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**Socio-Economic Assistance to Rural Youth with Specific Reference
to Their Linguistic Empowerment in English**

Rajashekar, M.A. English

“India lives in its villages” (M. K. Gandhi)

The aptness of this statement can be verified through an assessment of the social, economic and political spheres even today. The compounding effects of poverty, unemployment, poor and inadequate infrastructure in rural areas are felt in urban centres as well. We can confidently say, any task of rural development has an inbuilt agenda of urban development. It is in the background of this issue that the topic of this paper becomes especially significant.

Linguistic Empowerment of Rural Youth

Linguistic empowerment of rural youth as presented in this paper is not to be seen on par with the empowerment or protection of the rare languages spoken in rural areas, the languages that are on the verge of their death. Rather, it is a developmental initiative of the Ministry of Rural Development in partnership with some corporate industries and Non-Governmental

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Organizations (NGOs) to engage the rural youth in a skill exchange programme in the English language making them more market-friendly and employer-friendly.

Poverty alleviation, better livelihood opportunities, provision of basic amenities and infrastructural facilities through innovative programmes of skill development and self-employment are the areas Rural Development has been addressing. Supporting the Department of Rural Development in such philanthropic acts are communities, NGOs, Public-Private Partnerships, industries, institutions, etc., addressing the goal of transformation of rural life into one with better standards of living, least interfering with the habitants' nativity, the department has envisaged several anti-poverty programmes for the benefit of the poor. The restructuring and merging of several self-employment programmes such as Integrated Rural Development Programme (IRDP), Development of Women and Children in Rural Areas (DWCRA), Supply of Improved Tool kits to Rural Artisans (SITRA), Training of Rural Youth for Self Employment (TRYSEM), Ganga Kalyana Yojana (GKY), and the Million Wells Scheme (MWS) into a holistic self-employment scheme called Swarna Jayanthi Gram Swarozgar Yojana (SGSY) during the XI Plan was an epoch-making event. The contribution of Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MNREGA) in the National Rural Poverty Elimination Programme (NRPEP) is note-worthy.

Swarna Jayanthi Gram Swarozgar Yojana (SGSY)

The SGSY is, by design, meant to create widespread income generating activities, through the empowering mechanism of self-help groups. Any initiative of SGSY ought to have a wider outreach because of the magnitude of the problem of rural unemployment. But, contrary to this belief, a large chunk of the problem emanates not from the lack of jobs, but more from the fact that there is simply a colossal lack of skills training. India records one of the lowest ranks in skills training in the world (only 7% of the population is skilled as against the world average of 60%).

Unemployability versus Unemployment

This basically projects 'unemployability' and not 'unemployment' as the core problem. Rural entrepreneurship and focussed short-term training for youth in market-driven skills can

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effectively redress this problem. The work being done in this area by the National Skill Development Commission (NSDC) is certainly of commendable value. NSDC recognizes in its Preamble that skill and knowledge are the driving forces of economic growth and social development of any nation. With its target of training nearly 500 million people by 2022, India has to harness the advantages of the available youth work force that gives the country an edge over other countries. Such a mission would help the country achieve its target, gain productivity within its borders and contribute to the reduction in the global skill shortage as well. NSDC also highlights the importance of a policy back up for this mission in the social and economic spheres for the approach to be more holistic.

Focus on Skill Development

The XI Five Year Plan envisions a boom in the rate of skill development from 3.1 million to 15 million per year in order to be able to meet the requirements of knowledge economy. The skill development initiatives support employment generation, economic growth and social development processes. NSDC aims to strengthen the competitiveness of the country by developing a highly qualified work force relevant to current and emerging market needs.

No development initiative can be termed complete unless it envisages programmes for the youth, for they are the forces shaping the destiny of any nation. The resourcefulness of rural youth has to be tapped using appropriate initiatives for their empowerment leading to employment and a sense of achievement & self-worth among them. The deplorable condition, in which the rural youth find themselves today, in spite of being more educated than their parents, is not so much because of the higher education being inaccessible to them, but because of the fact that they do not possess the necessary employable skills warranted by the job market. So this *'more-education-no-job'* is a killing factor, compared to *'no-education-no-job'* and it may lead to poverty, alienation, frustration, drugs and exploitation affecting the image of the country.

“We are encouraging youth from other sectors to come forward and take advantage of the employment-linked-skill-based programme. This will make them independent and provide an opportunity to secure their future” (Dr. C P Joshi, Rural Development Minister).

Poor Communication Skills Affecting the Employment of the Rural Youth

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One of the factors affecting the employment of rural youth in organized sectors is their poor communication skills in English, both spoken and written. This, in turn, can be traced back to the shortcomings of conventional education, i.e. school and college curricula with very little or no scope of addressing the emerging employment market needs. Corporate, IT sectors, BPOs and industries have now entered this significantly potential area where they are fully assured of good returns in the form of abundant, skilled manpower, for their investment in youth. The Ministry of Rural Development has also responded to the call of enhancing the employability levels of rural youth by activating its district level functionaries like DRDA (District Rural Development Agency), and working out strategies in partnership with some NGOs and Public-Private Partnerships. The mobility and adaptability already shown by the rural Below Poverty Line (BPL) youth by way of less resistance to migrate towards economic opportunities have motivated the corporate and other industries to channelize the native intelligence of the youth effectively.

This has resulted in jobs for the rural youth promising them decent income and self-esteem. It is heartening to attempt a glimpse of some of these noble ventures which have redefined ‘inclusive growth’.

Various Agencies

- The Centre for Development of Employable Skills (CDES) formed by the Career Development Centre (CDC) of Hindustan Computers Limited (HCL) in alliance with Confederation of NGOs of Rural India (CNRI) imparts job-oriented skills and induces self-employment skills in rural youth. The training covers Basic Communication Skills, English Language Learning, Sales Orientation, Basics of Computer Hardware.
- Youth 4 Jobs is a rural retail academy and vocational training initiative of Andhra Pradesh with an ‘employment generating and marketing mission’. The philosophy underlying this academy is that the most sustainable livelihood option is to provide jobs for youth by giving them market relevant skills. Thousands of rural youth, preferably

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college dropouts and unemployed youth were chosen from different parts of the state and selections were made from among them to be trained in English Communication Skills, both spoken and written and other areas such as Work Readiness, Basic Computer Skills, etc. The successfully trained youth have been recruited as Customer Service Associates by market giants like Heritage, Big Bazaar, Reliance, etc...

- 4H (Head, Heart, Hands and Health) is a youth organization that has existed over 100 years. 4H seeks to train and empower youth and facilitate youth development. The general policy of 4H is that youth human resource training is the best mechanism for sustainable economic and social improvement.
- RUBY (Rallis Ujjwal Bhavishya Yojana), employability programme started by Rallis, the Tata group Company in Pathancheruvu, Hyderabad helped the first batch of rural youth trainees march towards a brighter future in April 2009. Its youth employability and life skills training programme, a free three-month training on employability enhancement skills mainly focuses on English Communication Skills enhancement. More than 200 men and women have already found employment in the BPO sectors, thanks to their grooming by RUBY.
- The Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU) has tried to address the mammoth issue of rural unemployment with its massive training programme, aiming to train an estimated 45,000 rural youth from the BPL. IGNOU has chosen to train them in Spoken English and etiquette, in order to make their shift from agrarian backgrounds to industrial sectors smooth. Industries have already been approached for the placement of the youth on their successful completion of the training.

Globalization and English Communication

The indispensable presence of English language communication skills in all these training modules is in line with the requirements of globalization. With its proven record in capacity-building and confidence-building of an individual, English language has now come to be seen as an effective tool for self-empowerment. Not only does it raise the employable standards of the

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rural youth, but also widens their survival range and survival potential. This language of the market opens up an explosion of opportunities for persons with different levels of competence and skill.

More Programmes Needed

Youth are the present and the future of humanity, as well as of nations. A well-educated and trained population gives a country enormous potential for economic and social development. No empowerment initiative is completely free from an underlying agenda of 'exchange'. That is to say, both the empowered and the empowering agency stand to gain from the process. Whereas the corporate sector or the industry gains the skilled labour in the form of empowered youth, the rural socio-economic fabric gets sufficiently strengthened. English language continues to have more potential that can be harnessed for enhancing the employability levels of rural youth.

More programmes need to be planned by the Ministry of Rural Development with the intervention of corporate, industries & NGOs, drawing expertise available in the universities and English Language Institutes. However, the paper intends to conclude on a note of suggestion that, despite the proactive efforts of all the agencies mentioned above, school & college curricula must be liberated from the clutches of convention, to the extent possible, and should be made to share the responsibility of addressing the employability of rural youth.

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