India – Seventy Four year of Independence

Nehru made this famous midnight speech about India’s tryst with destiny on the night of 14 - 15 August 1947. Now, more than seventy four years later, what has our destiny been? Have we redeemed the pledge Nehru spoke about?

In Some ways, India’s development since independence is commendable, maybe unique. Yet, in other areas, our achievements have been disappointing, pathetic and miserably poor.

On the credit side India has acquired considerable capability in industry and manufacturing. Health services have improved. Longevity has increased, agricultural output has increased. The economy has grown. The Green Revolution did away with our dependence on PL 480 imports of wheat from the US. From chronic or recurrent food deficits,we have reached agricultural self sufficiency. Endemic famine is a thing of the past. But we still hear of starvation deaths in certain pockets of the country, partly still due to maldistribution, but mostly due to lack of purchasing power. It is a disgrace to the country that after Eight Five Year Plans, 25 to 40 percent of the population still lives below the poverty line. They cannot buy the food that is there in shops.

The Human development indices are still low. India ranks 126 in the world – a much lower ranking than countries of Asia and Africa which achieved independence later. China, starting out in 1949, with a much bigger population than ours, has management to achieve 80% literacy. In India, the literacy rate is an abysmally low 52% percent, with women’s literacy rate being lower. Birth rate is still high (though India was one of the first countries to adopt Family Planning policy officially) and so is infant mortality rate, compared to the developed nations. With increasing population, overcrowding in city slums and unemployment are perennial problems.