

I give this advice because over 80 per cent of the people of India live in its half million villages and no one can hope to understand India if he doesn't learn something about villages. The heart of India lies in its villages, said Mahatma Gandhi.

I give the advice to see Indian villages because I have found from experience that it is only if one sees a representative Indian village with one's own eyes that one begins to comprehend the poverty of India, and the key to understanding India is its poverty- immense, pervasive, overwhelming.

I have taken expert Canadian economists to see their first Indian village, economists who had read deeply about India's poverty. They knew the number of calories of food the average Indian consumes a day, the number of yards of cloth he can afford to buy a year, the number of years he is likely to live. But I have found no one, no matter how much he has read about India's poverty, who is not profoundly shocked by the poverty of the first Indian village he sees. It is so much worse than he expected.

Poverty together with the disease and the illiteracy which accompany it are the enemies within the gates which India is fighting in its programmes of economic and social development.

The depth of the poverty is one measure of the task before India. Another measure is the number of people or things concerned in any given problem. In India it so often seems to be 40 million or 50 million.

Thus one of the major economic problems of India is that its population will go up by about 50 million in the next ten years. A major social problem is untouchability and there are in India about 50 million harijans - Gandhi's name for the former untouchables. One of the great destroyers of crops in India is the monkey and there are 50 million of them. Of the 220 million cattle in India, it is estimated that 40 million are useless and should be destroyed. The breed of the other cattle should be improved but how many artificial insemination centres would be required to deal with 180 million cattle and with 50 million water buffaloes, 50 million sheep and 60 million goats.

The task before India is so stupendous that to make a sizeable impact on it will require the devoted labours of a whole generation of Indians. It is no wonder that Mr. Nehru has said that this generation of Indians has voluntarily condemned itself to a lifetime of hard labour.

The first battles in the first campaign in independent India's war against poverty, disease and ignorance have on the whole been successful. Statistics in India are subject to a wide margin of error but it is generally agreed that in the last four years agricultural production in India has gone up by nearly twenty per cent and industrial production by some thirty per cent; while population has gone up by less than six per cent. Most of the increase in agricultural production is the result of good monsoons but some of the increase results from improvements in methods of production.

An increase of nearly twenty per cent in agricultural production and an increase of some thirty per cent in industrial production are impressive but they are not as impressive as the evidences of an expanding economy which you can see with your own eyes as you travel in India. These are some of the things which I have seen in the past two and a half years.