



Even God cannot provide government jobs to all, declared the wise Pramod Sawant, making it clear that he at least has no ambition of even trying. Government positions and incomes are for a chosen few like he himself and his cronies. But he would like, he says, unemployed households to have an income of 8000-10,000 rupees a month, for which he has a scheme which will provide – not jobs – but suggestions for ‘self-reliance’. Can his own household survive on such a princely income? Obviously not. Is it what government jobs pay? Nowhere near. So, basically, our CM wants to ensure that those unemployed today earn starvation incomes tomorrow.

But he needn't bother, because Goans are earning more than that rubbish amount today, and are still unable to survive or keep their families going. Like the family of the sixteen-year-old who committed suicide in Sattari last month, following the breaking of his mobile phone – the instrument that connected him to education. His was not the first suicide of a student in Goa recently; there have been at least two more reported since the lockdown began. Are three suicides not enough to indicate that something is very wrong in our education set-up? Behind these three tragedies are probably hundreds more similar situations, of students who remain precariously in the education system only through the enormous struggle and sacrifice of their families, in the hope that this will lead to a decent job and a better life. Besides, of course, those who have already been thrown out, like the sixteen-year-old's own younger brother, who dropped out of school at the beginning of this term, because the family had only one mobile phone. How many families must have made this unbearably painful choice this year, to give up a child's future, putting an end to so many dreams and aspirations, all for the lack of a mobile phone?

But Sawant's government is not bothered. The suicide in Ekoshi-Pomburpa in July had seen Goa's Secretary of Education, Nila Mohanan, brazenly declaring that, “If this (absence of a smartphone) can be a cause of suicide then we have some serious introspection to do as to how our children are being brought up... I don't think there is anything related to the working of education department”.

This attitude still prevails. The bereaved family in Sattari have heard nothing from the government; the only officials who visited were the police and a school teacher. This despite the fact that the boy belonged to the Dhangar community, one of Goa's discriminated-against tribal communities. Despite the fact that, thanks to the lockdown, his father had lost his driver's job which used to earn him 700/- a day; after being jobless and income-less for four months, with zero government support, he now has a job which earns him less than Rs 500/- on most days. Despite the fact that the boy's mother and grandmother are supposed to

be beneficiaries of government social support schemes, the mother of the Griha Aadhar Scheme and the grandmother of the Dayanand Social Security Scheme, but received nothing for months, except for Rs 1500/- at Ganesh Chaturthi.

So, was this a suicide caused by poor parenting? Or was it an institutional murder – a murder at the hands of the inbuilt elitism and casteism of our institutions that routinely ignore the needs of the most vulnerable? This routine and deliberate neglect could be seen right through the prolonged crisis caused by the COVID lockdown, when the government did exactly nothing for the poor. While governments in other countries increased the social security net, here we saw the opposite – the stopping of the meagre doles due to people. The excuse is the economic downturn and shrinking of government resources, but that hasn't stopped funds continuing to be lavished on completely useless and non-urgent (not to mention environmentally-destructive) white elephants like the Parrikar memorial at Miramar Beach, and various 'beautification' projects, along with anti-people ones like the double-tracking at Mollem, the coal hub, Sagarmala, etc, etc. Meanwhile casinos, not to be left behind, have been gifted with a generous CUT in the revenue they have to pay, by the same fund-starved government!

Because all these are important for the government, while people are not. Nice, expensive, money-gobbling 'projects' count as development for this government, while people's well-being and future do not. What about people's development, you ask? Why, of course, the projects will develop people – like Jindal and Adani and the casino-owners!

It is no irony that such a government, that shifted the whole of Goan schooling online without bothering to ensure that every student had the basic resources, can only envisage a 'prestigious' Goan IIT campus on the backs of the Goan poor, through the takeover of land, forest, and water resources of village communities. What will the villagers get out of the IIT – jobs? Of course not. IIT education for their kids – when they can barely afford cell phones? No way. All they will be guaranteed is increased marginalisation, and government suggestions on how to be 'atmanirbhar'.

It is interesting at this moment to note a promise made in the Bihar elections by the RJD's Tejashwi Yadav. If the RJD wins the elections, declared Yadav, it would create ten lakh government jobs. It is beside the point that this is just an election promise which may not be kept. What is worthy to note is that it is still a slap in the face for all those who – sitting in cushy positions themselves, whether public or private – sneer at aspirants for government jobs, and especially at Goan aspirants, because Goa is supposed to have a government employment rate which is 'too high'. But too high for what? The fact is that a government job is one of the few jobs where a non-privileged person can earn a decent living. In a situation

where the private sector is allowed to exploit 'low-level' employees to the hilt, and traditional occupations are being destroyed by 'development', where are people to find some hope for the future? Government jobs have always been a means for upward mobility and lifting people out of poverty. And if public money was not wasted the way it is today, for the benefit of the moneybags and scumbags, wouldn't it be easy to create many more jobs to work for public welfare?

But this is a government that has not filled even the existing government posts reserved for discriminated-against communities like the Dhangars. One can only hope that, although God may not be able to give us government jobs, maybe God will help us get rid of this government?

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