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CO-OPERATIVE MOVEMENT IN INDIA

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In India has been acclaimed as an agency for economic and social development and an important sector of national economy. It is a unique feature of the Indian Co-operative Movement that, besides being a voluntary democratic people's movement, it enjoys the active partnership of the state in terms of policy, financial and management support. Through the co-operative system, it is our aim to take democracy to the people and facilitate social justice. We look at co-operation as an effective instrument by the people involved in these areas, and as a countervailing force against the exploitative propensities that develop in the economy. Protecting and promoting the interest of the weaker section through co-operatives is one of our basic aims.

Co-operative Movements

Introduced as an agency for providing relief from the exploitation of the money lender to the agriculturists in the country, co-operation in India has emerged as an economic force providing variety of services to the masses undertaking agriculture and industrial production. Our Co-operative Movement has emerged as one of the largest in the world. Its contribution to economic growth is evident from the fact that about 55% of institutional credit, 45% of fertilizer distribution and 60% of sugar production is accounted for by co-operatives. The working capital of co-operatives which was a mere Rs 276 crores in 1950-51 increased to Rs 35,000 crores in 1984-85. During this period, agricultural credit provided by co-operatives increased from Rs 23.38 crores to Rs 3250 crores; marketing of agricultural produce from Rs 47 crores to over Rs 3,000 crores. Co-operatives have indeed helped the economic growth of the agricultural sector in our country in a very significant manner.

I find that an overwhelming majority of the delegates present here are basically farmers. Through them, I would like to compliment the farming community for achieving record foodgrains production in the country. Co-operatives have greatly helped in this achievement. Nearly two-thirds of co-operatives in the country are in rural areas and support agricultural and allied activities like dairying, fishery etc. Co-operatives constitute the principal institutional framework for the provision of farm credit and other inputs like fertilizers, seeds, implements, pesticides, etc. An important element in our agricultural strategy for increasing production and productivity is to provide remunerative prices to farmers. In the implementation of the schemes relating to price support and market intervention, co-operatives have been assigned the role of a nodal agency in respect of commodities like oilseeds, coarse grains, potatoes and onions. The protection to growers provided through co-operatives in the situation of gluts in the market and fall in prices during the recent time has been commendable.

In developing economic programmers in rural areas through co-operatives, the National Co-operative Development Corporation has been playing a significant role as a promotional, financial and consultative agency in the co-operative sector. Up to March, 1985, NCDC has provided a total financial assistance of Rs. 844.21 crores in economic development programmes through co-operatives. Co-operative agro-processing industries in the field of fertilizer production, dairying, oilseeds processing, sugar and spinning have attained excellence and have acted as pace-setters for rural industrialization in the country.

Co-operation is recognized as a shield for the poor. Support to weaker sections and tribal population, thus, constitute the sheet anchor of co-operative development efforts. Through measures relating to concessional rate of interest, liberal pattern of assistance and specialized technical and managerial assistance, co-operatives of such people are being encouraged as a matter of policy. They are making significant contribution to their economic and social upliftment.

Equity and justice in the provision of services and sharing of surplus are the guiding principles in co-operatives. Membership in co-operatives is open to all those who can use its services without any social, political, racial or religious discrimination. Observance of these tenets and their guiding principles promote national integration. In the course of the working of the movement for over eight decades, hardly any incident, which has resulted in promoting divisive forces, threatened unity and integrity of the nation and shaken the base of equity and

universality of the people has come to light. This is a great redeeming feature for which I would like to express our gratitude to the ingenuity of the co-operators.

For the healthy and balanced growth of a unified co-operative movement in the country, we have to be conscious of the prevailing weaknesses in the movement and strive for removing the same at the earliest. The weaknesses which are upper-most in my mind, relate to regional disparity, growing apathy of members, management deficiencies, inadequate technology orientation, the politicization of co-operatives and want of democratic content. These pose a threat and challenge to the management and leadership in movement. We would welcome suggestion regarding corrective measures which should receive the attention of both the movement and the Government.

The objectives, plans and programmes of co-operative development have been adequately reflected in the Seventh Five-Year Plan. The Plan, however, should not be taken as that of the Government alone. It is a plan for the co-operatives and the movement is responsible partner in the whole concept, thinking and operation. While we should be happy on our achievements, there should be on room for complacency. The nation, under the dynamic leadership of our youthful Prime Minister, Shri Rajiv Gandhi, is poised to enter the next century with determination and optimism. Co-operation, as a people's socio-economic and democratic movement, would have to expand and diversify its economic activities to raise the level of productivity, employment and income, provide better service to masses at economic cost, modernize the management of co-operative enterprises, and make its policies and programmes forward-looking.

Conclusion

In its deliberation, I have no doubt that this Co-operative Congress would give a comprehensive thought to the present status of the Indian Co-operative Movement and the challenges of the 21st century, and evolve guidelines on immediate as well as long-term objectives and strategies as enunciated in the Seventh Five-Year Plan. As I visualize, our immediate goal should be: (i) reaching every farmer through co-operative agricultural credit, marketing and processing programmes; (ii) enabling the co-operative sector to emerge as the major agency in the service of the common man; and (iii) intensifying human resource development efforts particularly relating to orienting every youth in co-operation.

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