



By ALBERTINA ALMEIDA

Sabka Saath Sabka Vikas? (Progress of All with All?)

Sabka Saath Sabka Vikas is a poll slogan apparently coined by Prime Minister Narendra Modi which, according to his website, translates as Collective Efforts Inclusive Growth, and is supposed to be at the core of the functioning of the present Government. However, if one were to assess how *Sabka Saath Sabka Vikas* is being applied, one would need to look at two factors: one, whether bland unity or bland equality measures, can succeed in contexts that are ridden with power imbalance; and two, to consider if the State's vision of progress is a progress that is accessible to the marginalized sections of society.

In the name of *Sabka Saath Sabka Vikas*, 10% reservations for the economically backward classes from the so-called upper castes, are justified. But that upsets the very logic of reservations which is to provide the historically marginalized sections with equal opportunities so that these sections can be at par with the historically advantaged caste sections. You can't have reservations for the socially advantaged sections of society and then have a general category too. It means the posts in the general category become theirs because of their networks and connections, accumulated benefits and experience, while the posts in the reserved category are theirs too.

The website says the Prime Minister spoke from his heart and delivered a powerful message of peace & unity to both Hindus and Muslims by asserting the slogan *Sabka Saath Sabka Vikas*. "He announced that Hindus and Muslims should together fight poverty instead of fighting among themselves". Indeed. But that is exactly what did not happen at Sanvordem-Curchorem in 2006 and what does not happen now thanks to the divisive politics accentuated by the BJP. The local people at Sanvordem were together fighting for their right to access water – as a matter of right, and not as a bounty from local politicians. The local politicians did not like it. They saw this as a threat to their ability to keep the local people under their thumb by forever being at their mercy for even basic amenities. What better way to divide than to incite violence between the communities, by using a religious place under construction as a pretext? That was the genesis of the Sanvordem-Curchorem riots. Some people who were responsible for the riots were detained later, and the present BJP Chief Minister, then MLA, Manohar Parrikar, even went with a rally to the police station to get them released.



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In a deeply uneven setting where minorities or minoritised communities are clearly differently placed from majority communities, there need to be special protection and special safeguards for those who have been historically and traditionally discriminated against. You cannot just chant the mantra of unity or equality. For, of what use is it if a scale is tilted in favour of the majority and, to set it right, the same weights are put on both the scales? That is what the slogan *Sabka Saath Sabka Vikas* has come to signify.

Another instance of this illusion of benefits of the same provision for all is the schemes with the Agriculture Department, wherein, for example, agricultural loans are predicated on established rights to land. A farmer can only get credit if he shows he owns some land; even in Goa, he or she can only get a loan if they show ownership of at least a hectare of land. But the Prime Minister and our Chief Minister will of course say that all agricultural schemes are available for all. He will talk about this as progress for all, but in fact, the person most in need of the scheme cannot avail of the agricultural loans. Similarly, the mining dependents' loans were waived, and it was made to seem like progress with them receiving bounty from the State by way of loan waivers, but this progress was by not making any efforts to recover the illegally mined profits from the mine owners. So it is the mine-owners who really benefitted from this policy while the public coffers were dug into, affecting the availability of other public social services to the masses, including the mining dependents.

One is in fact reminded of a quote of Anatole France: "The law in its majestic equality forbids the rich as well as the poor to sleep under bridges, to beg in the streets and to steal bread". In other words, the law clamps down on the bare living conditions of the poor, while claiming that the law applies to all'

Do we see the folly of this so-called equality? *Sabka Saath Sabka Vikas* is precisely this kind of fallacious 'majestic' equality. Again, who is the reference point for progress? What are the anticipated outcomes of this progress? It is a progress that benefits the rich and powerful. Not surprisingly, US Secretary of State, John Kerry, commended this poll slogan, saying, "If India's government delivers on its plans to support greater space for private initiative, if it creates greater openness for capital flows, if it limits subsidies that stifle competition, if it provides strong intellectual property rights, believe me, even more American companies will

come to India. They may even race to India. And with a clear and ambitious agenda, we can absolutely help create those conditions” (July 29, 2014)

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So competition for all, even when the participants in the competition are on an uneven footing, is progress. Openness for capital flows to benefit big time capitalists like the Adanis, at the cost of the health of the people, as is happening with a berth at Mormugao Port Trust, which is even managed by the Adanis now, is progress from the point of view of global capital, but certainly not progress for all.

Certainly this kind of skewed inclusivity is not what we want in the name of progress?

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