



Date: 27th June 2001

The Chairman

Planning Commission of India,
Yojna Bhawan, Parliament Street
New Delhi

**KIND ATTN: MR. ATAL BEHARI VAJPAYEE, HON'BLE PRIME MINISTER
OF INDIA**

SUBJECT: APPROACH PAPER TO XTH FIVE-YEAR PLAN (2002-2007)

Sir,

The Planning Commission has issued subject cited Approach Paper in the first week of May. This Paper has been drafted with the objective of higher economic growth of 8%. It is important to note that this paper has been issued in an environment where Government is putting its whole energy into strengthening the policies of economic liberalisation and effecting structural adjustment.

Centre for Alternative Dalit Media (CADAM) is a Non Governmental Organisation working primarily for the empowerment of the socially disadvantaged sections e.g. Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, which are broadly known as Dalits. With the issuance of the Approach Paper to 10th Five Year Plan, as we understand, Planning Commission has began the process of Planning of 10th Five Year Plan. Keeping this objective in mind, Centre for Alternative Dalit Media (CADAM) organised a meeting of the Dalit Intellectuals and concerned citizens on 24th June 2001 at Gandhi Peace Foundation in Delhi to analyse and discuss the Approach contained in the Approach Paper to 10th Five Year Plan. It was decided in the meeting that the concerns of the Dalits expressed in the said meeting shall be communicated to the Chairman, the Deputy Chairman and the Advisor (Backward Classes) to the Planning Commission.

Accordingly, I take this opportunity to communicate to you the deliberations and concerns expressed in the meeting.

Sir, you would agree that the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes are the most vulnerable sections of Indian Society suffering from age-old socio-economic exploitation. This was duly recognised by the founding father of our nation and they had evolved a mechanism to ameliorate the socio-economic conditions of these sections. A number of provisions, including fundamental rights and directive principles were included in the Indian Constitution to further the interests of these weaker sections. With the adoption of policies of planned development, Government of India set up Planning Commission in March, 1950 through its Resolution, which clearly defined the scope of its work in the following terms:

"The Constitution of India has guaranteed certain Fundamental Rights to the citizens of India and enunciated certain Directive Principles of State Policy, in particular, that the State shall strive to promote the welfare of the people by securing and protecting as effectively as it may a social order in which justice, social, economic and political, shall inform all the institutions of the national life, and shall direct its policy towards securing, among other things,

(a) that the citizens, men and women equally, have the right to an adequate means of livelihood;

(b) that the ownership and control of the material resources of the community are so distributed as best to sub serve the common good; and

(c) that the operation of the economic system does not result in the concentration of wealth and means of production to the common detriment

Since then, Planning Commission has played a vital role in putting India on the road to all round development. Whatever improvements we see today in the life of the Dalits and Disadvantaged, credit goes to the Planned Development and the Policies of the various Governments that have led this Nation from time to time.

Sir, you would agree that the Herculean tasks of raising the standard of Dalits and disadvantaged at par with other sections of society still remains to be finished. Following

Data compiled from various Governmental Reports indicate the deteriorating conditions of the Dalits.

- Literacy gap between SCs and general has increased from 13.75% in 1961 to 14.80 in 1991.
- Literacy gap between STs and general has increased from 15.49% in 1961 to 22.61 in 1991
- Female Literacy gap between SCs and general has increased from 4.64% in 1961 to 15.53% in 1991. Similarly this gap between the Sts and general female has widened from 4.77% in 1961 to 21.10% in 1991.
- Drop out rate of the SCs and STs student as per the 1991 census stands at 67.8% and 78.6% respectively is
- 48.37% of SCs and 51.14% STs live below poverty line compared to 35.97% of general masses for reason being low-paid and jobs considered degrading.
- Representation of the SCs/STs in group A and B has been far low than the expected level
- 75% of SCs work in primary sector and more than half of these as agricultural labourers

Sir, in the light of the above facts, we have studied the Approach Paper to 10th Plan and we are sorry to say that the Approach Paper fails to instill confidence among the Dalit Masses. We appreciate the frankness of the Approach Paper, which admits abject poverty of large masses, generation of lesser employment, lack of basic amenities to large population, failure to contain illiteracy, unavailability of adequate nutrition and health services to large population. To overcome these pressing problems, the Approach Paper suggests redefining of strategy, which to larger extent depend upon the performance of the PRIVATE SECTOR and the role of the Government will be to provide an environment which is conducive to such development.

The objectives of the Approach Paper as outlined in the Paper includes reform in agriculture sector, influencing a wide range of service sectors, running of schemes like SJSY (IRDP) by the banks without any subsidy, generation of funds by the gram sabha to

the extent of 15% to 25% in order to get funds from Government and asking poor not to be merely benefited by the growth generated elsewhere, but also to contribute to growth.

Sir, we are constrained to say that these objectives will ruin the life of the Dalits, disadvantaged and the poor equally. You would agree that schemes like SJSY (IRDP) are primarily run for the people below the poverty line and Dalits constitute majority of them. If these schemes are to be run by the commercial banks working on the commercial lines, we are afraid, they would need guarantees and securities, which these sections do not possess. This kind of arrangement will not help in alleviating poverty, but will contribute towards the further pauperization of the masses. We would also like to mention that Approach Paper does not address the issue of land reform, which could be instrumental in removing disabilities of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. Data shows that there is land alienation of Dalits is increasing day by day.

The Approach Paper proposes to generate resources by reducing number of Government Employee by 3% per year with no recruitment during 10th Plan, accelerated disinvestment, widespread and bold imposition of user charges of all non-merit goods, levy of tax at every stage of value addition from production to sale of goods and services, appropriate pricing of public services, leaving vacant posts of secretarial and clerical post unfilled, moratorium on launching new projects, complete privatization of non-strategic public enterprises within a specific period and rationalisation of labour laws and regulations to reduce the effective and implicit cost of labour.

Sir, this Approach Paper lacks the vision of finding alternative ways of generating resources. It seems that the Planners have failed to realise the grass-root realities of India. More than 400 million of Indian masses are living below poverty line, meaning thereby that they lack resource even to subsist. Only a cruel system can impose user charges and can ask price for public services. By suggesting “no-recruitment during 10th Plan and leaving vacant posts of secretarial and clerical post unfilled” planning commission seems to have forgotten its role of generating more and more jobs through better planning and instead preparing planned marginalisation of the Dalits. Sir, it is a known fact that due to no reservation in private sector, only vacancies in Government sector provide Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes some hopes of getting gainful employment.

Sir, this the first time since the Planning in India started that Planning Commission has forgotten to take cognizance of the problems of Dalits. The Approach Paper has completely ignored the problems and concerns of the Dalits. Special Component Plan and Tribal Sub Plan finds no mention in this approach paper. Welfare of the Scheduled Castes is also conspicuously absent in the Paper.

Sir, in the light of the above we requests you to direct the appropriate authorities to make suitable changes in the Approach Paper not only to bring Dalits at par with other citizens of India, but also ensuring their contribution in Human Development Index as measured by the UNDP for the country as a whole. You may be aware that of the fact that this index ranks India at 128th out of total 174 countries taken for the study. Therefore, keeping the above two objectives in mind, the Dalits forming almost 1/4th of Indian population have to be given due target group in the 10th Plan.

The Planning Commission has already been conscious to this objective, and introduced TSP and SCP from 5th and 6th Plan respectively and since then such schemes are in operation. Some states have given due priorities for which Special Component Assistance flows regularly.

But from the beginning of 1990s when Government of India adopted the policy of liberalisation due to a number of compulsions, size of the public investment has gone down considerably to a level of 1/3rd of total investment in the country, which was over 57% during the 5th Plan. The Planning Commission is very well aware of this situation. Hence in order to keep two objectives of Dalit Development in mind [(1) to bring them at par with other citizens of India for economic development and (2) harness their potential of labour capital now combined with knowledge, training etc.], the share of investment in them shall be decided by the Planning Commission in proportion to their population.

We understand that the process of liberalisation has come in a very big way to prevent utilisation of their potential and capabilities as less is going to be available out of public investment at the disposal of the Planning Commission. Since, the share of the investment from private sector in proportion to their population will take a long time; this

shortfall can be compensated by increase of share of investment in public investment available at the Government end.

It is therefore, suggested that the at least 50% share of investment of planning commission, which is in the vicinity of 30% or 1/3rd of total investment, should be earmarked for the development of the Dalits. While doing so, the system of planning in the country should ensure the contribution from this group is at least 25% of economic growth of 8% envisaged during 10th five-year plan. It is, therefore, requested that this may kindly be considered and Planning Commission be directed to work on these lines.

It will be pleasure for us to interact with you at your convenience to suggest a pragmatic solution to this objective for which we shall be grateful to you.

Ms. Rajni Tilak

President, Centre for Alternative Dalit Media

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