



Optimistic assessment

RBI should avoid having to choose between taming inflation and pushing for growth.

Growth and Inflation:

1. Less than a fortnight after the RBI announced its latest monetary policy, a team of its officials has provided an optimistic assessment of the 'State of the Economy' in the August issue of the central bank's monthly bulletin.
2. Pivoting from what the bank posited on August 6 when it said, "the outlook for aggregate demand is improving, but still weak and overcast by the pandemic.
3. Evidence that the economy was gaining traction could be seen in manufacturing activity gradually turning around even as the contraction in services had moderated.
4. The authors of the article have arrayed several high-frequency indicators including E-way bills, toll collections, fuel consumption, automobile dispatches and registrations, and rail freight volumes to buttress their view that demand is regaining momentum.
5. The team has also pointed to a private forecaster's data showing a sizeable sequential decline in the unemployment rate last month — to 6.95% from 9.17% in June, and that with a pronounced rural bias — to posit that this reflects the "resilience of the rural sector on brightened agricultural prospects".

Poor Quality Jobs:

CMIE contends in an analysis that "all the additional employment provided by India in July was of poor quality" while better quality salaried jobs shrank by 3.2 million, noting that the bulk of the rural jobs added were of temporary farm labour linked to delayed Kharif sowing.



Arms and the women

Gender parity in the Army is happening at a slow pace and is mostly led by the courts.

Women in Army:

1. Women have been fighting a tough and uphill battle for equal opportunities in the Indian Army. In a landmark judgment in February 2020, the Supreme Court asked the Government to abide by its own policy and grant permanent commission to women in the Short Service Commission and give them command postings in all services other than combat.
2. In *The Secretary, Ministry of Defence vs Babita Puniya & Others*, the top court pointed out that women had played a “significant role” in the army since their induction in 1992 and extending permanent commission to women SSC officers “is a step forward in recognising and realising the right of women to equality of opportunity in the Army”.
3. Despite the stringent verdict, systemic issues remain in the Army, and women have gone back to court to sort out the issues. Another step towards ensuring that women get an equal opportunity, as laid down by the Constitution, has been taken, when the Court passed an interim order allowing women to appear for the National Defence Academy entrance exam on September 5.
4. Till now, women could join the Army through the Indian Military Academy and the Officers Training Academy. The directive allows girls who clear the exam to study at the NDA and then at the IMA or the naval and air force academies and become commissioned officers.

Discriminatory

1. The Bench pointed out that closing a route of entry for women to join the Army was discriminatory. T
2. The ruling came on a writ petition argued that Articles 14, 15, 16 and 19 of the Constitution, which uphold the values of equality and allow equal, non-discriminatory opportunities at work, were being violated by denying eligible women the opportunity.
3. Though the legal route has helped overcome some of the hurdles, it will be a long haul before gender parity is fully achieved in the Army.



4. In that context, the Prime Minister's Independence Day announcement that girls will be granted admission in the Sainik Schools is a welcome move towards preparing them for an equal role and life in the military.

Back to basics

A preliminary report of a nationwide survey conducted by Lego Foundation in Denmark stated that students give importance to peer interactions, good teachers, fun learning content and knowledge gained from experimental approaches. The UNICEF says that children want to go back to school. We can reasonably assume that these aspirations hold true for Indian children also.

Learning Loss:

1. According to various estimates, the pandemic and lockdowns have led to an alarming drop-out rate from schools, migration of children from private to government schools due to inability to pay fees, increased abuse at home, inadequate nutrition, etc.
2. Industry experts will agree with the claim that for adults to unlearn and relearn is a very expensive and time-consuming process. Thus, if the foundation of education is weak, any effort at a later stage to strengthen it will only yield sub-optimal results.

Issues to be addressed

1. UNICEF has raised the issue of nutrition. Children, depending on their age group and gender, need to consume 1,000-3,200 calories per day.
2. The UNDP Human Development Report 2019 states that students who fall behind may struggle if the level of classroom instruction (based on textbooks that follow ambitious curricular standards) is considerably above their learning level. These problems are exacerbated at higher grades if students are automatically promoted to the next grade without having acquired foundational skills.
3. While the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 proposes pedagogical freedom to the teacher, a content-heavy curriculum forces instructions rather than constructivist engagements by default, as teachers are always short of time.



4. As a result, students simply consume what they are taught; they don't become creators. Supporting slower foundational development while focusing on the essentials will allow for deeper and more meaningful learning.

Need for skilled teachers

1. The National Curriculum Framework for Teacher Education 2009 quoted the NEP 1986 which said, The status of the teacher reflects the socio-cultural ethos of the society; it is said that no people can rise above the level of its teachers.
2. NEP 2020 has entrusted the intellectual development of kindergarten children from underprivileged sections to matriculation-pass Anganwadi teachers and helpers whose monthly salary is about ₹10,000 and ₹5,000, respectively.
3. Anganwadi teachers will not be able to fulfil the task of developing underprivileged kindergarten students into creators simply because they lack the expertise to do so. The proposal to upgrade their skills using online methods is grossly inadequate.

Working in rural areas

1. If the sight is on the 2030 Sustainable Development Goal for Education, India needs to work on a war footing. It will have to acknowledge that EdTech is a resource of the privileged and learning higher-order cognitive skills requires time and personal support.
2. One way is to mobilise students in higher education to contribute three to six months in government-sponsored programmes by working in the most remote and underdeveloped areas to educate children and teachers.
3. Private companies could also sponsor mentorship programmes where employees spend about a month on the field. This will have a transformative effect on all the participants involved. Current solutions appear to be designed in the cloud without adequate exposure of the ground.

The ability to successfully satisfy Sustainable Development Goal 4 will depend on the priority afforded to school education. And with budgetary allocations based on priority, the question that begs to be asked is, what is the priority of school education?



Is a caste census desirable?

It is required to document both the disadvantages and privileges of various communities in India.

Need of Caste Census:

1. At the recently concluded Parliament session, there was a demand to lift the 50% cap on reservation imposed by the Supreme Court through the legislative route. With the 2021 Census coming up, several political parties have demanded a nationwide caste census.
2. They argue that a Socio-Economic Caste Census is the only way to make a case to breach the 50% cap on the reservation and rationalise the reservation matrix in the country.

50 % Cap on reservation: Against Arguments

1. The 50% cap, as introduced by the court, has not really been argued through. Reservation in our country has been caught in ideological misgivings. It is constructed as though it is the only departure or the main departure from fair competition, but that is simply not true.
2. The absence of reservation does not mean that the playing field is level. Reservation is one among many considerations which affect competition among candidates.
3. Therefore, I think there is nothing sacrosanct about the 50% limit – it can be exceeded, if necessary, but a clear argument should be given for why this is being done.

For Arguments:

1. While one will agree that there is nothing sacrosanct about the 50% cap, I still feel that it is a prudent rule.
2. The reservation policy is one of the elements of the larger structure of democratic constitutionalism in India that by definition subscribes to the argument of equality of citizens. Reservation, no matter how extensive, is going to cater only to a small proportion of those who are entitled to it.
3. Exceptionally, however, reservation can be accepted, extended, but we do need to know very well that the rule is 50% and if there is an extension, it is an exception.



4. The way it is practised has invariably led to [the growth of] elites among castes and communities. These elites within the castes have tended to exercise their dominance over their very communities and not let them exercise the kind of freedoms or search for equality, which any democratic polity deserves.
5. Eventually, the bent in a good society should not be to preserve caste but to strengthen democracy. Therefore, we need to see where the convergence lies.
6. The more you actually begin to dole out reservation, the more the tendency to preserve caste, protect it, precisely because that becomes the bastion for the dole.

Caste Census:

1. A caste census is absolutely desirable in India today. And the purpose of a caste census is not merely geared to the reservation issue; a caste census would actually bring to the fore the large number of issues that any democratic country needs to attend to, particularly the number of people who are at the margins, or who are deprived, or the kind of occupations they pursue, or the kind of hold that institutions like caste have on them.
2. This information is absolutely necessary for any democratic policymaking.
3. The courts in India have often emphatically said that it is important to have adequate data with regard to the reservation. Very often, States have shied away from gathering this data.
4. Now, data gathering itself is a big problem because it can become very, very invasive. But we need to actually balance it with enabling people and asserting citizen equality.

Privilege and Disadvantage

1. We have got locked into a mindset where we think only those communities which want welfare benefits from the state must be enumerated.
2. We should not be associating the enumeration of communities only with welfare programmes, that is to say only with communities that are, in some sense, needy.
3. Caste is not only a source of disadvantage; it is also a very important source of privilege and advantage in our society. Caste enumeration is also required to document, as far as possible, this privilege.



4. We have to stop thinking of caste as being applicable to only disadvantaged people, poor people, people who are somehow lacking. The opposite is even more true: caste has produced advantages for certain communities, and these also need to be recorded.
5. In my opinion, when everyone's caste is counted, we will finally come out of the unhelpful mindset of thinking of caste as an exception meant only for those who are supplicants of the state.
6. The state has helped privileged communities far more, even though this help has not taken the explicit form of programmes like a reservation. The naming and counting of caste is a difficult thing that we have to pass through in order to bring about a future when it will not matter as much as it matters today.
7. The main need is that of exposing privilege. There are also important questions of demands coming up because of mismatches between the numbers that we come out with and the share in resources that different communities have. This is a kind of nightmare that all governments fear.

The democratic dividends of enumeration of caste and the risk

1. Counting of caste does not necessarily perpetuate caste or the caste system. However, under certain conditions, enumeration of caste for cultivating elitism can be a backward step to hold on to caste. But that is concerning the elites.
2. Overall, the democratic dividends of enumeration of caste are much higher. There are a lot of myths that actually deprive a large number of people, particularly on the margins.
3. Let's take the case of Karnataka. For a long time, there were claims that among the castes, the Lingayats are the most numerous. But a lot of other studies have brought out that this may not be true. These myths can be debunked through a caste census.

Power of controlling data:

1. We have had two exercises of a caste census — one carried out by the Union government in 2011 and another by the Karnataka government in 2015. Data from both censuses have not been made public and the governments have also disputed the data.

20.08.2021

Friday



<http://www.sriramsias.com>

2. This is a demonstration of the principle that those in power control data and information. We have had instances where this data has been collected but has not been made public.
3. A caste census is a necessity, it is not a happy thing, it is not a great achievement, it is just something that we have to do. It will also increase friction, to some extent harden caste identities in the short term. But not counting caste is much worse.
4. And one of the major things we will have to fight against in this journey is the vested interests of particular governments.