

DEPRIVATION AND POVERTY AMIDST GROWTH

There is no doubt that as a nation we are on the threshold of most dramatic transformation in the realm of our market economy. Fortunately, we also have many amongst us, top leaders to ordinary people, from business to social work, small places to big cities, children to elders who dream about an India as a world class developed nation. We are flooded with changes, new ideas and visions, like never before. One of our most brilliant and forthright journalists - turned a Minister¹, who happens to be one of such dreamers, strongly feels that this is 'India's moment', the only moment that we must grasp. Perhaps, the moment is to be understood in historical terms wherein, at times, decades look like 'moments', particularly in the context of the real socio-economic transformation for the majority who remain unaffected by the winds of change that appear to blow around us, those of us, who remain at times isolated from the realities and cocooned. Even if we accept the reduced figure of nearly 260 million, or 27% of population now being below poverty line (BPL), these many Indians, perhaps many more (another 20-25%) who happen to be just above the poverty line - are generally unaffected by our changing economy.

Nobody disputes the power of knowledge and that of Information Technology, particularly when this industry alone constitutes or makes for exports worth over \$10 billion or Rs. 45 thousand crores, i.e., 20% of our total exports. We are indeed proud of being one of the three countries in the world, along with US and Japan, who have built super computers and one of the six to launch satellites. One also feels greatly inspired when told about the endless list of world class success stories not only in IT software and hardware, but also in automobiles and components, industries like diamond cutting and polishing – 9 out of 10 stones passing through us, major chunk of garment exports in the world market, sourcing the global multinationals in myriad consumer goods products and creating their units while stalling part of our brain drain from India. Our success is indeed astounding, that ranges from the indigenous medicinal herbs and surgery to the fast changing technology in mobile telephones and the latest management skills and systems in business management. With our foreign exchange reserves exceeding \$100 billion (more than \$ 285 billion in China) looking back at nearly empty gold and foreign exchange reserves a little more than decade back, we have come a long way. Year 2004 begins with 6000+ sensex, highest ever GDP of 8.4%, and the Planning Commission targeting a growth rate of 8% during the Tenth Plan (2002-07). Added to all these, major infrastructural projects in the sectors of road transport, rail and civil aviation, power and communication, appear to be very much in place while laying the foundations of a transformed India.

Whenever India is discussed as the second largest chunk of humanity, inevitably, we get compared to world's largest country, China, although our political systems, social structures, even historical and cultural traditions are very much at variance. One simple reason why it is so happens to be our extraordinary similarity in terms of human resources. In any case, what could be more precious for any society or a nation than the human resources, the people who inhabit and create the same. Since the major part of our existence as individuals, each one of us who constitute a

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nation, primarily depends on the basics like food, clothing, shelter, security, recreation and the needs of development, such as, health, education and other factors that determine the quality of life. These are the features which must also occupy our thought process while being a part of a nation in quick march on the path of the development. There is no dearth of civilizations, countries and societies wherein situations of abysmal deprivation and poverty have co-existed with opulence and prosperity. When we carefully examine the real status of our human resources in terms of the actual conditions in which about 50% of Indian's live, it becomes impossible to think of ourselves as an equitable, a really progressive country in the midst of a fast developing global market economy.

India's human resources and demographic profile, in terms of human development indicators, which still place India at 127th rank amongst 174 countries, bears a compulsory, albeit reluctant, comparison with China. In 2002, China's population was nearly 1294 million, as against 1049 million of India, the under-18 population of India being 413 million and under-5, 119 million, as against China's 373 and 93 million, respectively for the same age groups. The figures on demographic and human development indicators of some other countries, which appear to be relevant, are those of Bangladesh, Nepal and Pakistan – being similarly situated, and of Srilanka which has somehow acquired an altogether different progressive profile despite a protracted internal war for a decade and half. During the past one-decade, none of these South Asian countries, including Srilanka, has undergone the remarkable economic upsurge, which our country has seen. Yet, on comparison, the primary economic indicator¹ i.e. GNI per capita of India, it is \$480 as against in China's \$ 940 per annum, \$360 for Bangladesh, \$230 for Nepal, \$410 for Pakistan and \$840 for Srilanka. Another developing country, Malaysia, which may also be compared having recently turned into a progressive country, has shown GNI per capita of \$3540, which is comparable to some of the most prosperous countries in the world. Globally speaking, India's per capita GNI when read with the information about 35% of India's population earning less than one dollar a day in 2001, as against 36% of Bangladesh, 38% of Nepal, 13% of Pakistan and 7% of Srilanka, does not at all give a happy picture.

Turning back to some of the demographic indicators, particularly in the context of disproportionate Under-18 and Under-5 population to the entire population which is higher in India than China, one finds the annual population growth in these two countries to be 2.1% during 1970-90 and 1.8% during 1990-2002 in the former as against 1.6% and 1.0% in the latter respectively. Both crude birth and crude death rates were higher in India compared to China, which conversely indicated the increase of life expectancy from 61 in 1970 to 71 in 2002, as against 49 and 64 years in India. Life expectancy in Bangladesh, Nepal and in Pakistan is lower than India, but in Srilanka, keeping the other HDIs in view, it has gone up from 64 years to 73 years between 1970-2002. Needless to mention that the demographic and economic indicators have a strong correlation with the human development indicators, which, ultimately, define the health and well being of a nation. Perhaps, in this entire exercise the treatment given to the children i.e. all human beings below 18 years of age² forming nearly 35% to 40% of the population, is most significant since that determines not only the actual status, as on the given date, but also the entire future of a given portion of humanity.

Nothing could explain better a nation's health than the basic health and literacy indicators themselves. Again, among the nations being discussed, Under-5 mortality rate ranking, that is, the death probability between birth and 5 years of age per

¹ World Bank & RBI Bulletin

² United Nations Convention on Rights of Child - 1989

thousand, ranks India - 53 as against China - 86, Srilanka - 130, and others, Bangladesh, Nepal and Pakistan being on 59, 54 and 44 positions respectively. Under-5 mortality rate is appropriately described as the most accurate indicator of social development since it includes not only nutritional, immunizational, health knowledge and awareness inputs, but also the actual state of maternal and child health services, income, food availability, clean water, safe sanitation and the overall child safety environment¹. India has made remarkable progress from 242 per thousand U5-MR in 1960 to 93 in 2002 as against 315 to 91 of Nepal, 227 to 107 of Pakistan. Quite predictably, China has gone up from 225 per thousand in 1960 to 39 in 2002, same as Srilanka from 133 to 19. Bangladesh has also done well, better than India, by improving from 248 to 77 U-5 MR during the same period². Besides the fact that nearly 30% infants are born in India and Bangladesh with low weight, their wasted / stunted profiles being slightly better in Bangladesh, the situation appears to be somewhat similar in Nepal and Pakistan, indicating the poor nutritional status of the children.

In terms of Infant Mortality Rate (IMR under-1), in the latest world's children report 2004 between 1960-2002 some countries under comparison including India, have made major progress. From 146 per thousand India has reduced IMR to 67 (ranking 53rd), Nepal 212 to 66 (ranking 54th), Pakistan 139 to 89 (ranking 44th), Bangladesh 149 to 51 (ranking 59th), Sri Lanka 83 to 17 (ranking 130th), China 150 to 31 (ranking 86th) and Malaysia 73 to 8 (ranking 158th). It is obvious that we have not done any better, even compared to Bangladesh and Nepal.

While, looking into the economic indicators in these countries, the respective Central Governments' expenditure (during the decade 1992-2001) allocated to health, education and defence become significant parameters. Whereas in India, the allocations in these three sectors were 2%, 3% and 16% of the total budget, in Bangladesh it was 5%, 11% and 10%³ in Nepal it was 5%, 15% and 5%, in Pakistan 1%, 1% and 18% and in Srilanka it was 6%, 10% and 18% respectively. Incidentally, in Malaysia during the same period, the expenditure on health, education and defence was 6%, 23% and 11% respectively⁴. Defence, indeed, attains the paramount importance in the context of the global and sub continental security scenario, nonetheless, the basic development considerations that create the level of human existence can't be accorded lesser priority.

Considering the Millennium Development Goals 2000 and realizing the value of education as a fundamental human right and the targeted education for all by year 2015. The educational scenario in the South Asian region is no better, except in Srilanka having 92% overall literacy (2000) and net primary school (1996/2002) enrollment / attendance at 97%. As against India's 57% adult literacy and 76% net primary school/attendance. During the same years, Pakistan has reported 43%-56%, Nepal 42%-73% and Bangladesh 40%-89% of adult literacy and net enrolment attendance in primary schools⁵.

The Govt. of India has of late forcefully recognized the education to be the most crucial investment for the human development, a powerful tool for progress to ensure equality and social justice¹. The government has also felt that despite all efforts at Universal Elementary Education, (UEE), half of the adult Indian population — two-thirds being women, continue to be illiterate, also indicating gender disparity, 66% male and 40% female. The literacy rate for rural India being just 54%, the overall

¹ State of the world's Children Report 2004

² United Nations Population Division and United Nations Statistics Division

³ Information incomplete

⁴ International Monetary Fund

⁵ UNESCO: Education for All Assessment 2000

literacy has increased from 52% in 1991 to 62% in 1997 (census for the population, aged 7 years and above). Highly disproportionate regional literacy rates, such as 90.92% in Kerala followed by Mizoram having 88.49% and the states like Bihar with 47.53%, somewhat explain the initiatives taken in some states and the lukewarm progress at the national level despite multiple ambitious projects, the latest being Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan.

The public expenditure on education has though increased from 77.14 billion in 1990-91 to 102.6 billion in 1997-98, an increase of 33%, the share of education in GDP has decreased, not exactly reflecting our national priorities. Ever since the historic Kothari Education Committee, (1964-65) reinforced by Ramamurti Committee, (1986) and ultimately estimation of the additional requirement given by Tapas Majumdar Committee, (1999) there has been constant demand for the increase to 6% GDP, the dream public investment on education. Saikia Committee calculated an average expenditure per student in classes 1 to 8 to be Rs. 948, and recommended an additional investment of Rs. 40 thousand crores during the next 5 years, whereas Tapas Majumdar Committee indicated an additional investment of Rs. 136 thousand crores over a period of 10 years ending 2007-08. Instead of reprioritizing the Indian economy to make the necessary investment in education to the desired 6% of GDP, we peaked to 3.99% of GDP in 2001-02 and fell down to 3.4% in 2000-01. The Tenth Five Year Plan allocation of Rs. 43825 crores on education which included Rs. 2875 crores on Elementary Education appears to be impressive but far below the requirement. The Kothari Commission had, incidentally, not estimated the critical areas of education, 'Early Childhood Care and Pre School Education' and the 'Inclusive or Integrated education of children with special needs', which remain excluded from our projects every since, including under SSA.

Following the 93rd Constitutional Amendment Bill proposing to make Right to Education as an enforceable fundamental right from 06 to 14 years of age as against the constitutional provision of 0-14 years of the age, an additional Rs. 6 thousand crores was provided. Revised budget 2002-03 allocated Rs. 4305.58 for education and literacy, 3764.37 crores for elementary education — inclusive of Rs. 1237 crores for district primary education programme, Rs. 1021.50 crores for nutritional support to primary education, Rs. 1220.03 crores for Sarv Shiksha Abhiyan and a small amount of Rs. 9.80 crores for NFE and literacy innovative programme. However, the actual additional allocation in the Union Budget 2002-03 is just about Rs. 728 crores for elementary education, which amounts to an additional expenditure of a 0.04% of GDP or just 4 paise out of every Rs. 100 of the GDP².⁶The total budget of 2003-04, allocation for elementary education was enhanced to Rs. 4669.40 crores, component of Sarv Shiksha Abhiyan including NFE & AIE being Rs. 1951.25 crores, indicating overall percentage in the general budget, in terms of GDP being no better.

India's demographic, economic and human development indicators, when placed along side, the success stories of our achievements in business and trade portray a disconcerting picture. Some of these UN generated facts and figures may not be accepted as so accurate being slightly behind the time, but generally they are not so much off the mark. The children, particularly the marginalized and disadvantaged amongst them, must give the 'first call' to our policy planners, administrators, politicians and to the leaders at all levels. They must draw our individual and collective attention everywhere from big cities to the small villages of the civil society at large represented by hundreds of thousands initiatives, and that

¹ Convention on the Rights of the Child, India first periodic Report 2001, Department of Women and Child Development

² Children in Globalising India, HAQ-Centre for Child Rights

of the sparkling world of new market economy who claim to hold the future of our nation in their hands. The issues relating to elementary education, health and child protection, water and sanitation, environment and that of poverty at large, which again afflict the children the most, indeed acquire extraordinary significance for a nation claiming to be one of the world's fastest growing economies. Although the state's direct commitment to children's education as a fundamental rights has now been limited to the age group of 6-14 years, 0-6 being placed in the category of early childhood care programmes and 14-18 excluded altogether, in the overall perspective it would not be wise and appropriate to overlook any one of these segments. Our children, 0 to 18 years, 40% of our population, are the true reservoirs of our country, the real human resource who we can't afford to neglect.

To understand their actual status, we may divide the under - 18 children's population of nearly 410 million in India in three categories i.e., 0-5 years - 119 million, 6-14 years - 220 million and 15-18 years - 70 million. In this entire population, nearly 140 million are estimated to be enrolled in the schools leaving nearly 270 million unaccounted children out-of-school from primary to secondary levels⁷. We have made some remarkable achievements in the field of education but the goal of Universalization of Elementary Education (UEE) remains a distant dream with at least 5-8 crores children being out of school even in the age group of 6-14 years. The drop-out rate at the primary level increased from 40.3% in 1999-2000 to 40.7% in 2000-01 and increased marginally at upper primary level from 54.5% to 53.7% during the same period. This trend may also be partly explained by the decrease in the number of primary schools from 642000 in 1999-2000 to 638738 in 2000-01 and the much publicized poor infrastructure: alarmingly poor state of buildings, toilets, drinking water facilities, learning teaching material and, often, the inaccessibility to the government schools.

Based on such estimations, the Planning Commission²⁸ lamented admission of only 120 million out of 200 million children (6 to 14 years) in the schools with about 66% enrollment at the primary level, a situation deemed completely unacceptable and calling for the most radical steps. Education being the most visible indicator of social development, other indicators like health, nutrition, U5MR, even the various parameters of poverty, like child labour, child protection fall in similar pattern. Honestly reflecting the situation of the out-of-school children which is now being considered to be the bench mark for all forms of child neglect, it is variedly estimated that between 44 million to 100 million children are being deprived and denied normal childhood opportunities. From small villages to metropolitan cities, they also happen to be the part and parcel of the unorganized work force in the country. In any case, among the officially admitted 92 % of the unorganized and unprotected labour in the country, the government estimated 10.6 million child labour may perhaps constitute a very small segment working in hazardous industries and processes prohibited under Child Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Act, 1986. This situation, inevitably, forces us to also take up the existing state of implementation under Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act 2000, India's basic law for children which the government also considers to be a "blue print for child welfare in the country". This legislation covers all categories of children in need of care and protection, the child workers deprived of their earnings to the millions of unprotected, abused and exploited children, besides the juveniles in conflict with law and those victims of crimes and myriad forms of injustices.

Since the problem of child labour as a major socio-economic concern gets inextricably inter-woven with the overall situation of poverty, labour and

¹ The India Child: A profile Department of Women and Child Development Ministry of Human Resource Department, GOI census 2001

² Approach paper 10th Five Year Plan: 2002-07

unemployment, it is most appropriate to take a realistic stock of the situation as well. The number of working children in the country officially declined from 2% of the total population and 6% of the total working force in 1981 to 1.34% of population and 3.59% of the total work force in 1991. The 55th round NSSO (1999-2000) estimated the working children to be 10.4 million, the overarching theme being that most of the children continued to be employed in the unorganized sectors, almost accepted form of child labour. The situation as it obtains is due to the overall poverty and child labour being closely linked in a vicious circle, one causing the other, and vice-versa. The recipe is 'Parents at work, children to schools and opportunities for the youth'¹. In home-based industries and domestic services², prior to 1991, Andhra Pradesh recorded highest number of child labour population in the country, other states with more than a million child labour being Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra and Uttar Pradesh. The child labour situation in the country is yet to be analyzed based census 2001, hence it is difficult to understand the impact of the new economic upsurge on the given situation. However, considering the sizeable loss of employment in the country during the decade following post -91 economic liberalization phase, the results cannot be positive in real terms. The impact of Child Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Act 1986 (CLPRA) which bans the employment of children below 14 years in factories, mines and hazardous industries and regulates the working conditions of the children in other areas of employment, has been finally found to be most insignificant.

To combat child labour in the country the successive 5 year plans have increased the allocations, i.e., from Rs. 5 crores during 7th plan to Rs. 249 crores in 9th Plan and now, in 10th Plan (2002-07) to Rs. 602 crores. Over and above the 100 districts, the NCL projects are now going to cover 50 additional districts and provide 'special schools' for identified and released children under the project, such children would be provided vocational skills, mid day meals, regular health check-up, and a stipend of Rs. 100/- per month. Considering the coverage so far, realistically the further coverage is not likely to create real impact, let alone eliminating child labour by 2007, as being claimed.

Similarly, the coverage of 2.11 lakh children under the solitary scheme of the government, National Child Labour Projects and the mainstreaming of 1.5 lakh children to the formal schools is at best most limited. An evaluation³ conducted on 100 projects headed by the District Magistrates, Deputy Commissioners of 100 districts in 13 states under various parameters reflected on matrices, such as, community involvement, monitoring system, enforcement of labour laws, convergence with other programmes, enrollment and school attendance of children, besides awareness generation etc has been found to be successful only in 50% of district, 50% being partially successful or unsuccessful.

In a recent, most limited study⁴ on child labour to ascertain the impact of legal action in the 9 hazardous industries, namely, glass bangle (Firozabad), gem polishing (Jaipur), slate (Markapur), carpets (Mirzapur), brassware (Muradabad), matches (Sivakashi), diamond (Surat) and knitwear (Trippur), mostly in household based situations, the intervention has been found to be negligible and somewhat disappointing. These are industries among the scheduled 13 hazardous occupations and 57 processes, which have been the prime focus of the Child Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Act 1986 and , consequently, the basis for the solitary government run National Child Labour Projects (NCLP) in 100 districts of India. Since the law does

¹ Juan Samavia, Director General ILO at the launching of 50 NCL Projects on 14th January, 2004

² Economic Survey of India, 2002-03

³ National Resource Centre Child Labour, V. V. Giri National Institute, Govt. of India

⁴ Conducted by National Labour Institute, Ministry of Labour, Government of India

not cover the home-based sectors, the legal interventions and the project coverage has remained most inadequate, same as, perhaps, our entire understanding of the child labour situation in the country which still mostly remains related to the household and family related activities. Child labour is considered to be a demand driven phenomenon fed by easy supply of cheap labour, which thrives on our poverty and poor attention to children. The legislation pertaining to child labour partly transfers the onus to the impoverished parents, same as in the legal process now being formulated under 'Free and Compulsory Education for Children Bill 2003' to implement the celebrated free and compulsory education as a fundamental right from 06 to 14 years of age. Both the issues ultimately being one and the same with the literacy, health care and child protection being the key denominators along with the child labour. Although, it is found that the majority of poor parents are motivated to place such children in the schools, the absence of a well provided free, compulsory and quality formal education and other programmes relating to health and poverty alleviation actually demotivate them.

It is impossible to segregate the entire population of such neglected children legally qualifying under Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2000 to be the 'children in need of care and protection', in myriad situations of conflict, victimization and deprivation, whose numbers have never been admitted, let alone estimated or counted. In the year 2000, the former Minister of Social Justice and Empowerment while hazarding a guess in consultation with some of us from the voluntary sector, indicated a figure of nearly 350 million. It is pointless getting into this endless debate wherein given the present state of public resources, the political and administrative will to enforce even the legal commitments, we don't consider ourselves to be in a position to tackle such pressing problems. All this again gets related to the overall situation of the massive want and poverty involving hundreds of millions that confronts India, albeit, in the midst of the new-found prosperity. The dramatically varying degrees of poverty and prosperity scenario in different parts of the country today divides India into many uneven regions, with very little being in common between states like Goa where poverty ratio was found to be just 4.40% of the population and Bihar where it was 42.60% of the population¹.

All of us, without exception, are proud of our achievements being part and parcel of the process to bring in the historic transformation of our country from an under developed to developed nation. In this regard, however, the national thrust economically speaking is to find commensurate space for the poor and marginalized in the national planning and, financially speaking, in the central government's budget which becomes crucial. Besides, enhancing budget allocations on elementary education and literacy, in the context of children – 'our supreme assets' in different forms of deprivations, the budget allocations acquire special significance. During 2002-03 the allocation for 'improvement of working condition of child / women labour' was just about Rs. 80.56 crores which came down to 72.89 crores in 2003-04, and 'to develop skills, ITIs and elimination of child labour', in the 10th Plan, the allocation is just about Rs. 3 crores.

The budget allocations for departments of health and family welfare has recorded an overall increase from Rs. 2427.14 crores in 2002-03 to 2469.09 in 2003-04, 4953.83 in 2002-03 to 4954.52 in 2003-04 respectively. However, there are no special schemes, except immunization programme and polio eradication for the infants, for the children below 18 years of age, per say. The budget allocations of Department of Women and Child Development (MHRD) increased marginally from Rs. 2253.63 crores in 2002-03 to 2653.91 crores in 2003-04, with the major component being integrated child development and related

¹ Economic Survey, Govt. of India 2001-02

programmes to cater to 0-6 years of age, wherein, the allocation increased from 1846.10 crores in 2002-03 to 2175.81 crores in 2003-04, the sizeable support coming from world bank.

Although, 'the department of women and child development' which happens to be the nodal ministry for the children who are by definition now upto 18 years of age, in terms of actual project this department covers only the age group of 0-6 years. This Department of HRD Ministry also constitutes the national committee for reporting progress on UNCRC in the context of our international commitment to our children's rights of survival, protection, development and participation. Such rights being almost synonymous with the basic need of the children they deserve resolution and fulfillment through concrete policies, an action plan to follow-up in a mission mode and adequate resources to make them real. In the absence of such a course being taken, the children miss out a holistic and undivided governmental treatment promised under national and international, legal and policy commitments.

Inevitably, besides the elementary education and ICDs under the Department of Women and Child Development, child labour related programmers under the labour ministry, for all practical purposes, Ministry of Social Justice & Empowerment becomes the nodal ministry for the age group of 6-18 years, which consciously happens to be the most crucial period for the children under difficult circumstances or the marginalized children. This ministry recorded a marginal increase in its budget from Rs. 1468.88 crores in 2002-03 to Rs. 1469.56 crores in 2003-04. The actual provisions for the neglected and delinquent children, now defined as 'children in need of care and protection' and 'juveniles in conflict with law' respectively under Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act 2000, is, perhaps, covered under the budget head "prevention and control of juveniles social mal-adjustment" with an identical paltry allocation of Rs. 6 lakhs in the budgets 2002-03 and 2003-04. Other form of scattered allocations may be within special categories of SC, ST, OBC, welfare of handicapped and under the drug abuse prevention and prohibition programmes.

As Convenor of one of the 10th Five Year Plan Committees to review the infrastructure and other requirements of the Children in Especially Difficult Circumstances (CEDC), who could be 35 million under the liberal definition of the law, we came to a conclusion that the amount allocated could be Rs. 450 crores for establishment of 308 children's home and Observations Homes and Rs. 376.68 crores for setting of 258 special homes. This was not inclusive of the expenses to be incurred on the children in need of care and protection, probation services, juvenile police unit, etc., being part of the basic requirement infrastructure. As against this, projection and the previous 9th Plan outlay of Rs. 41.24 crores, for the homes, 32.98 crores for street children, under the 10th Plan the allocation under the scheme for prevention and control of juveniles social mal-adjustment figured only Rs. 105 crores while under the newly introduced scheme for welfare of working children and children in need of care and protection the allocation constitute only Rs. 45 crores. Again while the amount allocated for the integrated programme for street children in 9th Plan was 32.98 crores, the amount spent was only Rs. 31.78 crores and the outlay for assistance to Homes for infant and young children for promoting in country adoption accounted Rs. 9 crores the actual amount spent was only Rs. 7.47 crores. In the 10th Plan these two programmes have been merged and retained as 'Grant-in-aid for welfare of children in difficult circumstances' with a total outlay of Rs. 85.90 crores. The basic infrastructure, including the apparatus to take care of the legal processes like Juvenile Justice Boards, Child Welfare Committees, Probation and other legal services and various types of homes for the juveniles / children. The

national and international commitments, provisions enshrined in the Constitution of India and plethora of child related legislations would at best remain on paper without this minimum infrastructure required under the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act 2000 in place. The juvenile justice apparatus as laid down in the 2000 Act, one of the most pro-active child legislations in the world, is appropriately considered by the government to be the 'blue print of child welfare in the country'. It is difficult to understand how the millions of children suffering neglect, deprivation and denial of basic rights and socio-economic and psychological justice could be overlooked in the process of our national development.

While relating the child labour situation to the overall labour and employment situation in the country¹ on Current Daily Status (CDS) basis the market decline in the rate of employment from 2.7% per annum in 1983-84 to 1.07% per annum in 1994-2000 would appear disturbing. The annual drop in agriculture employment in the total work force in the country from 60% to 57% (1993-2000) and the overall stringency in 'employment elasticity' in most sectors, except transport, financial services and real estates, needs to be given a very serious thought. By the most optimistic estimates, the organized sector employment account for just about 8-9% - public sector being 2/3rd of the same. Nearly 4.16 crores job seekers, 70% being educated - above 10th standard, as reported by country's 1939 Employment Exchanges in September 2002, is decidedly not a correct or complete estimate of unemployment in the country. However, it gives an indication, at times giving misleading picture, like the majority of job seekers i.e., 63.6 lakhs being in West Bengal, a province with much better human development status and considered to be one of the progressive states in India.

Considering the poor rate of employment in the organized sector, the unorganized sectors, such as, agriculture, trade, restaurant, tourism, non agricultural, small and medium entrepreneurs, transport and construction are found as most employment generating activities, hence must also take priority in terms of investments. Most interestingly, 'community social and personal services' accounting for 34.98 million and 30.84 million employment during 1993-94 and 1999-2000 respectively alongwith other high sectoral employers i.e., (1999-2000) being in trade hotels and restaurants, manufacturing and agriculture (37.54:40.79:190.94), also deserve equal attention. The 10th Five Year Plan while appreciating the centrality of employment objectives in the overall socio-economic development of the country very appropriately targets 10 million employment opportunities. This appears to be an impossible target to achieve without fully developing the potential of the employment generating sectors as above, particularly in the 'community social service sectors', with focus being on health and education, which might also ensure most positive human resource development. These sectors are primarily related to the voluntary and social sectors of activities, as distinct from the Government and corporate sector jobs, which need to be systematically developed to enable them to take the rightful mainstream position in the process of national development.

As a nation, however, we have no option but to look into the overall poverty that still grips the majority of Indians, the most vulnerable being the children, who are the worst sufferers. Judging from the accepted parameters of calorie consumption, the population below poverty line (BPL) is said to be coming down, but the repeated National Sample Survey reports also strongly indicate that per person nutritional intake in India has been falling since 1970's. We need to very carefully examine the overall progress in the country in order to ascertain the state of sustainable development, the evaluation of specific policies and programmes and the level of poverty based on other factors. The calorie consumption alone cannot be the yardstick for poverty measurement, it needs to include all other demographic,

¹ NSSO on Employment and Unemployment 55th round 1999-2000

economic and human development indicators, health, employment, education, housing and, other such parameters.

And

And above all, 'lack of opportunities and access to resources'¹ for nearly 60 to 65% of the Indians would ultimately, define the poverty.

We appear to be in the right direction when, in the wake of the much talked about economic progress, we are developing the physical infrastructure, like roads and transport, railways, power and communication, which are indeed the basic requirements for our growth. However, equally significant is our 'social infrastructure'² which include education, health care, water and sanitation services, environment and social safety nets i.e. variety of poverty alleviation programmes which get the axe in the budgets being considered non-productive. Education or literacy being an instrument of empowerment requires to add the missing components of skill and technical education to create goods and services which ultimately denote the economy. Thus, the need is to provide parallel system of alternative and technical education which, unfortunately, is being branded as something sub-standard when compared to the formal education. The technical and skill education in India happens to be just about 5% of the institutions as against 20 to 30% in the advanced and developed countries. Coupled with this major inadequacy, poor school infrastructure³ over 20% of single teacher primary schools, 56% schools having no drinking water and 70% having no toilets, one could imagine what kind of elementary educational system we provide.

Similarly, in the health and sanitation programmes, we still lag far behind the requisite standards, with about 7.5 % rural population and 9.8% urban population having no access of drinking water besides over and 90% of rural and 50.7% of urban population having no sanitation⁴. But the IMR & U5-MR being latest indicators situations may not have remarkably improved. The 'social safety nets' and anti poverty programmes cannot be under rated in the light of the overall issues relating to poverty deprivation and unemployment. Besides the children, could we, in any case, over look the needs of the other vulnerable groups, such as, over 50 million elders above 65 years, 50 million physically and mentally challenged and over 30 million widows suffering all forms of deprivations and social stigma.

There is no doubt that the central plan outlays on our major schemes relating to human development or social services have been on the increase over the past few years reflecting certain kind of change in priorities and the political inclinations. However, considering the disturbing trends in the poor human development indicators in India, even compared to some other poorer South Asian countries, our inputs do not appear to be adequate and the results responsive enough. During the FY 1999-2000 & FY 2001-02, the budget allocations have increased from Rs. 4700 crores to 5919 crores in education, of which elementary education increased from 3035 crores to 3800 crores; health including ISM&H from 1195 crores to 1553 crores with family welfare increased from Rs. 2920 crores to 4210 crores; WCD from 1320 crores to 1650 crores with ICDS recording an increase from 856 crores to 1198 crores and social welfare from 1207 crores to 1330 crores. Similarly, rural development, employment and poverty alleviation programmes together also have recorded an increase from 9751 crores to 9765 crores⁵. Referring to 10th Plan outlay, inclusive of Centre, States and UTs and the Social Services, covering education, medical and public health, family welfare, housing and other such services, the allocation of Rs. 347391 crores being 22.8% of the total outlay appears to be quite impressive. The will to augment resources for social services is again reflected in the overall annual plans 2002-03 (DE) wherein the inclusive outlay is Rs. 30928 crores being, 21.5% of the total

¹ Prof. Amartya Sen, Development as Freedom

² India Development Report 2002: Kirit S. Parikh, R. Radhakrishnan, Indra Gandhi Institute of Development Research

³ National Sample Survey 1993 & 6th All India Education Survey, NCERT 1997

⁴ National Family Health Survey (II), (2000), Ministry of Health & Family Welfare, Govt. of India, 1998-99 and Economic Survey of India 1999-2000

⁵ Economic Survey of India 2001-02

⁶ Economic Survey, Government of India 2001-02

outlay⁶. However it includes the major regional (States / UTs) disparities and the consequent differential scenario in different parts of the country.

The expert group (Lakadawala Committee), on the estimation of proportion and number of poor, applied consumption expenditure¹ on items like clothing, footwear, medical (institutional) and durable goods during 365 day recall period besides the consumption expenditure on food items using two reference periods of 30 days to 7 days, arrived at a figure of 260 million i.e., 27.1% of the population, being below poverty line. The same report also indicates wide inter-state, rural and urban disparities. Two larger states of Orissa and Bihar indicating poverty ratio of 47% and 43% respectively and 20 states and UTs with poverty ratio less than the national average do not augur well. Even based on these figures, the population below poverty line coming down from 36% to 27% in less than a decade, the situation could still be considered alarming.

The contradictions are very obvious between the remarkable progress that we seem to have made and the actual ground reality of 30 – 50% of Indians being in the proximity of poverty line, defined by the Task force – Planning Commission, as consumption of (energy equivalent of) 2400 calorie per capita / per day for rural areas and 2100 calories for urban areas. Expressed in money terms poverty line was Rs. 49.09 and Rs. 56.64 per capita / per month, respectively for rural and urban areas, at 1973-74 prices². This would be about half a KG of rice, which translates as Rs. 7-8 per day, per person consumption – meaning chronically poor. Internationally, two dollars per day / per person may be considered poverty, qualifying 70% of Indians to be categorized as poor as against one dollar per day / per person, being chronic poverty qualifying 27% of the population as being under BPL³.

However, barring the regional disparities which might increase, and given the political and administrative will besides the overall people's participation to create the difference, it is quite possible to achieve the poverty reduction target of the 10th Five Year Plan to nearly 20% for the country as a whole by 2007. It is obvious that India's progress cannot be judged on the simplistic parameters or yardsticks like the growing volume of exports, GDP, GNP, sensex, foreign exchange reserves alone, or, for that matter, by miraculous expansion of our information, pharmaceutical, automobile and other such industries which apparently cater to the 'creamy layer' of our population. While ascertaining our level of poverty and progress besides our per capita GDP (\$ 450) the human development indicators, adult and youth literacy rate, access to health care programme, water and sanitation and the care provided to the poor, marginalized and the vulnerable groups of society, like women, children, elders and disabled become the most important determinants.

¹ NSSO 55th round 1999-2000

² Economic Survey, Government of India 2002-02

³ Abusaleh Shariff, Chief Economist & Head National Council of Applied Economic Research, Times of India, 7th January, 2004 'Poverty Prescriptions'