

25-11-2005 - Introduction of Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes & Other Backward Classes (Reservation in Services & Educational Institutions) Bill, 2005. PRIVATE MEMBERS' BILLS

Sir, I am very happy that my friend, Shri Suravaram Sudhakar Reddy has brought this Constitution (Amendment) Bill for providing a new article by which the rural health care will be taken care of. He wants one adequately facilitated health centre for every village in our country.

Sir, the importance of this will be realised if we really know where we stand today after 58 years of our Republic. Now, more than 94 per cent of the doctors and 68.5 per cent of the hospitals are located in the urban areas. So, what a sad plight it is. Ninety-four per cent of the doctors and 68.5 per cent of the hospitals are located in the urban areas. That is to say, 27.8 per cent people who are living in the urban areas get this facility. Around 63 per cent of the people who are living in the rural areas are getting very paltry services of health care. So, this is the situation that we have to keep in mind when we discuss this Constitution (Amendment) Bill. So, we really have to serve our people in the manner in which it was pointed out in the Preamble of our Constitution, which says that equality of opportunities will be provided in relation to health. What are the kinds of opportunities that we are providing? So, we all should take it very seriously that this situation should be reversed. It does not mean that the urban people should lead a miserable life in terms of health. I do not mean that. The urban people should be provided with sufficient health care but sufficient health care should also be assured to the people in the villages. That is the intention of this Bill.

The situation today is that they are hardly taken care of. Their situation is so miserable. Probably it will be better to say that they live in a kind of a hell created by us.

So, this situation should be put an end to. This will improve if we take measures like the proposal of the Bill suggests. Then, probably from the Minister's side they will ask where the money is. That is the usual question the Government will ask. But the reality today is that we are spending just less than one per cent of the GDP for our health care. To put it more precisely, we spend 0.98 per cent of the GDP on health care. Is it just? In which way can we justify this?

So, the National Common Minimum Programme (NCMP) says that the effort of the UPA Government will be to make this situation different. Instead of spending 0.98 per cent, the NCMP suggests that three to four per cent should be spent on health care. If the Government takes that kind of measure, then there will be a substantial change in the days ahead. But I do not know whether the Government is doing it. I am not very sure. Promises may be there. But it calls for action. It calls for action based on very definite political will. Is it possible?

Now, take the case of Kerala about which my friend Shri Hamza said. I will correct him. In Kerala the situation is that in every village, in every Panchayat there is a Primary Health Centre. In every block, there is a community health centre. How is it possible in Kerala? If you take the list of the States and their resources, Kerala is not such a rich State. Kerala is one of the poorest States. It comes very much low in the ladder as far as the wealth of the State is concerned. But Kerala has shown that justice should be done to the poor people, the poor who are living in the villages. Then, of course, they had taken this decision and implemented it. There may be a lot of facilities lacking and all that. That can be improved but the State has come to a situation where all the Panchayats have one Primary Health Centre where a doctor, nurse, midwife and other medical staff are assured. Why is it so?

I do not mean anything bad about the other States. But when Kerala spends money for health to achieve this, if you take the figures, there is a difference of 10 times in the money spent by Andhra Pradesh. There is a difference of 30 times in the money spent by Madhya Pradesh. So, what is required is political will.

Political will comes only if you realise that the people who are living in the villages are also citizens of this country and they are to be treated equally like the other citizens. But that realisation is not forthcoming in many cases. Now how this could be achieved? That is for every State to decide. If they say they do not have money, then, well I would like to say that there are resources. There are resources for umpteen other things to be done.

There is a lot of money which is due to be collected but the Government is failing. If the tax amount that is due from the big companies is collected, it would come to thousands and thousands of crores of rupees. The Government never likes to hear the figure of the non-performing assets. We all know how big that amount of non-performing assets is. Non-performing assets is a good name given to those defaulters who have cheated the banks.

That comes to more than one lakh crores of rupees. If they can collect a part of it and earmark it for the poor villagers for providing better health facilities then probably we will make one or two steps forward. Otherwise, we may all chant the slogans only- Health for all. I think the Union Minister also did chant that slogan – ‘Health for all’. But it will remain an empty word; it will remain a dream which will never be realized unless matching action is followed. What Shri Sudhakar Reddy wants the Government to do is to accept this amendment and take actions by which the villagers in this country will be assured like any free country to do that; they will be assured for a better life and a better health care system. If that is achieved then life in this country will be totally different. Many of the problems that we see today will not be there. This has a dual nature of exploitation. The situation today is that all the health care facilities are concentrated in the urban areas only. If the village people who are poor otherwise are to get a little health care then they have to spend more because there is no doctor and hospital nearby. They have to spend more to get a doctor, to get a minimum treatment whereas in the urban areas, the average expenditure on health is much less.

The people in the private sector in the medicines and medical field have a feeling that they are in the village because there is hardly any Government facility. On an average, for one lakh people, only one bed is available. So, you can imagine as to how the people will get into that one bed. They have to depend upon the private sector hospitals about which Prof. Amartya Sen, who is the Nobel Prize winner and who is the pride of India, has made the best comment. When he was making a study on the situation of health and health care in India, he said that the private hospitals and the private health care institutions are run on the basis of quackery and crookery. I am quoting Dr. Amartya Sen. So, the quackery and crookery is being offered to the Indian people who are living in the villages and who constitute 68 per cent of the population. Can this be allowed? How long will they have to wait? They have waited 58 years after we declared India as a Republic when equality of opportunity was offered to everybody. But they still live under the precious care of private sector hospitals that are described by Prof. Amartya Sen as institutions of quackery and crookery. It is a shame. That sense of shame I feel will be shared by both sides of the House.

We will take a step and accept this Amendment and commit ourselves. It is a big commitment when you adopt a new article in the Constitution. It is a commitment that you make yourselves to the people of this country; the commitment to help the ordinary people to have some health care at this time after 58 years of our Republic.

Sir, I support this Amendment and I am thankful to you for giving me this time to speak.