

## Neglected by the State



The paradox embedded in the Indian development model: on the one hand increasing mobilisation of civil society groups and attempts at empowering the marginalised at various levels with seemingly positive influences on policy pronouncements, while on the other, withdrawal of the State from its essential roles and functions especially in its constitutionally mandated function of ensuring social equity. The results are appalling, particularly regarding human security. Deprivation and increased repression of marginalised groups have led to communities being pitted against each other.

### National Social Watch Coalition

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“Freedom is the connecting link between development and democracy. Poverty is the denial of the right to live with dignity... Development with equity, justice, distribution and participation is a prerequisite in the survival and growth of Indian Democracy.”<sup>2</sup>

Substantial sections of the Indian population suffer from serious deprivation vis-à-vis a set of commonly acknowledged basic needs, such as adequate food, shelter, clothing, healthcare, primary education, clean drinking water and sanitation. Indeed, the major shortcomings of the State-led economic transformations after independence are not the lack of economic growth or industrialisation - on the contrary, in these respects Indian performance has been at least respectable - but in the policies and processes that facilitate the fulfillment of basic rights and needs. Moreover, there is some concern that the prospects may have worsened relatively with reference to some of these basic needs during what is commonly described as the period of economic reforms - July 1991 onwards.

Although the Messiahs of free trade salute a growth rate of 6% in 2002,<sup>3</sup> there is awareness of increasing inequality and marginalisation of groups that were already marginalised.<sup>4</sup>

### The budget and socio-economic rights

When one takes a hard look through the maze of jargon and official rhetoric, the Government's commitment towards alleviation of poverty and implementation of socio-economic rights comes under suspicion.

For instance, since education became a fundamental right under the Indian Constitution, there

have been regressive budgetary allocations for the implementation of this right despite regular promises by the Government to the contrary. In the 2003 budget, there was only a marginal increase in real planned budgetary allocation in education. The revenue account under unplanned allocation in education declined in real per capita allocation from a meagre INR 15.40 (USD 0.33) to INR 14.68 (USD 0.31) between 2002 and 2003. The planned allocation on education declined from INR 0.30 (USD 0.006) per capita in 2002-03 to INR 0.18 (USD 0.003) in 2003-04. Important educational schemes like the National Programme for Women's Education have been scrapped.<sup>5</sup>

The Central Government scheme *Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan* (Education for All) has seen an increased allocation of INR 15.12 billion (USD 328 million) but has hardly achieved the stated goal of having all children below 14 years in school by December 2003. The silence over this failure is perhaps too deafening for the Government itself. What is obvious is that there is an increasing dependence on market forces to fill the educational deficit.<sup>6</sup>

### Health expenditure: the lowest in the world

The health sector scenario is not too encouraging, either. As stated in the *Citizens Report on Governance and Development 2003, Social Watch India*, “the level of public expenditure in the health sector is the lowest in the world. The Indian health system is the most privatised health system in the world. Of the aggregate expenditure on health 83% is allocated to private spending, while 43% of the poor depend on public sector hospitals for care. Privatisation and deregulation of the health system have resulted in rising drug prices. Riddled with contradictions as it is, new National Health Policy 2002 legitimises the ongoing privatisation of health.

Public health expenditure, which is currently below 1% of GDP, is far below the 5% of GDP recommended by the World Health Organization.”

The already meagre health expenditure decreased drastically in the 2003 budget. In fact most of the commitments made by the Government are related to privatisation of the health sector and were made on behalf of the interests of the market.<sup>7</sup>

The Pharmaceutical Policy 2003 is another issue at stake which has contributed to the process of making the Drug Price Control Order mechanism ineffective. This mechanism was instituted in 1978 to keep the prices of all drugs under control. However, the number of drugs under this scheme has now decreased to 35, which is about 22% of the total market. The consequence of this is decreased access to drugs and health care systems, especially for the most marginalised sectors of society.<sup>8</sup>

The Government has reduced expenditure on the overall nutrition programme from INR 79.2 million (USD 1.7 million) to INR 77.7 million (USD 1.6 million) in the 2003 budget. There has also been an inadequate allocation of USD 110 million with the impossible wish to uplift a quarter of the population living below the poverty line. There has been an overall decrease in spending on the social sector especially vis-à-vis the marginalised sections like the *Dalits*,<sup>9</sup> *Adivasis*,<sup>10</sup> women, etc.<sup>11</sup>

### Unemployment

One of the most disturbing trends that have accompanied the shift to a market economy is

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2 Samuel, John and Jagadananda, Eds. “Making Sense of Democracy. An introduction to Social Watch India”. *Citizens Report on Governance and Development*. New Delhi: National Social Watch Coalition, 2003.

3 www.adb.org/Documents/News/2002/nr2002048.asp

4 Datt, Gaurav and Martin Ravallion “Is India's Economic Growth Leaving the Poor Behind?”. [http://poverty.worldbank.org/files/13504\\_GD1.pdf](http://poverty.worldbank.org/files/13504_GD1.pdf)

5 CBA. *The Marginalised Matter*. 2003. Also see Samuel and Jagadananda, *op cit*.

6 “Although the literacy rate rose from 18% in 1951 to 65% in 2001, every third illiterate in the world is an Indian. Out of approximately 200 million children in the age group 6-14 years, only 120 million are enrolled. Inadequate budget allocation, dismal school infrastructure in rural areas, high dropout rates, caste-bias, gender-bias, etc. are the hallmarks of our education system.” Samuel and Jagadananda, *op cit*.

7 “Public expenditure on health in India is one of the lowest in the world. Currently, public expenditure on health as a share of the aggregate annual public expenditure on health is 96.9% in UK, 44.1% in USA, 45.4% in Sri Lanka, and 24.9% in China, but for India it is a meagre 17.3%.” Samuel and Jagadananda, *op cit*.

8 Ramachandran, P. “Unhealthy Policy”, *Frontline*, 15 March 2002. Also see Samuel and Jagadananda, *op cit*.

9 Editor's note: The Dalits or untouchables are the most marginalised peoples in India. There are around 240 million Dalits (25% of the population) in the country and they are mostly relegated to performing menial jobs.

10 Editor's note: Adivasis are believed to be the original inhabitants of India. There are around 70 million Adivasis (8% of the population) in the country. They are mainly marginalised farmers or hunter-gatherers.

11 Samuel and Jagadananda, *op cit*.

**TABLE 1**

Public expenditure on health as a share of total public expenditure (%)		
STATE	1980-81	1998-99
Andhra Pradesh	7.63	8.45
Arunachal Pradesh	5.43	—
Assam	5.23	4.65
Bihar	5.49	4.81
Goa	—	5.11
Gujarat	6.08	5.41
Haryana	6.51	3.84
Himachal Pradesh	10.65	6.38
Jammu & Kashmir	11.82	5.16
Kerala	9.57	5.47
Madhya Pradesh	7.59	5.80
Maharashtra	6.53	4.84
Manipur	8.66	4.67
Meghalaya	15.34	7.22
Mizoram	—	4.93
Nagaland	9.57	5.39
Orissa	6.70	5.58
Punjab	6.52	4.73
Rajasthan	10.21	6.42
Sikkim	5.65	2.84
Tamil Nadu	6.56	8.32
Tripura	4.57	4.69
Uttar Pradesh	5.89	4.10
West Bengal	9.07	6.49

Source: Draft Tenth Five Year Plan, Vol III. Planning Commission.

unemployment. While disguised unemployment continues to worry, open unemployment has become a serious problem. The collapse of the public sector and the resultant lack of opportunities and slow growth of the private sector have resulted in a sharp deceleration of employment in the organised sector. In fact, the share of formal sector workforce is only 8% and there are signs that the vulnerability of the workforce in the informal sector may be on the rise. What is most alarming is the increase in starvation deaths and suicides by small and marginal farmers that took place in 2003. These deaths can be attributed to the increase in insecurity related to livelihood within both the rural and urban spheres.

**Land, displacement and conflict**

The status of land distribution is also of interest. Except for rare instances such as the initiative of the Madhya Pradesh state government to grant small plots of land to Dalits, land distribution policies across the country have been on the whole regressive. Public land has been transferred to private corporations, as in the state of Tamil Nadu, while there is hardly any attempt to distribute it among the landless.<sup>12</sup>

In this context, the debate on mega-development projects and displacement is particularly serious and the discussion over the Narmada Valley project is the most glaring example. The Narmada Control Authority recommended that the height of the Sardar Sarovar Dam be raised from its present height of 95m to 100m.<sup>13</sup>

Large numbers of Adivasis were displaced due to the flooding of land that resulted from the increase in height of the dam, and their resettlement was most unsatisfactory. The conditions of the affected people in Madhya Pradesh are worse - a large majority of the 35,000 oustee families are yet to be resettled and a further 12,000 families face displacement this monsoon. The state government has openly declared that there is no land available for the oustees and is giving cash compensation, in violation of the Narmada Water Disputes Tribunal guidelines, which the Supreme Court upheld in 2000.<sup>14</sup>

The classification of revenue land as forest land is another process that denies rights of ownership and access to land to entire communities and their legitimate owners. This even led to violence in

Wayanad, in northern Kerala, where the police opened fire on a group of Adivasis who were allegedly encroaching forest land and a number of them were killed.<sup>15</sup>

**The construction of terrorism**

A further human security problem is the construction of terrorism, which is used as a pretext for increasing military expenditure as well as for introducing repressive changes in the criminal justice system with scant regard for constitutional mandates. The best example is the recent pronouncement by the Justice Malimath Committee, which recommends the extension to general criminal law of the draconian powers of the police under special legislation like the Prevention of Terrorism Act.<sup>16</sup> Even within the present system, it is the marginalised groups that fare the worst.

**Conclusion**

Having analysed the State's attitude vis-à-vis budgetary commitment in relation to society in general and marginalised communities in particular, we should take a look at the actual conditions of specific communities. The deprivation and increased repression of marginalised communities by the State both in economic and cultural terms are leading to a situation where communities are pitted against each other in the scramble for the little the State has to offer in terms of basic human rights. This has led to situations like in Gujarat, where repressive and fundamentalist forces have used marginalised communities to attack minority groups. Indiscriminate privatisation and the resulting erosion of socio economic rights in India have had disastrous consequences. ■

12 Ibid.

13 The Hindu, 14 May 2002.

14 www.narmada.org/sardar-sarovar/damincrease.html

15 Thakkaekara, Mari. "What really happened". *Frontline*, 15 March 2002.

16 Narrain, Siddharth. "Rights and Criminal Justice". *Frontline*, 13 September 2003.