



Party and Prosperity Dreams in Rural China: Poverty Alleviation Campaigns in Yunnan

Speaker-Dr. Ritu Agarwal

Chair- Amb. Ashok K. Kantha

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Amb. Ashok K. Kantha, the chair and the Director of ICS, welcomed Dr. Ritu Agarwal and pointed out that she has done a lot of work on agrarian crisis in Yunnan province and on the bases of her fieldwork she would like to present her paper.

Dr. Ritu Agarwal initiated her presentation by talking about her recent visit to Kunming and Jiulong town in Luquan county of Yunnan province. During her visit, she examined how the township government had advised a new approach for poverty reduction in the mountain areas by synergizing party, enterprises, and farmers.

She also explained that Xi Jinping had made poverty alleviation as one of the national priority agendas and promised to build China into a moderately prosperous society. Some of the key features of Xi Jinping's poverty alleviation campaign has provided a lot of financial support to the local government and built political pressure on local entities for regular inspection. This was the basic idea of mass poverty alleviation campaign. Party has also set up the inspection and supervision bureau under the Communist Party of China (CPC) anti-corruption campaign. Xi introduced the new idea of double promotion which means if any party worker works on poverty alleviation programme they will get financial support as well as promotion. The public policy slogan crafted for the local government is to "identify the real poor, assist the real poor and alleviate poverty". From 2011 to 2016 poverty went down from 43.29 million to 12.4 million in China's rural area.

Further, she argued that Xi had a targeted idea of poverty alleviation. This involved a focused approach by the authorities aimed at individual households. The new approach also requires that the poverty relief should be given to each household depending on the value and the number of assets they own. The second change is the transfer of money to concerned households in the form of loans and not in the form of cash help. The government is also providing the needy with monetary help for the construction of houses. Poverty alleviation also included food security, education, and registration of all poor people.

Luquan County is one of the mountainous villages and is rich in biodiversity and natural resources. One of the major methods of poverty alleviation in this county was developing agriculture. The main agrarian product was tobacco and medical herb (sanqui). The government is promoting a modern way of agriculture which is well coordinated much more commercialized, internalized and market-oriented. The local government has tried to attract poor peasant to give their land for farming which in turn will help them with increased income generation. The land is generally farmed by the company and they provide seeds, pesticides, and fertilizers but the land is owned by the local government. However, this kind of farming affects the fertility of land adversely and after 10 to 15 years the land becomes infertile. But in the short term, it helps in increasing the income and also stops the migration of people.

Education is a very important factor of poverty alleviation campaign and the party has encouraged local people to go to school. Xi Jinping has put in a lot of effort towards making education compulsory in China. He has also given renewed attention to medical services for children and has paid increased focus to the book reading culture.

Yunnan has a long history of growing and using tobacco. When it was opened up in the 1990s Yunnan was good at three sectors, tobacco, trade, and tourism. The local government has used tobacco cultivation and the growing industrial base to generate revenue. In earlier times, people of Yunnan used tobacco as a gift. The state had key control on tobacco production at Yunnan and they used tobacco production as an agenda of poverty alleviation. Some of the provinces like Yunnan, Shanghai, and Henan have the permission to produce tobacco in China. In the social assistance programme, party member used to work as volunteers groups to provides goods for poverty alleviation like party cadre gave up their land in order to help the government in building

the local activity center. They also made a cultural group which promotes brotherhood with the help of folk songs and dance among the various sections of the society.

She concluded her lecture by raising the problems associated with the poverty alleviation campaign. Farmers were facing the problem of infertility of land, shortage of enough soil and timeline to generate the income? But, the party had an idea to solve the problem with alternative crop farming which could help them increase the fertility of the land. The government has also invested in developing tourist spots which help in generating additional income.

One of the questions posed to the speaker was related to the history of the Great Leap Forward and argued that China has never learned from its mistakes. With the wrong crops, they may face the same problems as was the case during the Great Leap Forward. There were also questions related to the autonomy of leadership at the township level. She mentioned that there was local autonomy which was needed in order to make the poverty elevation programme a success. The measures include emphasizing strong leadership, enhancing overall planning, implementing tailored measures and increasing funding. President Xi has made a commitment that by 2020 China builds a moderately prosperous society in an all-round way with all poor, rural populations to be lifted out of poverty and impoverished areas of all counties are removed.

About the Speaker

Dr. Ritu Agarwal is an Associate Professor at Centre for East Asian Studies, School of International Studies, JNU. She holds a Ph.D. in Chinese studies from the University of Delhi. She completed her M.A. in Political science, JNU. Her doctoral work explored the micro-level agrarian transformation in Yunnan province and she is currently engaged in questions of provincial transformation especially in Yunnan. Her research interests are rural political economy, urbanization, gender studies, and provincial politics. Dr. Ritu Agarwal studied Mandarin Chinese from Beijing Language and Culture University, Beijing. She was a visiting scholar to Yunnan Academy of Social Sciences, Kunming, and visiting fellow to Yunnan Minzu University and Yunnan University recently. She was also affiliated to Chinese University of Hong Kong and East Asia Institute, National University of Singapore, Singapore to collect material for her research work.

This report was prepared by Julee Kumari, Research Intern at ICS

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