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Budget 2017–18 and the Social Sectors

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We had pointed out in our previous article on Jaitley's Budget 2017–18 that despite the devastating impact of demonetisation on the livelihoods of the poor, the government's social sector expenditures—aimed at providing essential services to the poor at affordable rates—have not seen any increase. A significant increase in these welfare expenditures could have provided some relief to the distress caused by this disastrous policy. On the other hand, the government continues to dole out huge subsidies to the rich, in the name of 'tax incentives to promote growth', 'Public-Private-Partnership' and so on. Just the tax incentives/concessions to the rich amount to an astronomical Rs 5.5 lakh crore, an amount that is nearly three times the government's social sector expenditures (Rs 1.95 lakh crore) as mentioned in the finance minister's budget speech.

In this article, we first take a closer look at the two most important allocations within the government's social sector expenditures, on education and health. After that, we examine the

allocations for two of the most marginalised sections of Indian society, Dalits/Adivasis and women.

No country in the world has developed without making provisions for providing free, compulsory, equitable and good quality elementary education to ALL its children in the initial stages of its development, and later expanded it to secondary and higher secondary education. (And all developed countries have done this entirely through public funding; they are aware that the private sector will only invest for profits.)¹ Unfortunately, India has not been able to provide this to a majority of its children after seven decades of independence. The Twelfth Plan (2012–17) admits that even after three years of the passage of the Right to Education Act which is supposed to guarantee free and compulsory education to all children in the age group 6–14, the drop-out rate at the elementary level is still as high as 42.39%!² According to freshly released 2011 Census data, of the total school age population (age group 5–19 years) of 38.01 crore

children in the country, as many as 6.54 crore children (17.2%) have never attended any school, while another 4.49 crore (11.8%) have dropped out of schools in the last decade.³

Even for those going to school, the conditions in a majority of the schools are so bad that it is a national shame:

- More than 50% of the primary schools in the country are single, or at best, two teacher schools! And 57% of the primary schools function with 3 classrooms or less. Implying that a single teacher is teaching two or three different classes at the same time in a single room, in a majority of the primary schools in the country!
- A shocking 19% of all regular teachers in elementary schools in the country are not professionally trained; another 14% teachers are working on contractual basis, of whom more than one-third are not professionally trained.
- 35% of elementary schools do not have usable toilet facilities, and 44% do not have separate toilet facilities for girls—an important reason for girls dropping out of schools.
- 24% of all elementary schools in rural India do not even have functional drinking water facilities.
- Given this state of our schools, is it any wonder that a survey found that 52% of Class V students were unable to read Class II-level text and 49% could not solve simple two-digit subtraction problems (that they are expected to learn in Class II)!⁴

So far as higher education is concerned, the Gross Enrolment Ratio or GER (number of students as a percent proportion of the youth population in the age group 17–23/18–24) is way below the developed countries—the GER in India is only around 20, whereas for developed countries it is above 60, with several countries having a GER above 70.⁵ Globalisation has led to the transformation of higher education into a business; a majority of the higher educational institutions in India are now in the private sector, and only those able to afford

their high fees are able to access college education.

But the government is unconcerned. It is simply not interested in spending on education. The overall budget for the education sector (2017–18 over 2016–17 RE) has been increased by just 8.3%, which means no increase in real terms. And as compared to the GDP, it has actually decreased from 0.49% in 2016–17 RE to 0.47% in 2017–18 BE.

Let us examine the budget allocations for school education. The school education budget for 2017–18 has actually suffered a cut in real terms: it has been increased over the revised estimates for 2016–17 by a mere 5.6%. In his previous budgets, Jaitley had slashed the school education budget so sharply that the budget for this year is more than the budget for 2014–15 (Actuals) by just 1.4%!

The Parliament passed the Right to Education (RTE) Act in 2009, whose declared objective is to provide ‘free and compulsory’ education to all children in the age-group 6–14 years. The Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) is the main scheme of the Central government for implementing this Act and universalising education. Six years after the passage of the RTE Act, barely 10% of the schools are RTE compliant.⁷ But the government is simply not willing to allocate funds for this scheme. Its allocation has been increased by only Rs 1,000 crore over 2016–17 RE; in the previous years, Jaitley had actually reduced the allocation for this scheme so steeply that the allocation for 2017–18 continues to be less than the allocation for SSA made in 2014–15 even in absolute terms!

The allocations made for the SSA by the Centre are much less than the amount of Central funds sought by the Ministry for Human Resource Development (MHRD) for implementation of the RTE Act. The MHRD prepares a budget for implementing the SSA every year, which is based on annual work plan and budgets prepared by the districts and submitted to their respective states. A part of this budget is supposed to be funded by the Centre, as its share of the SSA budget. The gap between the Central funds sought by the MHRD and the actual allocation by the Centre for SSA has been increasing every year, and in the four budgets presented by Jaitley so far, has fallen from 78% in 2014–15 to just 43% this year.

Table 1: Budgetary Allocations for Education, 2014–15 to 2017–18 (Rs crore)⁶

	2014–15 (A) (1)	2015–16 (A)	2016–17 BE	2016–(2) 17 RE	2017–18 BE (3)	(3–1)/1 %
Department of School Education and Literacy of which:	45,722	41,800	43,554	43,896	46,356	1.4%
<i>Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan</i>	24,097	21,661	22,500	22,500	23,500	–2.5%
<i>Mid-Day Meal Scheme</i>	10,523	9,145	9,700	9,700	10,000	–5.0%
Department of Higher Education	23,152	25,439	28,840	29,703	33,330	44.0%
Ministry of Human Resource Development: Total	68,874	67,239	72,394	73,599	79,686	15.7%
GDP at Current Market Prices (2011–12 series)	12,433,749	13,675,331	15,075,429	15,075,429	16,847,455	
MHRD Budget as % of GDP	0.55%	0.49%	0.48%	0.49%	0.47%	
Higher Education budget as % of total MHRD Budget	33.6%	37.8%	39.8%	40.4%	41.8%	

Table 2: Central Allocation for SSA vis-à-vis Demand from MHRD⁸

	<i>Funds sought by MHRD for SSA (Central Share) (Rs crore)</i>	<i>Budgetary allocation (BE) for SSA by Ministry of Finance (Rs crore)</i>	<i>Allocation as % of approved outlay</i>
2013–14	31,016	27,258	87.9%
2014–15	36,391	28,258	77.7%
2015–16	40,200	22,000	54.7%
2016–17	46,702	22,500	48.2%
2017–18	55,000	23,500	42.7%

The Mid-Day Meal Scheme is another very important scheme for elementary education, designed to combat the huge malnutrition levels among children in the country; another equally important purpose is to improve school enrolment and child attendance in schools. The allocation for this has been marginally increased this year, implying a cut in real terms, and as compared to the budget three years ago (2014–15), has actually fallen by 5%. The country's ruling classes are not willing to spend money even on providing a decent nutritious meal once a day to the country's children!

All this clearly indicates that the Centre is just not interested in universalising elementary education in the country. We have argued in detail in our earlier writings that the aim of the Right to Education Act passed by the previous UPA Government was never to universalise elementary education in the country; on the contrary, its aim was to abandon the Constitutional obligation to provide free and compulsory education of equitable quality to all children in the country, subvert the Unnikrishnan Judgement of the Supreme Court making education a fundamental right, and create conditions for demolishing the government school system and gradually

privatise school education—thereby fulfilling the dictates of the World Bank imposed Structural Adjustment Programme.⁹ The BJP Government has continued with this anti-child and anti-nation policy of the UPA Government. It has in fact accelerated privatisation and commercialisation of school education by a simple stratagem—squeezing the already low allocation of funds for school education.

Coming to higher education, this year, the allocation has been increased by about 12%, or Rs 3,600 crore, over last year's revised estimate.

Usually, an increased allocation for higher education would be a reason to cheer, but if we look at the various components of the allocation made for the MHRD, it becomes clear that this increased allocation is a case of misplaced priorities and is very iniquitous. This is so for two reasons. Firstly, it is evident from the last column in Table 1 above that the BJP Government is clearly shifting its priority to funding higher education as compared to school education. Within the budget allocation for MHRD, the allocation for higher education has been steadily going up, from 33.6% in 2014–15 to 41.8% this year. In other words, this increased allocation for higher education is at the cost of reduced allocation for school education.

And secondly, of this increased allocation of Rs 3,600 crore for higher education, more than Rs 3,000 crore is for the 23 Indian Institutes of Technology (IITs) and 31 National Institutes of Technology (NITs). These premier engineering institutions account for 37% of the total outlay for higher education in 2017–18! On the other hand, Jaitley has shown no interest in increasing funding for improving the quality of the average engineering colleges, which account for the overwhelming majority of the engineering colleges in the country. The All India Council for Technical Education, the regulator of engineering education in India, got only Rs 485 crore this year, as compared to Rs 481 crore last year (2016–17 RE), a cut in real terms.

Similarly, while the country's most elite universities, the Central Universities, got Rs 6,486 crore this year, the University Grants Commission, that is supposed to regulate the higher educational institutions in the country and provides grants to more than 10,000 institutions, has been allocated only Rs 4,692 crore (an increase of Rs 200 crore over 2016–17 RE, again a cut in real terms). The UGC had been allocated Rs 9,315 crore in 2015–16

RE; in other words, the allocation for it has fallen by half in two years.

So, in case of higher education too, Modi and Jaitley have their priorities clearly set out. The aim is to gradually strangulate the country's government funded higher education system by reducing government grants to colleges and universities, so that conditions can be created for its privatisation. With education becoming a commodity and higher educational institutions becoming business firms, the quality of education is bound to suffer. But the country's corporate houses need at least some good quality engineers and managers—and so government funding is being concentrated on the country's premier higher educational institutions like the IITs, IIMs and Central Universities.

The neoliberal model looks at everything, including education, from the perspective of maximising corporate profits. There is no need to look at education from the perspective of human development, as a means of unlocking the inherent potential of human beings, so that they can enjoy an enhanced quality of life. All this is gibberish. The sole aim of education must be to prepare youth for employment in the assembly lines of multinational corporations. For this, the youth must be imparted the necessary skills, so that they can become cogs in the corporate wheel.

This philosophy also fits well with the fascist philosophy of the BJP–RSS regime, which wants to transform our youth into mindless automatons in the service of virulent Hindutva. The youth of the country can only become so, if they do not read, gain knowledge, develop critical thinking, expand their mental horizons.

And so, while on the one hand, the Modi–Jaitley regime is slowly strangulating our higher educational institutions by starving them of funds, on the other hand, the government has hugely increased funding for skill development. The BJP Government inaugurated the Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship soon after coming to power in 2014. Its main program is the Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana, whose allocation has more than tripled in the last two years. In his budget speech, Jaitley proposed to extend the Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Kendras from the 60 districts at present to more than 600 districts across the country.

Table 3: Allocation for Skill Development (Rs crore)

	2015–16 (A)	2016–17 BE	2016–17 RE	2017–18 BE
Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana	991	1,771	2,140	2,924

Allocation for health

India's health system is in "crisis". India is the disease capital of the world:

- More than 2 lakh people in the country die of malaria every year, while TB kills 3 lakh;
- According to the World Health Organisation (WHO), India accounts for nearly one-fourth of the deaths in the world due to diarrhoea, more than one-third of the deaths due to leprosy and more than half of the deaths due to Japanese encephalitis;
- India's under-five child mortality rate is the highest in the world, with 12 lakh such deaths in 2015; a majority of these deaths are preventable;
- India is also in the grip of an epidemic of chronic diseases, which account for more than 50% of the deaths in the country.¹⁰

It is possible to address these health challenges, but that would call for strengthening of the public health system. The WHO recommends that countries should allocate at least 5% of their GDP for public health services; India allocates barely 1%. India ranks 171 out of 175 countries in public health spending.¹¹ Consequently, the public health system is in bad shape. Even by standards set by the government, there is a shortfall of about 20% in sub-centres, about 22% in primary health centres (PHCs) and about 30% in community health centres (CHCs); and there are only on an average of 1.14 district hospitals per district. Where these health centres exist, a majority of them are deficient in infrastructure, with even doctors not available.¹² This dismal state of public healthcare has forced citizens to depend upon the private sector for treatment; of the total health spending in the country, public health spending accounts for only 28%, households undertake the rest.¹³ Because of the lack of affordable medical services and high costs of private healthcare, six crore people are pushed into poverty each year—a fact admitted by

Finance Minister Jaitley in his budget speech last year.

On December 31, 2014, the Union Government released the draft National Health Policy (NHP) 2015. The draft NHP set three major objectives for the public health sector: expanding preventive health services, assuring universal availability of free, comprehensive primary healthcare services, and significantly reducing out-of-pocket expenditure by ensuring affordable secondary and tertiary healthcare services. But the government toned down these booming objectives in the draft document itself, saying that "taking into account the financial capacity of the country", the country could only afford a public health expenditure of 2.5% of GDP to meet these targets, of which 40%, that is 1% of GDP, would be spent by the Centre. Health experts have pointed out that considering the appalling state of public healthcare services in the country, such a low level of public health expenditure is inadequate to make available decent quality affordable public healthcare services for the entire population.¹⁴

In all the three budgets presented by Jaitley since the draft NHP was made public by the government, the funds sanctioned by him for healthcare are way below the minimalist fiscal target of 1% of GDP proposed in it.

Thus, in the 2017–18 budget, there is an increase in the allocation for the Department of Health and Family Welfare by 24%, or Rs 9,010 crore. This increase appears significant only because the allocation for health in the previous years has been very low. Even after this increase, the allocation is just 0.28% of GDP, way below the target of 1% set by the Union Government in the draft NHP. Of this increase in the budget for the Department of Health and Family Welfare, the major increase is in secondary and tertiary care sectors, ignoring the orientation suggested in the draft NHP, which calls for giving first priority to providing access to free and universal primary healthcare services to all. Thus, nearly one-fourth of this increase (Rs 2,006 crore) is allocated to upgrade district hospitals into new medical colleges under National Health Mission, and another 22% of the increase (Rs 2,022 crore) is on the Pradhan Mantri Swasthya Suraksha Yojana, which is for setting up new AIIMS and upgrading medical colleges. This is not to argue that new high quality public tertiary care hospitals are not needed—the point is that this should be done not at the cost of neglecting the primary sector. The present rush at the district and high-end hospitals can be much reduced if the facilities at the PHCs and CHCs are

Table 4: BJP Government Allocations for Health, 2014–15 to 2017–18 (Rs crore)

	2014–15 (A)	2015–16 (A)	2016–17 BE	2016–17 RE	2017–18 BE
Dept. of Health and Family Welfare (including Department of AIDS Control) (1)	30,626	33,121	37,062	38,343	47,353
Dept. of Health Research	911	993	1,145	1,345	1,500
<i>Ministry of Health and Family Welfare: Total</i>	31,537	34,114	38,207	39,688	48,853
Ministry of AYUSH	617	1,075	1,326	1,307	1,429
<i>Total Health Budget (2)</i>	32,154	35,189	39,533	40,995	50,282
GDP at Current Market Prices (2011–12 series) (3)	12,433,749	13,675,331	15,075,429	15,075,429	16,847,455
Total Exp on Health and Family Welfare as % of GDP (1/3)	0.25	0.24	0.25	0.25	0.28
Total Exp on Health as % of GDP (2/3)	0.26	0.26	0.26	0.27	0.3

improved; if primary level health services are good, most illnesses can be taken care of at this level itself, and this will not only improve the efficiency and reduce the cost of delivery of public health services, it will also improve the overall health status of the people.

On the other hand, the budget marginalises primary healthcare. While the budget for strengthening the National Rural Health Mission (NRHM) has been increased by Rs 2,870 crore, simultaneously, the budgets for reproductive and child health (including immunisation) and communicable diseases have been reduced, while the budget for maintenance of existing infrastructure has been kept at virtually the same level as last year. (And yet the finance minister has announced that the government has set a target of reducing the country's high maternal mortality rate from 167 in 2011–13 to 100 by 2018–2020, and infant mortality rate from 39 in 2014 to 28 by 2019—probably by manipulating statistics here too). Therefore, on the whole, the budget for NRHM has been increased by Rs 1,727 crore (over the revised estimates for 2016–17), which is a modest increase of 8.9%, barely enough to beat inflation.

This means that existing public health and primary care facilities, particularly the PHCs and CHCs, will continue to underperform and lag behind the rural population's health needs due to shortage of funds. In his budget speech, the finance minister has kept mum on the huge shortage of health sub-centres, PHCs and CHCs in the country and the severe shortage of infrastructural and other facilities at the existing centres—all that he has announced is that the 1.5 lakh health sub-centres

will be transformed into 'health and wellness centres', whatever that means. In other words, the huge shortfall of 35,110 sub-centres, 6,572 PHCs and 2,220 CHCs across the country is going to continue.¹⁵

The NRHM's urban counterpart, the National Urban Health Mission (NUHM), is yet to take off properly. For the period 2012–13 to 2016–17, its average yearly budgetary requirement was estimated to be Rs 3,391 crore per year from central funds; this year's allocation is only Rs 752 crore. This allocation is a sharp cut from the previous year's budget allocation of Rs 950 crore.¹⁶

It is well established that providing free/affordable public healthcare services is a much better way of providing universal healthcare to the people rather than providing them health insurance coverage and reimbursing them hospitalisation costs—the latter only benefits private healthcare providers and private insurance companies. Be that as it may, last year, the government made a big bang announcement of providing people Rs 1 lakh insurance coverage for all Below Poverty Line (BPL) card holders under a National Health Protection Scheme (NHPS)—this scheme was also announced by PM Modi from the ramparts of the Red Fort in his Independence Day speech of August 15, 2016. This was essentially a revamp of the earlier Rashtriya Swasthya Bima Yojana (RSBY) that had been launched in 2008 and which was also a publicly funded health insurance scheme providing hospitalisation coverage to BPL patients in private or public hospitals for up to Rs 30,000. Upscaling the RSBY to NHPS is estimated to cost Rs 24,000 crore for five years or an average of

Rs 4,800 per year. However, the finance minister sanctioned only Rs 1,500 for this scheme in 2016–17, spent less than half of this during the year, and in the budget estimate for this year, has cut the allocation for it to Rs 1,000 crore. PM Modi has now stopped mentioning this in his speeches. Clearly, this is another announcement that is also going to remain on paper only.

Table 5: Budget Allocation for RSBY / NHPS (Rs crore)

	2014–15 (A)	2015–16 (A)	2016–17 BE	2016–17 RE	2017 18 BE
RSBY/ NHPS	551	–	1,500	724	1,000

Allocations for Dalits and Adivasis

The budget documents show an increase of over 30% in the outlay for the welfare of the scheduled castes (SCs) and scheduled tribes (STs). In his budget speech, Jaitley announced that he had allocated Rs 52,393 crore for the SCs for the next financial year against Rs 40,920 crore in 2016–17 RE, and Rs 31,920 crores for the STs, against Rs 24,602 crore in 2016–17 RE. These appear to be significant increases, but a closer look tells a different story, the same story of massaging statistics to make them look good that has become a hallmark of Arun Jaitley.

Till last year, these budget outlays were designed to be from the Plan outlay, and hence were known as Scheduled Caste Sub Plan (SCSP) and Tribal Sub Plan (TSP). These sub Plans were launched in 1979 and 1974 respectively to ensure the flow of targeted funds from the general sectors in the Central Ministries towards the development of the Dalits and Adivasis, so as to bridge the development gap between these communities and the rest of society. The guidelines under these two programmes clearly stated that each ministry/department must allocate funds under

separate budget head/subhead for these sub Plans, and that these allocations as a proportion of the Plan expenditure should be at least in proportion to their share in the total population. The population share for the Dalits is 16.6% and for Adivasis is 8.6%, according to the 2011 Census, implying that the allocations for the SCSP and TSP should be at least 16.6% and 8.6% of the total Plan expenditure respectively. It is another matter that the actual allocations for these sub Plans never reached the stipulated norm. During the BJP regime, the allocations have fallen to even below the low levels of the previous UPA Government, and were 7.06% and 4.36% of the Plan expenditure respectively in the 2016–17 budget estimates (Table 6)!

Worse, of the total allocations for SCSP and TSP, only a small proportion of the funds were directed or targeted to benefit the SC/ST communities. An analysis done by the National Campaign on Dalit Human Rights (NCDHR) found that in the 2016–17 budget, only 18% of the total SCSP allocations and 37% of the TSP allocations were direct/targeted allocations. A majority of the funds were allocated for schemes and programmes that were very general in nature and had no direct impact on the development of the Dalits and Adivasis. Thus, not only was the allocation of funds for these two programmes less than half of the stipulated norm, even this reduced allocation was being done in such a way that allowed the diversion of funds for schemes that did not directly contribute to the actual development of these communities. This was actually a violation of the policy guidelines to these programmes, that clearly state that “SCSP and TSP funds should be non-divertible”.¹⁷

The same trend has continued this year too. A NCDHR study found that this year too, the majority of the allocations are for general, non-targeted schemes. Worse, this year, the BJP Government has abandoned the SCSP and TSP, and replaced it with “Allocation for Welfare of Scheduled Castes/Scheduled Tribes.” This innocuous

Table 6: BJP Government’s Budgetary Allocations for Dalits & Adivasis (Rs crore)

	2013–14 (A)	2014–15 (A)	2015–16 RE	2016–17 BE
Plan Budget	453,327	462,644	477,197	550,010
Scheduled Caste Sub Plan (SCSP)	34,722	30,036	34,675	38,833
SCSP as % of Plan Budget	7.66	6.49	7.27	7.06
Tribal Sub Plan (TSP)	22,039	19,921	20,963	24,005
TSP as % of Plan Budget	4.86	4.31	4.39	4.36

sounding change actually signifies a paradigm shift in policy, as now Plan and non-Plan expenditures have been merged. This has enabled the government to include administrative/non-Plan expenditures like salaries of employees who belong to SC/ST communities in various institutions, and pension of retired lecturers and professors who belong to these communities, as spending for welfare of SC/STs. This is contrary to the entire rationale for creating these special programmes; these people are not beneficiaries of special welfare schemes directed at SC/STs, they work/worked for the government like the rest of society, and are eligible for pensions like their non-SC/ST colleagues.¹⁸

Jaitley claims that he has allocated Rs 52,393 crore for the welfare of SCs for the next financial year against Rs 38,833 crore in 2016–17 BE, an increase of 34.9%; and Rs 31,920 crores for the welfare of STs in 2017–18 against Rs 24,005 crore in 2016–17 BE, a 33% jump. But Jaitley is manipulating data; these expenditures are not comparable, as the expenditures in 2016–17 were from the Plan Expenditure, and not total Budget Outlay, whereas in the allocations for this year, the distinction between Plan and non-Plan expenditures has been eliminated, and the two have been merged. Thus, in the allocations for welfare of scheduled castes and scheduled tribes this year, schemes that were earlier reported under non-Plan head and were not included under SCSP and TSP have been included, such as Employees Pension Scheme, 1995 (allocation Rs 767 crore and Rs 388 crore respectively), and Interest Subsidy for Short term credit to farmers (allocation Rs 2,430 crore and Rs 1,200 crore respectively). Then, it is also not clear why, all of a sudden, certain schemes that earlier were not included under SCSP and TSP have been included this year in the statements giving allocations for welfare of SCs/STs—these include schemes such as Rashtriya Krishi Vikas Yojana and Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana.

Till last year, the various ministries/departments had to report budget allocations under SCSP and TSP, based on which these sub Plans were drawn up. But this year, with these sub Plans being scrapped and no new framework being drawn up to replace them, how have the various ministries reported the allocations for welfare of scheduled castes and scheduled tribes within the different schemes is also not clear.¹⁹

Finally, even if we ignore the above manipulations being indulged in by the *manuvadi* BJP Government to inflate its allocations for scheduled castes and scheduled tribes,

even these inflated allocations are much less than the stipulated guidelines for SCSP and TSP. Even though an accurate comparison is not possible because of the merger of Plan and non-Plan allocations, let us make a rough estimate of the under-allocations this year. For this, let us take last year's ratio of Plan and non-Plan expenditure as the benchmark for allocations. Last year, as per the guidelines of the SCSP and TSP, the due allocation for SCs (16.6% of the Plan budget) should have been Rs 91,302 crore, and due allocations for STs (8.6% of the Plan budget) should have been Rs 47,301 crore. These amount to 4.62% and 2.39% of the total Budget expenditure for last year respectively (see Table 7 for the calculation).

Table 7: SCSP and TSP as Mandated by Policy, 2016–17 BE (Rs crore)

	2016–17 RE
Total Budget Outlay (1)	1,978,060
Plan budget	550,010
Amount mandated by policy for SCSP: 16.6% of Plan budget (2)	91,302
SCSP as % of Budget Outlay (2/1)	4.62%
Amount mandated by policy for TSP: 8.6% of Plan budget (3)	47,301
TSP as % of Budget Outlay (3/1)	2.39%

Now, taking these percentages (4.62% and 2.39%) as the benchmark for allocations, this means that in the 2017–18 Budget, the scheduled castes should have been allocated Rs 99,179 crore and scheduled tribes Rs 51,307 crore. But instead, Budget 2017–18 allocated Rs 52,393 crore for SCs and 31,920 crore for STs. This means a total of Rs 46,786 crore for SCs and Rs 19,387 crore for STs has been denied by the Central Government (Table 8).

Allocation for women

This is also known as the Gender Budget. First introduced in Union Budget 2005–06, it captures the quantum of budgetary resources earmarked for women by various departments and ministries. The Gender Budget Statement (GBS) is prepared on the basis of the information furnished by the Ministries/Departments.

In a country where a crime against women takes place every 90 seconds, an insensitive Modi Government had slashed the gender budget so sharply during the previous

Table 8: Desired Allocation for Welfare of SCs and STs, 2017–18 (Rs crore)

	2017–18 BE
Total Budget Outlay	2,146,735
Desired allocation for scheduled castes welfare: 4.62% of Budget Outlay	99,179
Actual Outlay	52,393
Shortage in Outlay	46,786
Desired allocation for scheduled castes welfare: 2.39% of Budget Outlay	51,307
Actual Outlay	31,920
Shortage in Outlay	19,387

two years that even after increasing the allocations for women in 2017–18 by 25% over 2016–17 BE, the allocations are below the allocations for 2014–15 BE in real terms! This is also reflected in the gender budget allocation as a percentage of total budget outlay—this year’s allocation of 5.28% is below the allocation for 2014–15 of 5.46%.

The GBS is in two parts. Part A details schemes in which 100% provision is for women, Part B reflects

Budget constitutes 73% of the total budget under Part A (Rs 31,389 crore).

Part B includes spending for those schemes where allocation for women constitutes at least 30% of the provision. All important ministries claim that 30% of their allocations are for women, and this is routinely shown as such in Part B of the Gender Budget. Thus, in the 2017–18 budget, the Department of Health and Family Welfare has claimed an allocation of Rs 19,288 crore for the Gender Budget, the Department of School Education and Literacy Rs 13,335 crore, Department of Higher Education Rs 9,777 crore, and so on. No attempt is made to ensure that this much allocation is targeted to benefit women, neither do these ministries attempt to make an estimate of how many women have benefited from these women-oriented allocations.

Let us now take a look at some of the schemes mentioned in the GBS which are genuinely targeted at women. In his budget speech, the finance minister announced the expansion of the Indira Gandhi Matritva Sahyog Yojana, a pilot scheme introduced in 53 districts all over the country in 2010, to cover the whole country. The allocation for this scheme, now renamed as Maternity Benefit Programme, has been increased from Rs 634 crore in 2016–17 RE to Rs 2,700 crore in this year’s budget. The scheme provides financial assistance of

Table 9: BJP Government’s Allocations for Women, 2014–15 to 2017–18 (Rs crore)

	2014–15 BE	2015–16 BE	2016–17BE	2017–18
Gender Budget	98,030	79,258	90,770	113,327
Ministry of Women and Child Development	21,194	17,352	17,408	22,095
Budget Outlay	1,794,892	1,777,477	1,978,060	2,146,735
Gender Budget as % of Budget Outlay	5.46%	4.46%	4.59%	5.28%

schemes where the allocations for women constitute at least 30% of the provision. A closer look at the GBS makes it clear that a large part of the allocations shown under it have actually nothing to do with the welfare of women. Thus, in Part A of the GBS this year, which includes allocations for schemes that are supposedly exclusively for women, there is an allocation of Rs 23,000 crore for Pradhan Mantri Avas Yojana. Even if women are given joint ownership of houses built under this scheme, how can this be a scheme that is meant to benefit women exclusively? The allocation for this under Part A of the Gender

Rs 6,000 to pregnant women for “hospital admission, vaccination and nutritional food”.²⁰

This upscaling was much needed, even though the quantum of assistance being provided needs to be increased—for instance, Tamil Nadu provides Rs 12,000 to all pregnant women below the poverty line from its own state resources. India’s maternal mortality rate is the highest in the world. According to the World Health Statistics (2016), nearly 5 women die every hour in India due to pregnancy and delivery related complications.²¹ Unfortunately, the finance minister has introduced

conditionalities such as institutional delivery and full vaccination for women to be eligible for this financial assistance. These conditionalities actually end up excluding 60% of the country's women, because they don't deliver in hospitals, and/or are unable to vaccinate their children. But they are the ones who need these maternity benefits the most, as they include women from the poorest sections of the population, belong to Dalit and Adivasi communities, and live in the remotest areas of the country. They are unable to deliver in hospitals or vaccinate their children, because of the terrible state of government health services in the country.²² Instead of focussing on improving facilities in government hospitals, and making hospitals more accessible for the poor (by improving ambulance facilities), the suit-boot sarkar's finance minister and prime minister are putting the blame on the victims of our dismal public health system, and excluding them from receiving maternity benefits!

In any case, despite the increased allocation this year, it is not enough to make the scheme genuinely universal. It is estimated that about 2.7 crore births take place in India each year. This means this scheme would require about Rs 16,000 crores. Assuming centre–state cost sharing to be 60:40, this would therefore require an allocation of Rs 9,700 crore in the Union Budget to cover all pregnant women in the country.²³ The finance minister has allocated just 28% of this.

Several other schemes exclusively meant for women are mentioned in Part A of the GBS under the allocation for the Ministry of Women and Child Development. The allocation for the 'Scheme for Adolescent Girls', also called SABLA, has kept at the same level as last year, Rs 460 crore—it had been allocated Rs 700 crore in 2014–15. For several other schemes, the allocation is so low that it is obvious that they are going to remain on paper only, and have been announced for propaganda purposes only. Thus, the Central Social Welfare Board, that is supposed to run several important programmes for the welfare and development of women and children, especially in rural areas, has been given a measly Rs 71 crore; while the Rashtriya Mahila Kosh, that is supposed to provide micro-loans to women for livelihoods, micro-enterprises, etc. has been given a nominal Rs 1 crore. The allocation for women's helpline has been reduced to Rs 10 crore from Rs 25 crore in 2016–17. The allocation for the much tomtomed *Beti Bachao Beti Padhao Abhiyan* has been doubled to Rs 200 crore; but the government's seriousness about this scheme

becomes clear from the fact that of the low allocation of Rs 100 crore in the 2016–17 budget, only Rs 43 crore was spent. Ninety crores have been allocated for setting up of 'One Stop Crisis Centres' across the country to provide assistance to women victims of sexual assault; they were to have been set up in 2015, in 2016 Maneka Gandhi announced that 17 such centres had been set up, but news reports point out that many are only in name.²⁴ Even the National Commission for Women, a statutory body that investigates complaints related to deprivation of women's rights, has been allocated just Rs 25 crore.

But what reveals the government's total unconcern towards women's safety, despite the newspapers daily carrying reports of rapes, acid attacks and domestic violence, is the under-utilisation of the Nirbhaya Fund. Following the brutal gang rape of a young girl in Delhi in December 2012, that shook the conscience of the nation, this fund was announced by the then Finance Minister P Chidambaram in his 2013 Union Budget to support initiatives by the government and NGOs that support the safety of women in India, with a corpus of Rs 1,000 crore. Jaitley too added Rs 1,000 crore to this fund in both the 2014 and 2015 budgets, and then reduced it to Rs 500 crore in the 2016 and 2017 budgets. But what is most astonishing is that most of this money has remained unutilised. Most of the schemes announced by the government for implementation with these funds have remained only on paper. In fact, in May 2016, even the Supreme Court issued notice to the government questioning why the Nirbhaya Fund has been left largely unused!²⁵

The most important allocation within the Ministry of Women and Child Development is for Integrated Child Development Services or ICDS. Within this, Anganwadi services have been allocated Rs 15,245 crore, which is even less than the allocation of 15,433 crore in 2015–16 (Actuals). This cut has been made, despite a damning Niti Ayog Report of 2015 showing that around 41% of the Anganwadis have inadequate space, 71% are not visited by doctors, 31% have no nutritional supplementation for malnourished children and 52% have bad hygienic conditions.²⁶ With the government reducing the allocation, the conditions are only going to get worse. It is indicative of our ruling regime's complete insensitivity towards the crores of children in the country who are malnourished (39% of children under five are stunted and 28% underweight) and the more than two crore pregnant

women and lactating mothers. It also means that the Anganwadi workers who are being paid a pittance will continue to work at their very low wages.

Additionally, in his budget, the finance minister announced a grand scheme of setting up Mahila Shakti Kendras in all the 14 lakh ICDS Anganwadi centres. He stated that they will provide one stop convergent support services for empowering rural women with opportunities for skill development, employment, digital literacy, health and nutrition. Ambitious indeed! But, the total allocation for these 14 lakh Kendras—a princely sum of Rs 500 crore. That works out to just Rs 3,571 for each Kendra! Furthermore, these services are to be provided by the low-paid Anganwadi workers—as an additional duty, without any additional pay! Implying that this scheme is a mere eye wash.

Consequence: growing inequality

The acceleration of neoliberal policies in the country under the Modi regime has worsened the inequality in the country to extreme levels. A study released by Oxfam in January this year showed that the country's richest 1% people now owned more than 58% of the country's wealth. This figure was 49% in 2014, when the Modi Government assumed power.²⁷

“India's billionaires have never had it so good”, to quote a magazine that keeps track of these worthies. The number of dollar billionaires in the country has gone up by a record 50% in just two years, from 56 in 2014 to 84 in 2016, as per the latest global ranking of the uber rich by *Forbes* magazine. They collectively own a mind-boggling \$248 billion, or 8% of the country's total wealth of \$3,100 billion. As a percentage of the country's GDP, their collective wealth, at Rs 16.6 lakh crore (taking \$1=Rs 67), is equivalent to 11% of India's GDP for 2016–17! The top 57 billionaires have more wealth than the bottom 70% of the population.²⁸

No wonder the rich are elated with Modi–Jaitley; *achhe din* have truly come for them! With India now having the fourth largest number of billionaires in the world, they have declared that India is on its way to becoming an economic superpower.²⁹

On the other hand, the poor have never had it so bad! While the *Economic Survey* of 2015–16 claims that the incidence of poverty in the country has declined from 37.2% in 2004–05 to 21.9% in 2011–12, a host of other

studies show that this is a huge underestimate:

- Basing herself on official NSSO data, the noted economist Utsa Patnaik has shown that the percentage of persons in rural areas who could not consume enough food to obtain the minimum recommended calorie norm (2,200 calories/day) was 75.5% in 2009–10. In urban areas, the percentage who could not consume enough food to obtain the norm (2,100 calories/day) was 73%.
- The Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative of the Oxford University devised a Global Multidimensional Poverty Index, which used weighted indicators relating to education, health and standard of living to arrive at a measure of multidimensional deprivation. It found that in 2005–06, 53.8% of the population was ‘Multidimensionally Poor’, and another 16.4% was ‘Vulnerable to Poverty’, totalling 70.2%.
- The Socio-Economic and Caste Census (2011) data relating to rural households are now available. They show that for nearly 75% of rural households, the income of the highest earning member is less than Rs 5,000/month; and for 92%, it is less than Rs 10,000 a month. For more than half of rural households, the main source of income is manual casual labour—the most insecure, deprived and sweated type of employment.³⁰

Despite this extreme inequality and terrible marginalisation of the overwhelming majority of the country's population, the government is reducing its already low welfare expenditures on the poor, and transferring the savings to the rich! In the 2017–18 budget, the total allocation for the Department of School Education, the Department of Health and Family Welfare, for all agriculture-related sectors and for the Ministry of Women and Child Welfare totals Rs 46,356 + 47,353 + 1,65,671 + 22,095 = Rs 281,475 crore. This amount is roughly half of the total tax concessions given to the rich last year! And apart from tax concessions, the rich are being given so many other breathtaking subsidies—loan write-offs, loan restructuring, allowing them to plunder mineral wealth of the nation virtually for free, grants of public funds as ‘incentives’ to investors in the infrastructural sectors, and so on.

The Modi Government is undoubtedly the most pro-rich government in the history of independent India.

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Between The Lines**Politics at studies****Kuldip Nayar**

There was politics even during the period when I was in college before partition. But it was not on communal lines as it is today. Then the enemy was the British and all were at a struggle to oust them. It was the 1940s when Qaid-e-Azam Mohammad Ali Jinnah came to the Law College at Lahore and exhorted all of us to make a joint effort to drive out the British.

Subsequently, things came to such a pass that even water was divided into Hindu pitchers and Muslim pitchers. We, the students, were not contaminated at that time. We would eat together at the same table, ordering food from the Hindu kitchen as well as from the Muslim kitchen.

Today the polarization has contaminated Hindu community, dividing it into castes. Prime Minister Narendra Modi did not recognise this and recently talked about *kabaristan* and *samshanbhoomi*. He unnecessarily brought in the religion saying that why there is no power at *samshanbhoomi* while it was available at *kabaristan*.

State chief minister Akhilesh Yadav corrected the Prime Minister and stated that Uttar Pradesh had electricity for 24 hours and both *kabaristan* and *samshanbhoomi* get constant power supply despite the fact that the state had been facing severe power cuts. The complaints the Muslims make is that there are fewer ATMs in their localities and

they feel handicapped in withdrawing money.

This may be true. But the Muslims do not point out at the real reason. They lost their importance after the creation of Pakistan which was founded on the basis of religion. Congress leader Maulana Abul Kalam Azad fought a lonely battle against this thinking during the British period itself. He would say that if the Muslims felt unsafe or insecure in a large country like India, they would feel still more unsafe in a partitioned India because the Hindus would tell the Muslims to go to Pakistan after having taken their share.

This is precisely what happened. It was Jawaharlal Nehru who was able to stop the exodus. Along with Sardar Patel, who was not enthusiastic about Muslims staying back in India, appealed to the Hindus that Mahatma Gandhi who freed India from bondage would say that India would continue to be a country where there will be no distinction between Hindus and Muslims.

The Muslims community has lost its importance in government affairs after partition. They number about 17 crore in India but have no important portfolio in the Narendra Modi cabinet. Mukhtar Abbas Naqvi was the lone Muslim face until M.J. Akar was inducted as the second minister of state. This does not, however, cover up the tilt towards Hindutva.

The scenario in UP only underlines the Modi's or, for that matter, the BJP's thinking. True, Hindus are in a preponderant majority in India but the country is ruled by the constitution which gives the voting rights to every individual without any distinction. When this clause was discussed at the Constituent Assembly, Sardar Patel was willing to give reservations to Muslims. But the community refused it on the ground that such thinking would again result into another division.

Nonetheless, the appeal to voters is still on the basis of caste and creed. Although the Election Commission has banned invoking the name of religion or community, the political leaders continue to use them so blatantly because they knew that the Muslims did have a say when it came to elections.

We could see leaders of all hues and parties trying to woo the Muslim voters during the recent election campaigns in UP, without saying anything to ameliorate their conditions which is worse than that of dalits according to the Sachchar Commission report. The offer of freebies, including electricity and writing off loans to farmers, is the routine traits adopted by all political parties. This once again goes on to prove how the Muslims are used as a vote bank.

Unfortunately, all these last until the polling dates. Soon after, different

parties go their own way and the elected government once again turns a blind eye towards the betterment of Muslims. The wishes and aspirations spelled out in the constitution becomes only a mirage. The Muslims are pushed into the background to be brought back to the forefront before another set of elections.

I witnessed a similar scenario when I left my hometown Sialkot. There was no difference during those days and we lived as citizens, not as Hindus and Muslims. I had even got the Crescent tattooed at the bidding of my Muslims friends.

However, none of them agreed to my plea that one of them should have a tattoo of OM. They said that they would be beaten up at their home if they did.

We have come a long way from that time. Today, the society is so polarized that the question of tattooing other religion's symbol does not arise. He would be a brave man who dares the community by violating its code. Muslims prefer to live in a locality where their community's people are concentrated. They do not feel safe in a mixed or secular habitation.

At the same time a Muslim does not get accommodation or think of buying a property in a decent locality. They do not even agitate for it lest they should be misunderstood. But there are instances of Muslims having bought properties in a Hindu locality after the court's intervention. Of course, there are some misguided elements among Muslims throwing their weight about.

However, despite Hindutva factor people in India are realizing that they have to live together as they have done centuries before. That is the idea of India and most people are clutching at it.

Violence in Delhi University

Socialist Yuvjan Sabha (SYS) condemns the violence that broke out in Ramjas College of Delhi University a few days ago. SYS condemns similar bouts of violence happening in other universities. The tragic suicide of the promising research student Rohith Vemula of Hyderabad University too could be viewed as the result of this trend of violence in student politics. SYS believes that universities are a platform for the freedom of expression and the holistic development of students. The future of the nation is shaped in its universities, where students sharpen their intellectual acumen to lead a more meaningful life for the nation and society. But the pervasive violence witnessed first at JNU and now in DU has diminished the stature of the universities. This has caused insecurity for students (especially those who have come here to study from far-flung areas) and has disrupted their academic career.

Under the umbrella of the power at the Centre Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad (ABVP), the student wing of RSS/BJP, is indulging in routine ruckus in the name of nationalism and culture. In reaction to this, the communist students' organizations lead protests for freedom of expression in the campuses. In the battle for supremacy between Sanghis and communists, the general lot of independent, liberal, non-violent, democratic, secular students, and those who advocate social justice naturally stand against ABVP's retrograde agenda. But the communist student organizations often try to use them for their own limited agenda. This weakens the struggle which benefits the ABVP. Communist student organizations do not actually lead these groups; this was proven beyond doubt with the BAPSA's impressive demonstration in JUNSU elections when it contested for the first time. SYS had fielded its panel in the DUSU

elections after a long hiatus in 2013 and 2014 and received good support from the student community. SYS believes that in the university campuses, the fight for the freedom of expression should not be transformed into a fight for hegemony.

It is a matter of great concern that in the wake of the Ramjas incident some communist comrades openly advocated violence on social media. The ill effects of violence are usually borne out by the students from the weaker sections of society. SYS believes that university campuses should be no place for violence of any kind from any quarter. Consequently, SYS unequivocally opposes the violence. The time has come when all student organizations must agree to follow the path of non-violence advocated by thinkers like Gandhi, Bhagat Singh, Acharya Narendra Deva, Yusuf Meherally, Kamla Devi Chattopadhyaya, Dr. Ambedkar, Frontier Gandhi Khan

Abdul Gaffar Khan, Dr. Lohia, JP and Kishan Patnayak.

The Ramjas incident has become an alibi for some people to speak against student politics. What is the need for politics in university premises, they ask. SYS believes that the right kind of political training can happen only in the environs of universities. In this

context, the following statements by Bhagat Singh and Dr. Lohia are pertinent:

‘They (the students) should study. They must study. Along with it, they should also acquire political knowledge, and jump into politics if and when the need arises, and dedicate their lives to its cause.’
(Bhagat Singh)

‘When students do not participate in politics they tacitly support governmental politics and in this way do politics indirectly.’
(Dr. Lohia)

Come; let us all join hands to free education and educational institutions from the clutches of neo-liberalism.

–Niraj Kumar, *President* ; Bandana Pandey, *General Secretary*

The author of two articles ‘RSS–biggest threat to democracy’ and ‘Mayawati set to return in Uttar Pradesh` published in the last issue at *Janata* is Sandeep Pandey.

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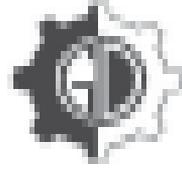
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