

FORUM

THE FEASIBILITY OF APPLYING THE INDIAN MODEL OF EMPOWERING DALITS TO ROMA COMMUNITIES IN CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE

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ABSTRACT The paper explores the socio-economic similarities between two marginalized communities: scheduled castes and nomadic tribes in India and the Roma of Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) and focuses on the transferability of the ‘affirmative action’ model of India to address poverty, disempowerment and lack of integration of the Roma in CEE societies. In this context, the European Union’s (EU) Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies (NRIS) needs to be critically assessed to identify the fault lines in the extant models and suggest a way forward. Due to the acute marginalization of the Roma in CEE countries, stigmatization and xenophobia and a significant lack of political representation. Under the circumstances their progress towards self-empowerment and better governance is extremely slow, if not stunted. Economic and political empowerment instruments, as adopted in India, can be seen as a possible alternative for Roma communities.

KEYWORDS Roma, India, Hungary, ‘affirmative action’ model, empowerment

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INTRODUCTION

The aim of this paper is to explore the links between the Roma in modern-day Europe – whose cultural connections clearly support their Indian origins – and their counterparts in India. Hence, this paper primarily attempts to re-establish these connections while drawing upon the idea of transferability in public policy to address poverty and disempowerment. The paper is the product of preliminary field work that I conducted when undertaking a doctoral program at the Corvinus University of Budapest while serving as Indian Ambassador to Hungary.

Connections with India

European Roma trace their origins to India. Researchers believe that descendants of today's Roma (Gypsies) began their westward exodus in around 1000 AD (Shashi, 1990), although Grellmann was the first academic, through a linguistic study of the European Roma, to identify the connection with India in the eighteenth century (Grellman, 1953). Linguistic affinities between Hindi-Sanskrit from India and the various languages spoken by the Roma are remarkably conspicuous. Researchers have discovered at least 800 words or families of words that are common to the languages (Shashi, 2001). A study (Nature, 2012) led by Indian and Estonian academics confirmed the Indian origins of the Roma and even identified their former location and social background. The study examined the Y chromosome in DNA samples to compare the genetic signatures of European Roma thousands of years ago from the subcontinent. Scientists from Hyderabad's Centre for Cellular and Molecular Biology collaborated with their counterparts in Estonia and Switzerland to compare more than 10000 samples from members of 214 different ethnic groups from India (Nelson, 2012).

Interest in the connection between India and the Roma was established in the late twentieth century in part through the Indian writers W. R. Rishi (Grattan Puxon, 2008) and S.S. Shashi (Shashi, 2001) who undertook life-long research in this area. Notably, Rishi used the link as a nation-building project for Roma activists and employed the idea as part of the Roma World Congress in London in 1971. Rishi, an Indian Foreign Service officer, attended the first Romani World Congress in London in 1971 and persuaded the International Roma Movement at the Congress to incorporate in the design of its flag a cartwheel, resembling the Ashok Chakra of the Indian flag (Rishi, 2008), though the larger symbolism of the wheel is that of a people in movement.

This has remained the Roma emblem until this day.

In 1973 Rishi set up the Institute of Romani Studies in Chandigarh and the following year produced the first issue of the Roma biannual journal, the first of its kind for English-speaking readers. Rishi also organized two international Roma festivals in 1976 and 1983, both attended by the then Prime Minister of India, Mrs Indira Gandhi. Mrs. Gandhi in her message said that “the Indian people support the efforts of the Roma in enriching human culture. Theirs is an example of nationalism within internationalism, beyond prejudice, where large-heartedness thinks of all people as one big family living in harmony and trust”. (Roma World, 2001)

Shashi organized a conference on ‘Roma culture and heritage’ in New Delhi in 2001 where Ashok Singhal, President of the *Vishva Hindu Parishad* (World Hindu Organization), in his inaugural remarks, called for the Roma to be treated as ancient Indian emigrants. A resolution passed at the conference reiterated that “Roma preserved Indian ancient culture. They had a strong affiliation with India. They should be recognized by the Government of India as ancient Indian emigrants” (Shashi, 2003).

More recently, former MEP Livia Jaroka asserted that forms of self-help and collectivity practised in India to aid and empower marginalized groups could be transferred to European Roma communities (Jaroka, 2013). In the same year, a conference on Roma inclusion held at Corvinus University reflected on the same question. At this event, an Indian sociologist, Prof. Gopalakrishnan Karunanithi, presented a paper about women’s empowerment and community development in India and argued that this model could be applied to Roma communities in Hungary to support their development. (Karunanithi, 2013). In doing so, the Roma politician and the Indian sociologist established an important avenue for scientific inquiry that this paper seeks to add to. A key question that is considered here is whether Indian poverty alleviation programs can succeed with the Roma. The paper thus aims to bring about the salient features of the ‘affirmative action’ model as applicable to the Dalits and tribal groups of India and has largely helped their socio-economic empowerment whereas the same with contextual modifications could address the issues of economic empowerment and social inclusion in respect of the comparable and historically linked Roma in CEE countries.

Policy and Social Context

The Roma Platform in Prague, organized by the European Union (EU) and Roma civil society, established a set of 10 principles in 2009 to address the inclusion of Roma. They included commitments about the involvement of the Roma. This initiative was a precursor to the emergence of the EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies (NRIS; EC website,

2009). The EU advocates micro-credit and promotes decision-making for Roma empowerment through the framework of NRIS. Empowerment and microcredit have also been the central components of Indian strategies to alleviate poverty and marginalization of the poor. The EU Roma Framework is based on an *open method of coordination* and entails member states developing their own NRIS. It is a deliberative framework in which the European Commission (EC) stresses the importance of dialogue between government and Roma groups. Thus it is evident that there is growing political and policy impetus to address the issue. The different social contexts could also provide ground for correlation and comparative analysis between the two historically linked communities in India and Europe.

With reference to the European Roma, there are cases of profound and extreme multiple exclusion where those at the margins are consigned to life-long poverty and a state of disempowerment. I shall briefly outline the situation with poverty and exclusion in India and then Hungary. Hungary has been included in the analysis as it has a sizeable Roma population which is experiencing the type of problems typical of Roma in CEE countries. Hungary was chosen as the focus as it was leading the EU presidency when the Roma Framework was adopted and was a lead initiator of the framework. Thus, in theory, the paper is of particular relevance to policy makers, Roma activists and academics in CEE countries and particularly in Hungary.

Kocze and Rovid state:

“The Roma are second-class citizens... they are not equal members of the political community as their values and interests are not represented at either the local, national or international level, and the noble principle of an equally motivated and gifted Roma having the same chance of realising his or her life plans as non-Roma (in terms of profession, living conditions, leisure, and so on) remains a utopia.” (Kocze and Rovid, 2012.)

‘Anti-Gypsyism’ (ERRC, 2013) is deeply rooted in Europe and opinion-makers have openly defamed the Roma and Travelers (in the UK), using racist language and stigmatizing rhetoric in some cases. Such words have tended to encourage violent action against the Roma. The Committee for Human Rights in its report on Human Rights for Roma and Travelers in Europe (Council of Europe, 2011) has suggested that anti-Roma language should not be employed during electoral campaigns. For example, in the Hungarian national elections in 2014, the extreme right wing party *Jobbik* used anti-Roma rhetoric in its electoral campaign to a substantial extent. However, it

was successful in garnering a significant majority of votes in those districts which have large Roma concentrations, viz. the Central region, North and North-Eastern regions of Hungary, possibly because of a negative vote for the ruling center-right party which by default went to the extreme right.

The Roma comprise the largest minority group in Hungary, accounting for 5- 8% of the population according to estimations (5-800000). They live in diverse socio-economic conditions in different regions while a substantial part lives in ghettos in a state of near total alienation and disempowerment. According to Hungarian Government statistics, the Roma primarily live in poorer regions and a majority of them live in segregated neighbourhoods. Currently, an estimated 300 000 people live in 1663 such neighbourhoods. Nearly half the Roma live in absolute poverty (Decade for Roma Inclusion Secretariat, 2015). The percentages of Roma completing primary school are 87 percent and secondary 22 percent (Friedman, 2013). Life expectancy for Roma is said to be 10 years below the wider population (Roma Matrix, 2014).

Furthermore, the most underdeveloped regions have witnessed continuous demographic decline through migration, thereby leading to a reconfiguration of Roma ethnic regions. The Roma are frequently (re)located, for various reasons, from the cities to the outlying areas, where they are provided with subsidized accommodation.

The following deposition will provide the reader with a more descriptive illustration of the state of Roma exclusion based on a series of visits that I made to Roma settlements in Hungary.

Village A

Predominantly a Roma village with about 80 inhabitants, it is situated in the North Eastern part of Hungary and can be deemed to be one of the poorest villages in the country. I visited several houses and found them made of aluminum tile, tin sheets, broken wood and mud-plastered walls. None of the houses had proper doors and windows. Inside the houses, there was barely any furniture. In one house, there was a small table on which the family had a stove to cook. Besides this, there was a little bed in a corner where the parents and their three children slept together. I was informed that the father had no job and therefore no income and no means to feed his family. He ran a few errands for other houses and did some part time work under the public works program. There was no water or electricity, nor even toilet facilities; the family was forced to defecate in the open. This was the condition, more or less, in almost all the houses. The level of poverty encountered among the Roma in

that village, coupled with the lack of assistance from local authorities, was indeed shocking.

Village B

It is located south-east of Budapest on the banks of the River Tisza. The river flows right through the village, which has made the adjacent land fertile and suitable for agriculture. The village has 300 inhabitants, 97% of whom are Roma. I met a family who seemed to be relatively affluent compared to my previous experience in Village A. The head of the family earned 50 000 HUF from the public works program while his daughter earned 75 000 HUF as a school teacher. The man seemed to be content with the income and did not think of any additional income for the family. Almost everyone in the village lived off earnings from public works. There was hardly any contact between inhabitants of the village and the village authorities or between the village and Roma minority self-government bodies. These and other visits to Roma communities illustrate the extent of Roma poverty and the parallels that can be drawn with India.

Situation in India

India's population is about 1.3 billion people, more than a quarter of whom live in abject poverty. Out of 400 million impoverished people, nearly 80% belong to the marginalised communities (Scheduled Castes and Tribes). This group is arguably comparable to the Roma population of Hungary in so far as relative deprivation is concerned. The Rangarajan Committee Report, released in July 2014, used separate all-India rural and urban poverty indices (based on a standard food basket) and derived state-level rural-urban poverty estimates from them. The new poverty line indicates a decline in per capita expenditure on food and nutrition, calculated for a family of five. The Committee's estimates are that 33.9% of the rural population (260.9 million), and 26.4% of the urban population (125 million), were living below the poverty line in 2011-12. At an all-India level, 29.5% of the total population (363 million) were living below the poverty line at that time. The all-India level of poverty, as seen from the above figures, has thus fallen from 39.2%, calculated by the previous Tendulkar Committee, to 29%. (Orissa Post, 2014)

Indian Policy Responses

It was the noted constitutionalist and rights campaigner, Dr. B. R. Ambedkar who introduced 'affirmative action' to raise the underprivileged class (Dalits) out of poverty in India in the 1930s. Mahatma Gandhi, the foremost leader of the Indian Independence Movement, called the same people 'Harijans' or 'God's people' to give them respectability and empower them through such affirmative action. The basic objective was to integrate individuals from this caste, also known as 'Dalits' or the oppressed, who had long been subjugated by the upper caste, into the mainstream of the independence movement. (Gandhi, 2010) While Gandhi's fundamental objective was to raise the social standing of the Harijans, Dr Ambedkar sought to go beyond this goal and give the Dalits or Harijans political power. He was in favour of holding communal elections for the Dalits in India and granting them separate constituencies. This was strongly opposed by Gandhi who went on a hunger strike while undergoing imprisonment in the Yeravda Jail at Poona. This led to the Poona Pact between Gandhi and Ambedkar in 1933 where it was decided that seats should be reserved for Dalits in education and the workplace, but that they would not be awarded separate electoral constituencies.

The 1st Schedule of the Constitution defines the Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs) of India and enumerates rights and privileges accorded to them. The scheduled castes are found in different parts of India today in varying concentrations. As per law, 22.5% of places are reserved for SC and STs (15% to SCs and 7.5% to STs) in all government educational institutions and positions of employment in government and the public sector. Another 27.5% is reserved for Other Backward Castes (OBCs). Thus half of all government jobs and placements in government schools and colleges are reserved for members of underprivileged classes, a major part of whom are members of SCs and STs. Though it cannot be said with certainty that affirmative action has led to poverty alleviation, it has surely made a difference in the socio-political empowerment of the marginalized castes. For example, SC/STs are well represented in the Indian government, bureaucracy, judiciary, military, legislatures, both state and central level, and public sector undertakings, sometimes notwithstanding their talents and capabilities. With affirmative action having been enforced since the adoption of the Indian Constitution on 26 January 1950, at least three generations of backward classes have already benefitted. Though the Constitution had provided for reviewing the reservation system after 10 years since its coming into force, this has never been done.

Besides this major initiative, a good number of opportunities have emerged since independence for community empowerment. They include micro-financing through Grameen (rural) Banks and Agricultural Development Banks as well as the World Bank. This has led to entrepreneurship among the marginalized groups who employ their skills to generate an independent income. Moreover, illiterate women in villages have formed Self-Help Groups (SHGs) as well as cooperatives and are sharing produce such as milk, poultry, vegetables and fruits, etc. Village administrators facilitate their access to nearby markets, enabling them to sell their produce directly, or through a cooperative system by which they are paid for what they have supplied at the end of the day or week, thus providing the women with a supplementary income. The SHGs have largely helped in generating self-reliance and confidence among rural women to seek additional income for the family through forming collectivities.

In more recent times, the 'incubator' model (NSIC website) has been developed by the National Small Industries Corporation, (NSIC), an autonomous body under the Ministry of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises. The incubator model comprises small entrepreneurs who are from relatively uneducated and marginalized communities. The process entails 'holding the hand' of the small entrepreneur, firstly by educating him about the benefits of small enterprises and then providing him with legal advice and financial assistance through the facilities of Development Banks designed to support micro and small enterprises. After this, the would-be entrepreneur is given the tools and technology appropriate to his skills and needs, and trained to use such machinery to manufacture products. Besides he is supplied with subsidized raw materials through cooperatives and facilitated in his product marketing. With the advent of IT, the process has become even simpler and has led to success of the micro-financing model in India.

Mahatma Gandhi's concept of cooperatives is of currency in assisting rural India to improve village economies and promote self-sufficiency and inclusivity. An immensely-successful example of this is the milk cooperatives in Anand (state of Gujarat) which are run primarily by women and which have by now become a major force under the brand name '*Amul*', even exporting milk products to other countries besides fulfilling the essential needs of a huge market such as India's.

Karunanithi's study, referred to above, was designed to identify the factors in the success and failure of such models - with respect to women's empowerment and community development - by focusing on the operation of women self-help groups in Tirunelveli district of Tamil Nadu. The study has come out with the benefits in terms of economic relief (viz. loans extended

by banks to SHGs), but also the empowering nature of such forums which give Indian women a platform to build capacity and participate in decision-making themselves.

Today, the '*Panchayat*', or collectivity of 5 village elders, as initially conceived by Mahatma Gandhi and brought to life through legislation, is found in every village in India and forms the first tier of governance called '*Panchayati Raj*'. It has effectively linked the village to the district administration, as well as the state (province). As per law, one third of Panchayats in the 660 000 villages of India are to be headed by women. Today we find approximately 50% of Panchayats are led by women, thus proving themselves to be capable leaders and decision makers at the primary rural level,

With the coming of ICT, the villages have gained better access to urban areas as well as to markets. IT networking in India has helped by effectively facilitating the access of the poor to administrative services. It is a different matter that funds earmarked for the purpose of promoting the inclusion of the backward classes and castes are sometimes not properly channeled to the target groups, resulting in leakage and corruption. However over the years, with an upright administration, vigilant audit system, media and judiciary, several systemic faults are being eradicated.

It is thus evident that affirmative action has been a tool of seminal importance in reversing economic and political exclusion, alongside microcredit, self-help groups and other forms of collectivity which have played a key role. The key agents in microcredit, collectivity and self-help include economic institutions such as banks, though national governments and agencies such as the World Bank have also been central promoters of microcredit. Local government and NGOs are also key institutions in community empowerment. In some cases community empowerment has been delivered through constitutional change. For example, the Panchayati Raj system in India requires by law that women be represented, similar to the Roma minority self-governments providing for Roma representation. Collective action and community empowerment can take various forms and include economic, service-oriented and advocacy initiatives centered on the involvement of microcredit, self-help groups and non-governmental organizations, as well as participation in wider decision-making forums.

The following table summarizes the discussion outlined above and describes some of the key tools used in India to address poverty and exclusion:

Community Empowerment Activity	Description
Microcredit	Type of loan for developing business. Started in India in the 1970s and operated through commercial and agricultural banks or governmental and NGO agencies. In recent years, greater efforts have been made to combine credit with skilling and training in financial literacy.
Self-Help Groups	Like credit unions, members come together and make regular financial contribution to their group. After a period of time members can take small loans from the group to facilitate economic activities. SHGs often have a leader who represents the group and undertakes administrative work on their behalf.
Non-Governmental Organizations	NGOs can be local and/or national and be involved in a range of economic, cultural, education and training or advocacy initiatives.
Panchayati Raj	The Panchayati Raj system in India reserves seats for women and 'other weaker sections' such as castes and certain tribes in elections for local bodies. One study has indicated that rural women have been active in panchayats that play a role in programs designed to promote local development (Prasad, 2009).

We can now discuss the feasibility of these approaches to the Roma communities, reviewing the progress of such initiatives that are already in operation, and those which have potential for alleviation if they are not being implemented at present. The paper divides the discussion into two sections: - Empowerment and Poverty.

EMPOWERMENT

Collective strategies that skill up those at the margins can increase gender awareness and empower through forms of community organizations which have transformative potential by increasing decision-making opportunities and abilities (Torri, 2010; Tesoriero, F. (2006)). They represent a departure from traditional forms of community development which can be viewed as hierarchical; instead, emphasis is placed on community-based organization and empowerment (Andharia, 2009). How well-positioned are the Roma communities to replicate such methods of empowerment?

Roma Civil Society

In their thought-provoking paper on Roma Civil Society, Thomas Acton and Andrew Ryder highlight the concept of ‘Social Europe’, unfolding a vision of a society based on equal opportunity, social justice and solidarity with a fair distribution of economic wealth and an absence of discrimination against any particular group or individual. However, the paper also delves deep into the ‘malaise’ of European societies, wherein Roma communities have been amongst the most prominent victims of both poverty and xenophobia. In fact, the Roma have experienced an acute form of marginalization in CEE countries during the transitional period to the market economy since the early 90s. Habermas has called for greater ‘deliberative democracy’ in Europe (2010) and proposed better coordination in various areas, including economic equality. It has been found that forms of deliberation, centered on inclusive community development, are needed to mobilize the marginalized classes. But the marginalized themselves must participate in the process. It has been seen that donor-driven agendas and bureaucratic NGO structures are impeding the progress of Roma communities. Besides, national governments and the EU, are merely offering ‘lip service’ to empowerment.

The ability of Roma advocacy networks to reach and connect with the Roma communities and create consistency of support has been limited by the acute marginalization of the Roma communities. Trehan (2011) has claimed that NGO-ization with its ‘managerialism’ and paternal donor-driven agenda are hindering Roma communication and mobilization. Furthermore, resource limitations require that government intervene if rapid solutions are to be found, as donor-driven agendas foster limited cooperative development amongst the Roma civil society in Europe. The Roma communities’ interaction with governments has been far from easy, with the Roma being viewed either as a deviant or primitive group to be ‘civilized’ by development projects (Powell, 2010), or punished (Liégeois, J-P, 2007). EC guidelines on the Roma framework advocate ‘partnership’ approaches whereby Roma NGOs and communities, in terms of micro-policy, are partners in local, regional and national decision-making processes. If there is political will, EC and Roma civil society power elites can effectively use forms of deliberative engagement to create channels of bottom-up communication. With a plethora of civil society bodies active in social advocacy programs and with better coordination between national governments and Roma self-governing bodies, development plans for Roma socio-economic inclusion should not be difficult to create and implement. A more detailed assessment of the situation in Hungary provides some insight relating to the factors that are currently

limiting Roma empowerment.

In his well-articulated paper, 'The Political Significance of the First National Gypsy Minority Self-Government' (Kovats, 2001), Kovats mentions that Hungary was the first country to build a national, legally-recognized, state-financed network of elected institutions for minority representation (the minority self-government system was founded in April 1995). However, this initiative has not exactly been translated into adequate political representation for the Roma. At the time of dismantling of the Communist-controlled economy the economic impetus to address Roma marginalization vanished following Hungary's liberalization. Roma identity was categorized in the same way as that of other domestic nationalities; a status confirmed by law on the rights of nationalities and ethnic minorities in 1993 (the Minority Law, assimilated into broader minority policy) which was designed to shape further laws of identity concerning the national ethnic minorities of Hungary. However, the policy was centered on preserving the cultural identity of minority groups, as the proposed self-government system was primarily designed to enable minority populations to enjoy cultural autonomy. As Kovats points out in his paper, the bulk of funding that the national minority self-governments received in the period from 1995-98 was earmarked for project establishment costs.. Thus there exists an inherent inconsistency between the dynamics of Roma politics as concerns the goal of promoting equal opportunities and the role played by self-governments in promoting different minority identities by encouraging cultural expression.

Roma representation in parliament is also a cause for concern. Peter Vermeersch in his paper points out that from 1990 to 1994 the Hungarian National Assembly had three Roma MPs. Antónia Hága and Aladár Horváth were elected from the Free Democrat Liberal Party list while Tamás Péli was elected from the Socialist Party. Of these three, only Hága managed to retain her seat until 1998 (Vermeersch, 2000). It is important to note that there are only two Roma MPs in the current Hungarian Parliament. The Open Society Foundation (OSF), in its Report of 2012, described a case study which included five governments, including Hungary. The Report stated that in the case of Hungary the government maintained close cooperation with the Roma self-governing bodies as the leaders of these bodies were often politicians from the ruling party. This form of cooperation does not cover the diversity of civil society and the entirety of Roma stakeholders, and these political consultations do not appear in the public domain. Besides the under-representation of the Roma in national politics, the limited size of the Roma constituency inherently bars Roma leaders from participating in political life, where they are perceived by the far right as a social problem and a threat to

political stability. The widening gap between Roma and non-Roma politicians has reflected itself in popular thinking and public behavior, the Roma already having been subject to negative stereotyping in many CEE countries.

The negative view of the Roma, however, does not correspond to the complex reality of Roma culture and promotes the illusion that the social position of the Roma and the general breakdown of inter-communal relations between Roma and non-Roma is not an issue for which society should bear any responsibility, instead the Roma themselves are blamed for their misfortune. It is this type of reasoning which has been used systematically by the extreme right for political mobilization which has led to xenophobia and consequent ghettoization of the Roma communities.

Since the Roma live in segregated settlements castigated by mainstream society, they tend to strongly bond among themselves providing succor in times of need as well as building defense mechanisms to protect their own interests. Furthermore, they develop empathy and a feeling of kinship which causes them to rely on each other, a process reinforced through their common language and cultural traditions (Kallai, 2002).

Thus while cultural capital is sought to be preserved for Roma communities in multi-ethnic societies of CEE, there is a systematic depoliticisation arising out of extant ghettoisation which lead to erosion of basic human values and abuse of human rights for these communities. (Sigona - Trehan, 2009)

ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT

Here the range of support mechanisms available to the Roma are explored and assessed in terms of their effectiveness for poverty alleviation. Such mechanisms include microcredit, training and work experience. Debate exists about which forms of empowerment, enterprise and collectivity are transferable from the Indian context to the European. For example, offering microcredit to Roma communities has only been partially successful. Though this has been an essential path of EU funding, in Hungary, for example, it has been noted that a would-be Roma entrepreneur may need a microcredit loan of several thousand Euros as opposed to an Indian entrepreneur who may need only a few hundred Euros depending on the respective milieus and forces of production. It should also be noted that the profits generated from agriculture or crafts businesses in Europe may be less sustainable than in India. Furthermore, the Roma may consider the risk involved in loans to be such that it is safer to continue working at their existing low income jobs, or combine welfare benefits with participation in the informal economy. In

addition, lack of assets (collateral) or poor credit history may further preclude the Roma from accessing credit (Ivanov and Tursaliev, 2006). However, these problems may not be insurmountable. There are numerous success stories of women's Self-Help Groups in India which have accessed micro-credit and demonstrated their ability to run micro-enterprises profitably. Nevertheless, they are sometimes confronted with problems relating to loan management, repayment, and the overall sustenance of micro-enterprises (Karunanithi, 2011). In many cases, members of a group prefer to start business enterprises individually after equally dividing loans availed on behalf of the group as they lack adequate training to participate in collective business ventures.

In an interesting article on micro-lending to the Roma, Ivanova and Tursaliev (2006) point out that the micro-finance model is not successful as the sole tool - or even as the most important tool - for stimulating Roma economic growth and social empowerment. They suggest that certain common principles for micro-financing should be developed and applied in case of the Roma and that micro-lending should not be seen as a stand-alone tool and a starting point for poverty alleviation. Micro-lending, to be successful, must be combined with applied tools such as training and traditional business support, including assistance with marketing and professional skills development. In fact, these skills should ideally be in place before a potential entrepreneur even applies for micro-financing. To this may be added the proviso that educational and legal assistance should be given to under-educated Roma to ensure that they have picked up the legal skill necessary to sign documents in full awareness of their implications. As pertinently brought up by the authors, approaches that may work in developing economies may not work for the Roma who live in isolated pockets of poverty in 'developed' economies. Micro-financing has not had the expected success in countries such as Hungary because the Roma have limited access to capital; i.e. they lack collateral, a credit history and business skills, etc.

A survey conducted by Ivanova and Tursaliev (Ivanova and Tursaliev, 2006) among 3534 non-Roma households revealed that 26% of them were using some type of credit instrument. By comparison, 15% of the same member of Roma households said that they had secured small loans which were not sufficiently large enough to address their food or healthcare needs, nor even to serve them in times of emergencies. Furthermore, the marginalized status of the Roma effectively cuts them off from formal lending markets. Roma communities can engage in small scale crafts, trading or farming but these activities are rarely marketable or financially successful enough to generate the cash necessary for repayment of loans. Accordingly, instead of going to commercial banks some fall prey to usury and are forced to pay a very high

rate of interest on loans. It is therefore through social economics that the state, through its political institutions such as self-government mechanisms, should intervene and extend subsidized micro-credit through banks or other financial institutions.

I have visited a project developed in Tiszaroff in Hungary where about 50 Roma have come together to manufacture tomato sauce and juice from tomatoes that are grown in adjacent fields and marketed in the same region through the auspices of the Mayor's Office. A similar project has been implemented in the village of Hosszúpályi near Debrecen in Hungary which has a mixed population. Here the Roma beneficiaries have received support in the form of grants to produce vegetables (tomatoes, paprika, beans and cucumbers) and trained to move to the next stage: marketing the products, thereby creating surplus income. Members of the Roma communities have constructed greenhouses to generate higher productivity in lesser cultivable land. The project, started with 15 families, has become a major success (Higines, 2003). Similar greenhouse cultivation in the southern village of Cserdi has been eminently successful in raising productivity while developing bio-organic vegetables.

Thus approaches to micro-lending should reflect realities on the ground and be based on a broader understanding of the benefits of micro-financing, instead of being solely towards financial viability of loans. Such micro-financing invariably requires grants or subsidized loans from the state or state-backed institutions.

Thus far, the primary approach of Hungarian decision-makers has been to engage the Roma in work programs, using their basic unskilled labor for sub-standard and marginal employment (Kemény, 2002). This paper advocates honing the skills of the Roma to build a vibrant, entrepreneurial, self-sustaining community with the purpose of reducing the burden of unemployment while using the demographic dividend (each Roma family, to generate cumulative societal gains).

CONCLUSION

Fostering entrepreneurship through micro-finance, SHGs and other forms of collectivity is an essential tool for societal development, more so for marginalized communities, who can grow much better through collective rather than individual actions with adequate and regular state intervention. The differences in context between India and CEE countries in respect of marginal communities are evident, but for economic empowerment and social

inclusion of such groups, certain core elements need to be replicated from India to Europe with contextual modification.

In fact the approach of a neo-liberal state to make business for banks through micro-lending defeats the very purpose of such palliative tool in raising the economic standards of the ‘social bottom’ surviving at the margins of the society and fostering their social inclusion. In this, the Indian example of affirmative action and extension of micro-credit through non-commercial banks at subsidized interest meets the purpose.

The paper is a critical attempt to understand the respective context in India and Hungary, given the ethnological and historical links between marginalized communities in both societies, while using the advantages visible in the Indian context to suit the specificities of the CEE in looking at socio-economic empowerment of Roma communities. With a surfeit of Roma-related NGOs and activities in CEE, particularly in Hungary, and with greater visibility to the Roma cause having been made the sine qua non of the EU frameworks of social inclusion and NRIs, the paper seeks to challenge established notions of inability of extant financial instruments and, on the contrary, draws the salience of such measures for the overall benefit of the Roma communities suggesting a course of action for policy makers and concerned state and NGO bodies. Finally, if such measures have shown a great deal of success, albeit in larger economies of scale such as India, these could be adapted and brought into relief in the context of Roma inclusion and empowerment in Hungary as well. In this way, yet another bilateral link could be meaningfully explored and developed between India and Hungary on sharing of knowledge, best practices and experience.

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