationhood gave people confidence. They were willing to suffer in order to build. Moreover, the planners and politicians who steered the Government enjoyed widely perceived legitimacy, partly because they had brought freedom and partly because, in the traditional value system, they were the kind of leaders who were acceptable. Regardless of the fact that they had come to power through unfamiliar democratic processes, theirs was, in the eyes of the masses, the traditional authority of education, caste and social status, converted into the authority of the new Government. As business, trade and manufacture started to blossom, the traditionally powerful business class retained its political influence. And, it was easy to co-opt and bring into the coalition the landed and the other caste elite because there were new job and business opportunities to offer.

Through the decade of the sixties, this changed visibly. The change was no accident. Rather, it

was a consequence of the unfoldment of the Plans, the Constitution, and the political philosophy that we had adopted. One of the most critical elements of the change that occurred was that the homogeneity of the legislative and policy making bodies was disturbed. Political democracy in action brought into these bodies members from middle and lower castes. It also brought persons with very little or no formal education. The legitimation of trade unions changed the parameters, not only of economic activity but of the functioning of Government offices, educational institutions and even hospitals. The operationalization of provisions for the backward classes, aimed at equality, created new tensions, angers and uncertainties. All this has been recorded by political scientists. What matters to our understanding of the failure of planned development is that as the homogeneity of the Government eroded, efficiency suffered and its legitimacy came to be seriously threatened. While all this was happening, the promises made turned out to be too big to keep. Inevitably the State's delivery of social purpose became weak and shaky. I will try to substantiate my statements with some illustrations from higher education, the field that I am relatively more familiar with.

Illustrations From Higher Education

The Government of independent India deserves full credit for its generous provisions for higher education. The character of the commitments could be briefly summed in terms of three bold commitments that were made. First, the commitment that the country would be provided with full facilities for education in every technical, technological and professional field, and to produce all the manpower needed for the country's economic, political and social development. Second, that the facilities for higher education provided would be complete enough to ensure that the country would become fully independent of foreign expertise as well as of dependence on Universities in developed countries for higher education. Third, that all those who aspire to higher education after high school will be provided with the opportunity to pursue their aspirations. All three commitments have been met. Today, the country is fully self-sufficient in the matter of producing technically, technologically and professionally trained manpower. It does not need to depend either on foreign expertise or on foreign Universities. Supported by the Government, higher education has grown phenomenally and practically everyone who aspires for further education after completing high school is able to get it.

Problems

However, as a system primarily supported by and dependent on the State, the system suffers from many problems. One of the most conspicuous is the size of the expansion. The system of higher education in the country has grown to be so large that it cannot be operated efficiently. When the First Five Year Plan was launched in 1950-51, there were only 28 Universities, 695 colleges and 174,000 students. Today, we have 169 Universities, 27 deemed Universities, 7400 colleges and 3,948,000 students.

Within a few years of launching the First Five Year Plan in 1951, it was feared that higher

education was expanding too much and too rapidly. In fact, at the time of the establishment of the University Grants Commission in 1956, Dr C.D. Deshmukh, its first Chairman, had categorically advised that the growth must be curbed. That statement has been repeated from one Five Year Plan to another. But, neither the Central nor the State Governments have really curbed the growth of higher education. As a consequence, the facilities have been stretched to tearing point and the standards have declined enormously. This deterioration is visible in the functioning of all Universities. So far, institutions like the IITs and IIMs -set up as centres of excellence- were relatively protected from the deterioration. But, gradually they too are beginning to suffer.

Vested Interests in the Expansion of Higher Education

Both the Central and the State Governments have allowed higher education to expand against the advice of Plan experts and observers. They argue that growth has to be accepted in order to honour the national commitment to equality of educational opportunity. But, I believe that the Government's claim masks at least two vested interests which it may not be willing to face, much less to admit. First its interest in using higher education as an instrument to contain the frustrations of unemployment. If there were jobs for those who finish high school, there would not have been such a heavy demand for admission to colleges. I believe that the Government has been expanding facilities for higher education because it cannot provide employment in adequate measures. The Government's second vested interest is to use the expansion of higher education for political patronage. Our politicians have discovered that one of the easiest ways to keep voters happy is to start a college in the constituency. The Government, which according to the established practice, holds the authority to permit or withhold permission for starting colleges, has in turn discovered that it can use this authority as political patronage-by allowing politicians it wants to oblige or please the permission required.

Deterioration in Standards

In all fairness it must be conceded that while allowing higher education to expand, the Government has taken increasingly greater responsibility for financing it. In fact, the Government's share of the expenditure on higher education has increased from a mere 57 per cent in 1951 to more than 88 per cent by now. However, the distribution of what the Government spends is far from even. Elite institutions, such as the IITs, receive an extraordinarily large share. So do the Central Universities. State Universities receive much less. Within every University, the distribution between departments is again highly uneven. I cannot go into the details of these disparities, but in the arithmetic of fund allocation, State-supported Universities end up very frugally supported.

With the limited resources available to them, these Universities have, nevertheless, to expand in response to public demand. They have tended to cope with the pressure for expansion by enlarging their Arts and Commerce faculties, less expensive to operate than the Departments of science, or technology, or any of the professions. But, they have not been able to halt the

deterioration in standards in teaching and in the examinations. While this is clearly evident, it is interesting to look at what the Government does to improve standards. For instance, to the standards of the examinations where malpractices range from copying to physical violence against invigilators with which University examinations are plagued.

Lukewarm Efforts at Reform

As early as 1977, a major committee was appointed on Examination Reforms. The Committee was charged with the responsibility of finding ways and means to remove malpractices. The Committee recommended the replacement of the single annual examination with continuous evaluation. Further it pointed out that it was wrong to depend exclusively on the lecture system, and firmly advised a more interactive system of communication between teachers and students.

With funds barely enough to pay teachers for the lectures required, there was no real possibility of introducing either continuous evaluation or a more interactive system of teaching. But the authorities were satisfied that the gesture of appointing a Committee which made a well thought out recommendation had been made. Of course, none of the recommendations of this Committee could be implemented with any seriousness. In 1988, ten years later, a Committee was once again appointed to look into Examination Reform. Whether we consider the report of this Committee as more realistic or feel sad about what it was reduced to recommending, depends on how we look at the efforts of the State. The report starts with a series of observations about the problems faced and concludes with the comment that "we must do something to make examinations less prone to manipulation and corruption, and more honoured and efficient." I feel that this recommendation bears witness to the fact that the country is getting used to the poor performance of Universities.

The Politicization of Ends and Means

Another consequence of the Government taking on the major share of the responsibility for higher education is that administrative matters as well as academic issues tend to get highly politicized. Academic Staff Unions, Non-Academic Staff Unions and Student Unions, as well as bodies like the University Senate, Academic Council or Senate and College Managements are occupied by politicians. They use the University and its various activities as an arena in which to fight their political battles. Government decisions on University matters are contested by parties in opposition to the party in power. Only recently the Vice-Chancellors of all the non-Agricultural Universities in Maharashtra went through a nightmare, being *gheraoed* by the Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad to protest against a fee hike introduced by the Government. As the Vice-Chancellor of S.N.D.T. University, I was *gheraoed* mercilessly for five hours -locked in my room with about hundred ABVP activists, 'demanding that I reduce the fees at our University or resign. Barely four or five of these hundred odd activists were S.N.D.T. students.

I do not have the authority to reduce the fees, nor does the Executive Council of the

University, unless it can provide funds to make up the difference between what it would want to charge and what the Government would have the University charge. But, the activists pressurized me in order to pressurize the Government. Two months ago, on Guru Purnima, the same activists came to me with flowers, saying that they wished to touch my feet in order to pay me the traditional respect due to Gurus. I told them that I could not understand their desire to thus honour me, only two months after their ugly behaviour over the issue of fees - I told them that I could not possibly accept their flowers ... It was quite a strain to speak to them without being abrasive.

As a Vice-Chancellor, I should be looking after the administration of my University, concentrate on taking responsibility for its academic advance and growth. Instead, I have to tune myself to handle one political confrontation after another. What makes this even more difficult is that almost invariably these confrontations have their genesis in political differences or dissensions only marginally relevant to the University.

Mixing Objectives

Yet another major problem arises out of the fact that the Government takes the responsibility for financing higher education in that the Government expects Universities, in return, to help with several of the tasks of development. For instance, through schemes like the National Social Service, it expects to involve students and teachers in the accomplishment of targets for literacy, adult education, population education and other programmes. On paper the plans to involve students appear impressive. It seems as if they are truly designed for mutual benefit. While programmes targets are to be achieved with the voluntary help of students, students in turn are set to gain through the experience they are designed to receive.

There is no doubt that this happens on a small scale. But, by and large, the outcome of these programmes is very different from what the glossy reports on their evaluation claim or suggest. To start with, only a fraction of the students are really able to participate. Moreover, only a few of those who participate are inspired by altruism or develop any real commitment to social service. Most students demand that their participation is rewarded with marks or some other credits that can be counted in the final assessment of their academic performance. Thus, the net result of such arrangements is questionable.

Not that the programmes cannot be made more productive. Able managers of such programmes are not only able to meet programme targets, but to ensure that students gain experience and cultivate sensitivity to the country's needs and problems. But, administered as they normally are, by highly centralized bureaucracies, these arrangements leave much to be desired. One suspects that Universities and colleges reach out, to the grants that are assigned for these programmes, not because they are inspired to national service but because grants provide the much needed funds for at least a modicum of extra-curricular activity. Moreover, the targets achieved in literacy, or adult education or whatever can be a way of gaining favour with the

Government.

Incompatible Commitments

Yet another illustration of how the implementation of political obligations and objectives through the system of higher education can damage the quality of education is available in the implementation of the policy of reservations. Under this policy, as is well known, a quota of admissions has to be reserved for Backward Class students. The consequences of such reservations differ significantly from one type of institution to another. I will make my point with specific reference to the IITs.

The IITs were set up as apex centres for higher education in science and technology. They are very well funded and are allowed full autonomy. In all fairness, it must be granted that while higher education was otherwise stretched to accommodate all those who aspire to it, the Government made a determined effort to keep these islands of excellence free from the pressures of expansion. They were always protected from having to dilute their standards.

At the outset, as part of the policy of making it practical to pursue standards, these institutions were not required to implement the policy of reservations. But about fifteen or twenty years ago, they too were required to reserve a quota of admissions. As soon as they started to do so, they found that there is a massive gap in the capabilities of students who come to them through open admissions and those who are admitted to the reserved seats. This problem was immediately and consciously tackled. In order to bridge the gap, they gave the students admitted to the reserved seats a year's bridge course. Students admitted to the reserved quota could not go on to regular work without finishing this course. But, unfortunately, the students resented having to spend an extra year. Before long, this issue became politically explosive. The course was criticized for being discriminatory and had to be withdrawn. As a result, the IITs are now required to accommodate the students who occupy the reserved seats without any extra preparation. This causes an unhealthy strain on the teachers as well as on the students who come through open competition.

I am not opposed to reservations. That is a national commitment I respect. But, in the context of our concern for the failure of development, it is important to recognize that the Government's approach in the matter of the implementation of the policy of reservations is defined by the immediate political pressures it faces rather than by basic or long term development concerns. Organizations like the Homi Bhabha Science and Mathematics Education Centre at Bombay have researched into the issue of the preparedness and performance of socially and otherwise disadvantaged students carefully. They have come to the conclusion that to overcome the disadvantages which affect their performance, such students must get special help from Std.III onwards. If this is not possible, they should get

help at least from St. VIII onwards. The Centre has developed scientifically designed teaching materials and strategies for the purpose. If the Government is serious about equality, it must from the outside provide students who are eligible for reserved admissions at institutions like the IIT this extra help and support. It does not do so. On the contrary, in response to the suggestion that students admitted to reserved quota are given a year's coaching, questions are being asked in parliament as to why courses at the IITs are allowed to be so "elitist" as to cause serious problems to Backward Class students!

Pressures

Several other features of higher education illustrate the problems linked with State control over the delivery of development. I cannot discuss all these. But, before I conclude, I will briefly touch the issue of admissions. In principle, admissions are to be given strictly on merit. But, in practice, influential persons are able to make room for students regardless of whether they do or do not qualify by merit. One of the first decisions I made as Vice- Chancellor was that all the institutions owned and conducted by the University will admit students only by merit. On hindsight, I feel that the courage to take this decision and to stand by it came from my lack of experience of the system!

The first step was to give up the seats to be filled by me at my discretion in my capacity as a representative of the 'management'. At admission time, as expected, I experienced an onslaught of requests for admissions. I received telephone calls and requests for appointments from every quarter. From eminent citizens, from social workers, from politicians and not the least from the highest quarters in the Sachivalaya, both at the ministerial level and at the level of Secretariat. The requests from the Sachivalaya were usually made over the telephone. Each time I received a call from the Sachivalaya or any other Government office, I would tell the calling party that I could never be sure that the call was not spurious or bogus and would be grateful to have the request written on official letter-heads of the office from which it was being made. These letters did not arrive, but the telephone calls would continue. Occasionally the Minister's or Secretary's secretary would come with a note claiming that he was representing his boss. In such cases, I would draft a polite letter to the Minister or official concerned with a reference to the telephone calls and/ or visit and requesting the Minister or Secretary to confirm that he/~,he had asked for admission. When V.I.Ps came to meet me in person, I would try to explain why admission could only be given by merit. This was difficult. I had to face threats and anger, though I must confess that on rare occasions callers have appreciated the stand taken.

Over the course of the three years since I have served the University, the requests for admission have practically ceased. In becoming so strict, the University may have lost some of its clout and influence in official and political circles. On the other hand, our college Principals

say that they have gained enormously in strength, self-respect and confidence. But, it has not been easy to sustain this course of action. For instance, just two weeks ago, the President of the Pradesh Congress Committee of one of the small towns adjacent to Bombay came for admission for his daughter. He forced his way past my secretary, who is instructed to refuse appointments for those who wish to see me on admission matters. When I told him that admissions are strictly on merit, that his daughter does not qualify, he pointed out that he could help the University get all its grants quickly and that he could help clear all kinds of administrative matters through the State Education Department. As I answered back to say that the University does not make any such transactions, it did cross my mind that he could very well wreak vengeance by delaying our grants. All I could do was hope that his political activities would not leave him time to pursue vindictive action against me or my University ... My experience has been frustrating enough, but Principals and Managements of some Universities say that they have been threatened with severe physical violence and held at ransom over admissions.

Non-Government Organizations

While State-run programmes for development have run into serious trouble, non-government organizations are the new hope on our horizon. Non-Government organizations or NGOs as they are now called, were only beginning to appear on the scene in Durgabai's times. Today they are active in full measure. NGOs are organized in a variety of different ways. Some NGOs are individual activists, autonomous in every single way. There are NGOs who function as groups or teams who have voluntarily organized themselves for a cause, and NGOs who work on behalf of larger organizations. The latter are often paid employees like any other bureaucracy. As compared with programmes operated by the State, one can observe several of the distinctive qualities of Durgabai's work in the functioning of the NGOs. I will try to place before you two examples of NGO work which may help to validate this claim.

Urgent and Immediate Needs to Worry About

The first is the work of an organization named SPARC (Society for the Promotion of Area Resources Centre). This organization works for slum dwellers. It was started by an imaginative professional social worker named Sheela Patel. She started her career with one of the oldest and most respected social work agencies in the city of Bombay. As she administered routine welfare programmes in health, education, provision of gainful employment, recreation etc., she felt that the women beneficiaries of the programme were not as enthusiastic as she expected, or would have liked them to be. Disturbed by what she thus saw as a lukewarm response to the efforts that she and her agency put into their work, she decided to openly ask the women why they were so unenthusiastic about the programmes provided for them. The answer that she received was incredibly firm and clear. They said that they appreciated the efforts put in on their behalf, and were grateful for what was done, but could not be fully involved in programmes like literacy when they had more immediate basic and urgent needs to worry about.

Startled by this reply and recognizing that it was necessary to probe into their needs if she really intended to help them. Ms. Patel set up a unique process of dialogue with her clients. From the dialogues which she taped and carefully replayed to herself, she was able to make a sharp assessment of the real needs of the women. Based on this assessment, she designed a need-based plan for action. Old, established, and set in its ways; the agency she worked for was reluctant to support this programme. So, with the help of a couple of her class-mates, she decided to launch out on her own. SPARC is the organization this group set up.

One of the basic decisions of SPARC is to reorganize marginalized communities towards development and to make women central to this reorganization. They have identified pavement dwellers as the most marginalized community in Bombay, because they discovered that apart from being marginalized by poverty and migration, pavement dwellers are the victims of authority, particularly of Municipal demolition squads. Every few days these demolition squads descend on them and wipe out their habitation.

Philosophy and Strategy

Following up on its decision to work with, and through the women in the community, SPARC made a very sharp and subtle distinction between the "condition" and the "position" of women. According to this distinction, the term "condition" refers to where the women stand in terms of day-to-day material needs such as education, food, shelter, clothing, etc., whereas the term "position" indicates where they stand in the structure of society. SPARC contends that all State-level programmes work only against the condition of women, they do not really change their position. Its declared policy, therefore, is to work through the condition of the women to change their position.

With their frame-work for action thus defined, the members of the organization once again initiated a dialogue -this time *with and between* the women in the community that they had chosen for their work. But, this time, complaints that the women made were monitored into more systematic discussions, useful for the analysis required. With this monitoring, they were able to identify a pattern of deprivation in the sufferings that the women described and the complaints they made. The next step was to get the women themselves to see these patterns. Then they did something that was really remarkable. They decided that while their clients gained in strength in terms of being able to handle their problems, they ran the risk of dislocating their relationship with their husbands, or with the other men in the family, if these men- excluded from the programme-grew to be jealous or suspect of the women's new capacity to assert and be effective. So they decided to co-opt the men in the programme by having community sessions.

The first community sessions centered on how to handle demolition squads and what to do when demolition finally happened. It so happens that municipal squads come when the men are

out on work. So, before long the men in the community sessions were saying to the women *"yen to apko khud dekhna chahiya, hum log tho hothey nahin ghar me"* (This is something you women must handle. We are hardly at home). Upon this in the presence of the women, the social workers would coax and cajole the men into taking up the responsibility, asking them how they expected the women to handle the demolition squads on their own. The men invariably answered that this would mean foregoing the daily wage. With admissions thus made, the men were cleverly co-opted into the programmes and gently led on to accepting the women in their families as principal functionaries and leaders, in the matter of handling eviction.

The women were next informed about their rights vis-a-vis the demolition squads. They were made aware of the distinction between demolition and eviction, and guided to recognize that the right to one did not necessarily give demolition squads the right to the other. Using available plans for the Bombay city and metropolitan area, the social workers taught the women how to identify vacant land. They were also taken by buses to these spots. Thus, when Government and municipal authorities told them there was no land to rehabilitate them, they were able to show these patches. Finally, with all these facts in hand, they were guided to work out proposals as to where they could be shifted. After this, they were encouraged to make little models of the houses they wanted. Engineers and architects were brought in to listen to them.

Looking back upon their own experience, the social workers who launched SPARC say, "we had no message to start with; we had no plans. We only knew we wanted to move through the needs of the women, speak to them in their own language and advance them towards the fulfillment of their needs". Today, the strategy used by SPARC is considered one of the most successful. But, SPARC workers deny that they have any strategy! In fact, reflecting upon their own experience, they say that the trouble with Government programmes is that they aim at a product, whereas the secret of working successfully with the poor is to master the process of getting them to recognize their needs and to help themselves. They speak in terms of "outcome" rather than of "products" and explain that instead of aiming at any specific target, they work with the broad Idea of helping the women help themselves. "We work together" they say "and then what we accomplish at the end of it is something that evolves, even what is needed is not seen clearly at the beginning. It is seen as we go along."

The second example I would like to quote is equally impressive. It relates to the work of a Peter Prabhu who works near Dahanu, in the coastal district of Maharashtra. This man, an ex-Jesuit, has left the Jesuit order to fight against bonded labour. Convinced that it is impossible to understand what tribals suffer unless one lives with them, he has to set up headquarters in the midst of the tribal villages that he serves. For this, he has learnt the languages of the Katkari and Warli tribes. These languages are very difficult. Further, he familiarized himself with their religious practices, legends, beliefs and folklore. This is even more difficult, because the level at which these tribes function is so primitive that in their conception fact merges imperceptibly into fable, and it is practically impossible to decipher the line dividing the two. All the same, Prabhu and his team have struggled through and

managed to establish clear communication and rapport with the tribals.

For lack of time, I will not go into Prabhu's work in connection with release of bonded labour or restoration of land to the tribals -although that work really illustrates how committed activists work. But, I propose to tell you very briefly something about Prabhu's programme of literacy. One of the two tribes Prabhu and his group work with, viz. the Warlies, paint on their floors and walls beautiful paintings with rice-flour paste on surfaces prepared with wet application of coats of rich red mud. These paintings have ritual meanings and are specifically designed for different occasions like births, deaths, weddings, harvest time, sowing time etc. Prabhu and his team have developed for their literacy and awareness programmes a set of sixty paintings which basically depict Katkari and Warli legend and folklore in the Warli style of paintings. But, messages relevant to the integrated development of these tribes are carefully woven into these depictions. The paintings are used as the core visual materials for the programme of non-formal education that this group, known as the Kashtakari Sanghatana, conducts. Literacy is one aspect of this programme of non-formal education. Making the villagers, both men and women, aware of the political and economic exploitation that they are vulnerable to, of the gender exploitation they themselves practice, and indicating solutions is the other. The lessons are conducted with tremendous sensitivity and a rich sense of humour. The pictures and discussions used to discuss problems and solutions doubles as material for the literacy programme as the tribals learn to write identified items from the pictures. One of the picture-episodes that linger in my mind is about the harvesting ritual. This picture conveys a message of how the landlords the tribals work for, recover the money they pay by way of wages through the liquor shops they run.

In my brief review of Durgabai 's work, I had tried to identify her distinctive qualities. Picking up from that review, I list the following: clarity of purpose; courage and determination in action; competence; the ability to resist pressure and to measure up to an emergency; the capacity to handle difficult organizational tasks with efficiency; a willingness to suffer in the cause of social jus. ingenuity; perseverance; a relentless pursuit of purpose; an ability to raise resources to stimulate voluntary effort and co- operation; above all an ability to advance a cause in proper phases from one stage of growth to the next; and a watchful monitoring of each stage. Surprisingly, very few, or hardly any from this long list of qualities is visible in State sponsored social action. Occasionally, one may come across a devoted bureaucrat serving with a sense of mission. But, for the major pan, the movement for change that planners had expected to launch by employing the State to deliver development has turned out to be as limp as a revolution fought by mercenaries.

To an extent this is inevitable. After all, Government servants are neither Social activists nor revolutionaries. In fact, conceptually, the term bureaucrat' could well be seen as the antonym of the term 'social activist'. Moreover, it is significant that even the work of social activists is known to take on a bureaucratic character as soon as it is established into an organized system, either to replicate work done, or give a successful programme conducted by a single activist or a small team of workers the stability, a measure of permanence and a more widely usable frame. Sociologists define social institutions as widely accepted and firmly

established practices and procedures aimed at meeting societal needs. Established practices and procedures are vital to the functioning of society, but so is spontaneous action. The truth is that the fulfillment of social purpose requires both the dynamism of an activist approach and stability of institutionalized functioning. The challenge is to keep the two in a balanced and socially productive interaction. This perhaps is the need of the decade of the nineties, viz. to sustain and promote the alertness, purposiveness, pertinence and efficiency of NGO activity and to support it with relevant facilities and provisions available with Government and other established agencies, and at the same time to bring to the functioning of the latter some of the dynamism with which the work of successful NGO is infused. I would like to make two points on this issue before I close. The first concerns institutionalized purpose. The second concerns NGOs.

Administrators as Activists

Planned development administered through the State is one of the most powerful ways of institutionalizing social purpose. Legislation in support of the cause that is to be served or the need that is to be met is one of the most important arms of the State in this task. From the nineteenth century onwards, we have put great faith in legislation. After independence, we have in the same spirit made legal and constitutional provisions in support of objectives such as equality or secularism. Therefore, in order to understand the course of planned development administered by the State, it would be useful to look at how legislation works.

Much hope was put in legislation in pre-independence dreams for independent India. After independence, we have continued to function with the same faith and produced some impressive legislation. For instance, since the decade of the 70s, there has been a considerable amount of legislation on rape, dowry, family violence, etc., all geared to improving and advancing the status of women. But, at the end of two decades, we find that the achievements of the objectives of this legislation are thwarted because of the hair-splitting demands for definition in the legal process. The definition of dowry, for instance, or the definition of rape. To be exactly and unquestionably applicable, definitions of what constitutes the criminal act are made to be narrow and precise. As a result, there are instances where behaviour that is visibly criminal may not fit into the narrow legal description covering that particular act. The efficacy of legislation can be further affected by legal requirements by way of proof. These requirements, made with the explicit objective of protecting the innocent from being wrongly accused, are absolutely essential. But, imposed or implemented by a judge or jury who are not committed to the cause that the legislation is designed to serve, they can be reduced to harsh mechanical brakes on social justice.

The point I am trying to make is very well illustrated in the matter of legal action against rape. From 1960 till 1984, there was no major revision in the rape law. The public upheaval caused by the Mathura case, pertaining to the rape of a tribal girl in Police custody, and the publicity given by the media to the issue, resulted in considerable reform of the existing legislation on rape. For the first time, the sentence for rape was clearly specified -ten years for the rape

of a pregnant woman, for gang rape, and for the rape of a little child, and seven years or less for others. But the kind of proof that was required to establish a charge made it well nigh impossible to punish a culprit unless the judge was prepared to read between the lines of the proof presented.

Records on some of the cases brought to court are revealing. For instance, the case of a 21-year old boy who had raped a 7-year old girl. The argument was that the injuries on the boy's body did not show adequate resistance from the girl. The law requires that for the physical contact to count as rape, the penis of the accused should show physical injury. This requirement is based on the assumption that the physical struggle, at the time of the rupturing of the hymen, must cause an injury to the penis. One wonders whether a frightened seven-year old could ever put up enough physical resistance to injure someone three times her age. But, in the absence of the required proof, the boy was acquitted. Or again, as late as 1989, we have a case where girl of five was raped, and the rapist was let off because the child could not give "proper evidence".

On the other hand, records reveal that even prior to the revised legislation, as early as 1958, both the High Court and Supreme Court have taken the position that in cases of rape, the demand for the establishment of proof beyond doubt is ridiculous. Further, commenting on the fact that the accused often took shelter under the provision which required proof that the victim had not "consented" to the act, they have categorically pointed out that the demand for establishment beyond proof that "there was no consent from the girl," is ridiculous, because compliance obtained under fear and pressure is not consent.

Thus, experience indicates that legislation is only as strong as its implementation. Progressive legislation cannot really serve its purpose unless its implementation is presided over by a committed and progressive judge -in fact, by a judge who is social activist of a special kind. Legislation is only as strong or effective as its implementation.

People at the Helm of Affairs Matter

Whether it is the implementation of reform oriented legislation, programmes aimed at economic growth, or the establishment and implementation of rationality, social justice or the democratic process in general, people at the helm of affairs matter. One of our major problems is that most of our progressive, development- oriented institutions are run by people who continue to believe in and function with feudal values. Nowhere is this more pathetically visible than in the functioning of political processes in the country---all the way from the top to the grass-roots. In fact, regardless of inadequacies in State-administered development, one is sometimes grateful that the functioning of the State is not quite as feudal as that of some of the politicians who exercise control over it.

The Commercialization of NGOs

The second concluding point that I would like to make concerns NGOs. I have spoken positively and approvingly of the NGOs. That is because, so many of them are full of vitality and highly effective in their functioning. But, it would be misleading to paint a uniformly rosy picture. Some of them get co-opted into the lethargic public delivery system. Others become easy prey to funding agencies looking for "good" programmes to boost their own status. More often than not, funding by such agencies is governed by very specific and inflexible project requirements. Some of the best projects in the country are known to have clipped their wings in order to fit into these requirements and qualify for funds. The possibility of acquiring massive funds has generated yet another malaise, viz. the writing of impressive project proposals for programmes that have neither substance nor soul. Again and again one comes across instances of hollow proposals gaining grants merely because they were well written or, worse yet, merely because the proposers had good contacts. At the same time, there are a host of dedicated and successful activists who know very little about funding, are unable to write project proposals of the kind that fetch funds, or who are just too busy with their work to be able to do the workshop and seminar rounds where funding transactions are initiated. I think we need to be alert to all this. NGOs must be protected from such vested interests.

Thank you very much for giving me such a patient hearing. I would like to conclude by narrating a small incident by way of my tribute to the Deshmukhs-Durgamami and Bhaimama to me. In his opening remarks, Dr Amar Kumar Singh made a reference to Dr. Deshmukh's illness and to how courageously Durgabai made the decision that he must be operated. I must give you the other side of the story. Dr. Deshmukh was in Bombay for medical treatment then, and Durgabai was still in Hyderabad. When we told him about her opinion and asked him what his decision was, he said "in this matter, the decision lies with my wife because my life is hers". His answer sums up the quality of their extra-ordinary relationship with each other. What we need to remember is that both of them, and each in a distinctive fashion, had the same relationship with their work. Their lives belonged to the social purpose they served.

Thank you.

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