

HUMAN RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT*

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May, I, first of all, say how deeply beholden I am to the organisers of the 16th Indian Geographers' Meet for inviting me to deliver the keynote address at the inaugural session. I took it as an honour not only to myself personally, but also to the Geography Department of the Punjab University with which I had the pleasure of being associated for nearly three decades.

I also wish to compliment the executive committee of the Institute of Indian Geographers for choosing "Human Resource Development" as the focal theme for this Meet - a theme which is of perennial importance. Man is at the centre of the whole drama of spatial development and the totality of life on the earth. His is a pivotal role of multiple dimensions. There is an old saying that "resources derive their significance from man". To the Red Indians living in North America for centuries, coal was only black stone. But the European immigrants after landing in the new continent found it as a precious source of energy. All students of Geography are aware how the knowledgeable, adventurous, and innovative migrants from Europe made use of this sources of energy in developing the U.S.A. into an economically strong land and, by that token, into one of the

most powerful countries of the World politically. Also it is widely known how through a process of assimilation and promotion of human qualities these immigrants were able to build a progressive and ever forward looking nation. The quality of man, no doubt, is the key factor in the totality of regional development.

Human population is not to be placed alongwith natural resources on the same plane in the developmental process. It is commonly believed that population is not only a resource, but an "active" resource for that matter. Man is the "doer" or the "chief actor" in shaping or reshaping of the regional landscapes. What a region looks like in its totality, or in its sectorial segments, bears an indelible imprint of the Man involved in the process. All the non-human resources are "passive". These non-human resources are important but not entirely (and always) indispensable. What is indispensable is the fine quality human beings. You can do with inadequate or deficient resources, but there is no substitute for innovative, educated, hardworking, determined, disciplined and forward looking human beings. There are many examples in the world where dynamic and innovative people have produced unmatched socio-economic assets and quality

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of life in the midst of scarcity of natural resources. Among such cases, Japan and Switzerland are shining examples. This is not to minimise the importance of natural resources, but only to put the human resource in its correct perspective. The adequacy or abundance of natural resources is an enabling or facilitating factor in the developmental process, provided the desired kind of human beings are on the scene to make use of them.

The quality of human population is not only measurable in terms of literacy, education, technology, health and nutrition, but it also includes among its determinants traits like values, ethics, culture and a sense of pride in belonging to one's country. In sum, the quality of human resource is a comprehensive concept.

The quality of population is inter-related with its numbers. Quality can be promoted with appropriate measures if the numbers are not too large. Quality gets diluted, or is difficult to be achieved in full in the midst of a massive population witnessing accelerated growth over a long period of time. India is caught up in such a trap at the moment. With the world's second largest population consistently growing at high rates throughout the post-independence period (21.5% during 1951-61, 24.8 during 1961-71, 24.6% during 1971-81, and 23.85% during 1981-91), it has experienced staggering increases in its absolute numbers decade after decade. The explosion from about 360 million in 1951 to 846 million in 1991 (913.7 million according to the 1994 ESCAP Population Data Sheet) has created wide ranging implications for the country. Among many consequences of this bewildering growth, the fact that as much as about 37 per cent of India's total population is below 15 years of age is a great stumbling block in the way of bringing any significant decline in birth rates immediately. If this trend continues, India is

threatened to become the most populous country in the World, bypassing even China, sometime during the thirties of the 21st century. Despite respectable achievements in absolute terms in the socio-economic sphere during the past about 40 years, the average Indian does not seem to feel better off in several crucial aspects of life. Such has been the neutralising effect of the rapid strides of population growth during the four decades of our planned development. To avoid further dilution of gains toward the qualitative improvement in the various facets of life of the people, highest priority has to be extended to the control of numbers. Despite the provision of family planning programmes ever since the very first five year plan the crude birth rate in India has remained high. It has started declining only recently but at a snail's pace. It has dropped from 39.9 per thousand in 1951 to 29.3 per thousand in 1991. Only in Kerala, Goa and Tamil Nadu has it come down appreciably by 1991: to 18.1, 16.8 and 20.7 per thousand of population respectively. But Kerala and Goa are only small states accounting for a small fraction of the total population of the country. Consequently, their achievement has not made any material impact on the overall national fertility rate. No doubt they are showing the desirable direction to the rest of the country. The large states like Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan in the north have still very high birth rates ranging between 34 and 36 per thousand of population, as in 1991. In most others, the corresponding figures are between 26 and 29. Unless the large states register appreciable decline in their birth rates, the national scenario is not expected to change much in this regard.

The death rate in the country as a whole, on the other hand, has come down significantly, from 27.4 per thousand of population in 1951 to 9.8 in 1991, with inter-state variations showing a much shorter range. The decennial population

growth rate of 23.85 per cent during 1981-1991 in India demonstrates that the country has still to go a long way before achieving substantial reduction in birth rates so as to be able to bring the demographic transition to an advanced stage. It is clear that the country is racing against strong currents in its fight against escalating numbers. Till the demographic situation comes under control, the progress toward the multifaceted improvement in the quality of human resource is most likely to remain slow, and the process of neutralisation of the benefits of development is bound to continue. This scenario is in marked contrast to what has been accomplished in several of the eastern and south-eastern Asian countries (Japan, South Korea, China, Taiwan, Singapore, etc.). There, a large part of the demographic battle has been won within far shorter periods and most effectively. Their efforts to improve the quality of human resource are getting visibly reflected in their socio-economic achievements.

The exacerbation of the employment problem is a direct consequence of accelerated population growth, as has been experienced in India in recent decades. The adverse effect of population explosion on the quality of nutrition, health facilities, extension of literacy and educational facilities and public services is now commonly realised. It follows from the above that rapid population growth is a great stumbling block in the way of human resource development and in the attempts to improve quality of life.

Population geographers should investigate into the regional variations in fertility rates and the social, economic, cultural and demographic factors associated with these variations, so as to provide a basis for planning measures of population control. Dependence on economic development for reducing birth rates to low levels is only a long term perspective. Quick

results in this direction may be obtainable from development of education, both among men and women, raising age of marriage through legislation and its effective implementation, provision of employment facilities for women outside the home raising their social status, expansion of health care programmes and improvement of nutritional standards. Removal of illiteracy among women in all sections of the society is of special urgency. In a large country like India, with great spatial diversity in social, economic and cultural milieu, the geographers have a distinct role to play in this vital sector of human resource development. Formulation of precise and sound policies for human development must be based on extensive empirical research into the spatial patterns and processes relating to the various facets of life.

Among the important factors associated with resource development, education is the most pivotal. The extension of educational facilities to all regions, all social groups and to both men and women received priority consideration in developmental planning in all the countries which are among the most advanced today. In all developed parts of the world, human resource development was considered basic to socio-economic progress. The realisation is gradually dawning upon the developing countries now, although in varying degrees. However, in India even literacy - the ability to read and write with understanding in any of the languages - has not as yet been extended fully despite regular provision of literacy programmes in all the five year plans. There are wide spatial, sectional and male-female differentials in this regard. As per 1991 census, only 52.19% of the population aged 7 years and above is literate. With 89.8% of its population (aged 7 and above) literate, Kerala leads all other states and union territories in the country, followed by Mizoram (82.2%), Lakshdweep (81.7%), Chandigarh (77.8%), Goa (75.5%), Delhi (75.29%), Pondicherry

(74.29%), Andaman & Nicobar islands (73.03%), Daman and Diu (71.20%). But these are all very small areal units and account for only a small fraction of the country's total population. Large states like Uttar Pradesh (41.06%), Bihar (38.48%), Rajasthan (38.55%), Andhra Pradesh (44.09%) and Madhya Pradesh (44.20%) are way behind in their literacy progress which is only an elementary effort toward human resource development. The slow growth in knowledge is an especially severe restraint to material progress. The economic achievements of population remain meager when there is little knowledge of the available natural resources and when understanding of the alternative production techniques and necessary skills is lacking. Lack of education also results in ignorance of the existing marketing conditions and opportunities, as also the institutions that may be recreated to favour economising effort and economic rationality. The progress in knowledge and the diffusion of new ideas, innovations and technologies are necessary to remove economic backwardness and to instill human abilities and motivations that are favourable to economic advancement.

The ability to read and write with understanding in any of the languages is the very minimum required to move in the direction of socio-economic progress. The inter-state disparities even in this elementary requirement are glaringly large in India and the degree of achievement in most cases still quite low. In addition, the male-female differential in literacy is not only large but has also wide range of variation. In Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan general female literacy rates are woefully low - between 20 and 25%, and this after 40 years of planned development. Among scheduled castes and scheduled tribes the female literacy rates are still far lower. In India as a whole, while 64.13% of the males aged 7 years and

above are literate, the corresponding figure for the females is only 39.29%. Likewise, the rural and urban areas stand apart in literacy - 44.69% in rural areas and 73.08% in urban areas can read and write with understanding. In Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan the rural literacy rates (for the total rural population) range between 30 and 37% while in Kerala it is as high as 88.92%. The situation with regard to rural female literacy rates is far worse, and spatial disparities therein far larger. Whereas in Kerala as much as 85.12% of the females (7 years and above) in villages can read and write, the corresponding proportions for Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan are as low as 17.95%, 19.02%, 19.73% and 11.59% respectively. In a predominantly rural country like India, rural female literacy rates provide a sensitive index of socio-economic progress. If the country is to move ahead socially, economically and demographically, rural female literacy must spread extensively and intensively and spatial disparities therein must be narrowed down substantially and in the minimum of time.

In the urban areas, on the other hand, literacy rates are much higher and inter-state differences in them much smaller. In urban India as a whole 81.09% of the males (7 years and above) and 64.05% of the females are literate. In Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan urban male literacy rates are 77.72%, 69.98%, 81.32% and 78.50 respectively. As against these the urban female rates in these states in that order are 55.94%, 50.38%, 58.92% and 50.24%. In Kerala, on the other hand, 95.5% of the males and 89.06% of the females in urban areas are literate. These figures bring out clearly that although literacy is far more diffused among males and females in the urban areas and male-female differential relatively small, much still remains to be done for the females in their ability to read and write

with understanding in any of the languages even in towns and cities in most parts of the country.

The complexities of the situation in this regard are further heightened by the persistently high disparities in literacy among the various sections of the society (scheduled castes, scheduled tribes, backward classes, etc., vis-a-vis the rest of the population). It emerges from the above that even in this elementary aspect of human resource development, that is literacy, the level of achievement in the country as a whole leaves much to be desired and that the rural areas and the females need to be brought under a special focus in this regard. It is an Herculean task which must be pursued with urgency.

With a view to accelerating development, the immediate need is to lay emphasis on vocational and technical training and adult education rather than on a greatly expanded system of formal education. In other words, the problem of human resource development in developing countries has to be assaulted from all angles.

For a broader understanding of educational requirements, there is a need to conduct "manpower surveys" from time to time to identify principal skill shortages so that training activities may be planned accordingly. The nature and quality of skills required will change with changing development patterns and processes in each country. Instead of imitating the educational system of developed countries, therefore, newly developing countries may find it more appropriate to concentrate, at least in the early phases of their developmental programmes, on methods of informal education and on the objectives of functional education.

Putting all these ideas together, it may be noted that the concept of human resource development is not a static one. Rather, it is a dynamic concept. The measures of improving the quality

of human resource have to continue to change from time to time in accordance with the changing needs of the countries. An individual once educated is not educated for all time. He must continue picking up new ideas as they emerge in order to be up-to-date in his learning process. That is the only way of surviving in a fast changing world. Lack of dynamicity leads to stagnation. Human resource development, therefore should be a continuing process.

Even in the U.S.A there has been a persistent demand for restructuring education in recent years to make it directly more responsive and relevant to the changing needs of the country. In several cases general disciplinary departments in universities and other institutions have been closed to divert available funds for strengthening courses of educational programmes of practical utility. Within individual departments old courses have been restructured to make them practically relevant, of course retaining the substantive academic contents. This is being done to produce the kind of manpower which is required for restructuring the economy and maintaining its position in the current highly competitive world. With the slogans of globalisation which we are hearing all around, there is no occasion to sit idle and be complacent. Inter-regional and intra-regional relations must be understood and regulated appropriately. The whole concern for survival is involved. For developing countries like India, in particular, the challenge is real and it must be met with courage, conviction and determination.

Nutrition and health care programmes are equally important constituents of human resource development. Able bodied and healthy men and women can be more productive and willing to meet challenges than those who do not remain well and suffer from malnutrition. It is necessary to give attention to the

development of nutrition-oriented programmes. Through suitably planned investigations food deficit areas and people should be identified so as to ensure that food reaches those who are in need of it. Similarly food subsidy programmes should concentrate on those who are poor and in real need of help, rather than all the people in an area or a social group. Also, food subsidies should be planned for lean periods rather than the whole year. In other words, misuse or wastage should be meticulously avoided in such programmes. This is possible by organising comprehensive nutrition surveys and by making use of their findings. Such surveys must cut across various sections of the society, different income groups and all agro-meteorological zones.

Likewise, there should be a network of health care centres extending over all areas to ensure diffusion of available medical facilities. Spatial disparities in health care programme should be identified and remedial measures taken to achieve complete coverage.

Lastly, but not the least, there is a need to put special focus on the development of women's programmes as an integral part of human resource development. Throughout the world, disproportionately large sections of women are among the poor, illiterate, unemployed and underemployed, and suffer from malnutrition and poor health. With a view to redressing these imbalances, it is necessary to give considerably

more attention to (a) women's productive role in national economies (b) gender differences in income earned (c) place within the household and (d) men's and women's access to adequate nutrition and health services. It is also important to ensure women's participation in development planning programmes. In sum, the development of a balanced society in social economic and cultural terms requires equality of opportunity to both men and women in all spheres of life.

All the parameters of human resource development are inter-related among themselves directly and indirectly, and should, therefore, constitute an integrated unit in the total developmental process.

The discipline of Geography, which is essentially anthropocentric, has a special interest in : (a) assessing the quantitative and qualitative aspects of the human resource, (b) identifying spatial disparities in the various attributes of the population, (c) discovering associations of these disparities with all sectors of the total environment, and (d) making recommendations and prescriptions for minimising the inequalities as well as for accelerating progress. These may become the basis of plans, programmes and policies for a qualitative betterment of the human resource. Such an approach is sure to contribute in a substantial measure to the creation of a happy world to live at all spatial levels.