



## **Policy: issues & actors**

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### **Human Security in India:**

A mixed bag

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Dehumanising poverty and the growing rich-poor divide are an ugly reality of the present world order. The ever-widening gap between the rich nations of the North and the poor of the South has created a new duality in the world. We have two worlds on the same planet: one world is toiling to stave off hunger, while the other is chomping at the bit to cross over into cyberspace. Yet, the proponents of globalisation promised to lift all boats. The neo-liberal gurus are never tired of chanting the market mantra that everything must operate according to the criteria of the “master market”. Going by this new theology, one would assume only the strongest shall survive! Life is a fight, a jungle. It is economic and social Darwinism. The market dictates the Truth!

While the market is flourishing (at least shopping malls give that impression) there is another reality staring us in our eye. The huge army of uneducated, unemployed, unskilled, unfed and unsatisfied people - the so-called un-people - is also rising. The rich-poor gap is widening rather than closing. And it is happening all over, not just at the interface between the rich and poor nations. The same dynamic is at work within countries, even developed and industrialised societies. While the proponents of globalisation have sought to perpetuate myths such as a growing convergence of rich and poor, in reality the gap in per capita income between the industrial and developing world has tripled over the past three decades. The irony is too stark to be missed. While the number of dollar billionaires is rising by the day, the share of the poorest fifth of the world's population is steadily declining. The world is becoming polarised economically both between countries and within them. Governance institutions the world over are awakening to these fault-lines as potential threats to the fledgling post-Cold War global order.

Over the past few years, development has moved to the centre stage of the global political agenda. So has human security, particularly after two dramatic developments---the fall of the Berlin Wall and the collapse of the twin towers of the New York World Trade Centre. Security is now being increasingly defined not so much as the defence of national territory as ensuring the safety and well being of the citizens of a state via the provision of development opportunities. Human security encompasses protection from physical and mental harm, freedom from want and fear, and respect for personal and cultural identities. In this framework, the effective means of dealing with the multifarious threats is not force; rather the preferred instruments of security are human development and humane governance.

## 2. UNDP'S AGENDA-SETTING ROLE

It was Mahbub Ul Haq who first drew global attention to the concept of human security in the UNDP's Human Development Reports. As Special Adviser to the Administrator of UNDP, Haq did pioneering work giving meaning and content to the concept of human development besides taking initiative to build the now famous Human Development Index to measure it.

The 1994 Human Development Report focussed primarily on human security. This Report is considered a landmark in the field of human security.

Haq outlined seven features of human development as follows:<sup>1</sup>

- It moved people to the centre-stage;
- It has two sides - the formation of human capabilities such as improved health, knowledge and skills and the use people make of their acquired capabilities;
- People are regarded as the end, but means are not forgotten;
- Human development embraces all of society – not just the economy;
- People are both the means and the ends of development;
- Progress of nations is measured not merely by an increase in their GNP; and
- Seventh, productivity, equity, sustainability and empowerment are the four components of human development.

Mahbub Ul Haq in his *Reflections on Human Development* explained human security not as “a concern with weapons” but with “human dignity”. As he said, “In the last analysis, (what matters is that) it is a child who did not die, a disease that did not spread, an ethnic tension that did not explode, a dissident who was not silenced, a human spirit that was not crushed.” Human security, Haq further emphasised, “is to be interpreted as security of people, not just territory. It has to do with the security of individuals, not just nations. It is concerned with the security of all people everywhere - in their homes, in their jobs, in their streets, in their communities, in their environment. Needed urgently is security through development, not through arms.”

The Human Development Report of the UNDP for the year 1994 provided further conceptual clarity to the concept of human security. Freedom from want and the freedom from fear, said the report, are the two pillars of human security. In the immediate aftermath of this report, these two pillars became the clarion calls for all those who demanded an overhaul of the existing world order. The UNDP visualised threats to human security in seven areas: economic security, food security, health security, environmental security, personal security, communal security and political security.

In a rapidly integrating and globalising world and an increasingly interdependent and multi-polar international system, the predominantly military-strategic orientation of the security discourse came to be viewed as overly narrow and inadequate. Hence individuals became the primary referent of security. Freedom from want and fear became the most

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<sup>1</sup> Mahbub Ul Haq, *Human Development Paradigm for South Asia*, D.T.Lakdawala Memorial Lecture, 7 February 1996, Institute of Social Sciences, New Delhi

effective shields against insecurity. Nelson Mandela later summed up the aspirations of the common man who want “the simple opportunity to live a decent life, to have a proper shelter and food to eat, to be able to care for their children and to live with dignity...”

### 3. WHITHER HUMAN SECURITY IN INDIA?

It was Mahatma Gandhi who placed the individual at the centre of human progress. He talked of the “village republics”. Every village, Gandhi said, “will be a republic with full powers. Life will not be a pyramid with the apex sustained by the bottom. But it will be an oceanic circle whose centre will be the individual always ready to perish for the circle of villages...” Nobel Laureate Rabindranath Tagore had this to say: “We have for over a century been dragged by the prosperous West behind its chariot, choked by the dust, deafened by the noise, humbled by our own helplessness and overwhelmed by the speed. We agreed to acknowledge that this chariot-drive was progress, and the progress was civilisation. If we ever ventured to ask, ‘progress towards what and progress for whom’, it was considered to be peculiarly and ridiculously oriental to entertain such ideas about the absoluteness of progress.”<sup>2</sup>

In recent years, the Indian economy has made impressive strides. Today India and China are the two fastest growing economies in the world. The growth figures released by the Central Statistical Organisation in early June 2006 show that the GDP growth rate for the last fiscal (2005-06) was 8.4 %, up from the 8.1% projected by the government in February 2006. This is the fourth highest growth ever since independence. The previous highs were in 1988-89 (10.5%), followed by 1975-76 (9%) and 2003-04 (8.5%). It is argued that the GDP growth is a good 0.3% higher than even the revised estimate of 8.1% for the year released as late as February 2006. This significant change of gears is thanks to a huge upsurge in agricultural output. Agricultural growth spurted to 3.9% in 2005-06, from 0.7 % a year ago. Manufacturing too accelerated to 9% sustaining one of the largest stretches of growth recorded. Services, which now accounts for over half of India’s GDP, grew at an impressive 11.5%. But the push factor undoubtedly came from agriculture.

The neo-liberals would very much like India to be the poster boy of economic success. Recently, *The Economist* featured India on its cover yet again with the poser “Can India fly?” It went as far to say that “the question is no longer whether India can fly, but how high - and whether the success of its business class can be spread throughout the country.”<sup>3</sup> Time also recently lauded India’s growth saying “India is being remade, as it is increasingly integrated with the global economy...We have witnessed Asia’s economic tigers and dragons. Enter the elephant”.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid

<sup>3</sup> *The Economist*, 3-9 June, 2006

<sup>4</sup> *Time*, 19 June, 2006

India's growth performance is by all means impressive. But is it sustainable? Whether it is a shining star or a passing comet will depend on what India does to its two-thirds population who appear to be still untouched by economic strides. Two years ago, a government which sought to ride to power again on the much-hyped "India Shining" campaign, had to bite the dust at the polls. State governments that had created a hype on their IT successes, with their chief ministers making regular appearances at World Economic Forum's annual extravaganza at Davos, while farmers committed suicide, met a similar fate. India's gains in the IT sector are impressive. Indian firms have two-thirds of the global market in offshore IT services and nearly half that in BPO. Now there is a manufacturing boom as well. But can India depend on the trickle-down effects to spread prosperity? After all, isn't the trickle down what John Galbraith says, "like feeding horses oats, so that sparrows can eat the dung"?

### 3.1. AMARTYA SEN'S 'DEVELOPMENT AS FREEDOM' MODEL

Amartya Sen, a leading Indian economist and Nobel Laureate, talks of three 'unfreedoms' - the fear of illiteracy, the fear of early death and the fear of starvation. "Development requires", says Sen, "the removal of major sources of unfreedoms: poverty as well as tyranny, poor economic opportunities as well as systematic social deprivation, neglect of public facilities as well as intolerance or overactivity of repressive states."<sup>5</sup> Lack of substantive freedoms is inextricably linked to economic poverty, which deprives people of the freedom to satisfy hunger and meet requirements of adequate clothing and shelter. Sen sees poverty as 'capability deprivation'.<sup>6</sup>

In conceptualising development as freedom, Amartya Sen has carried the capability approach to somewhat higher dimensions. Expansion of freedom is viewed as "the primary end and the principal means of development."<sup>7</sup> The former has a constitutive role in enriching human life whereas the latter includes elementary capabilities such as the ability to avoid such deprivations as starvation, under-nourishment, as well as the freedom to be literate and enjoy political participation.

Sen mentions five types of instrumental freedoms:

- political freedoms;
- economic facilities;
- social opportunities;
- transparency guarantees; and

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<sup>5</sup> Amartya Sen, *Development as Freedom*, Oxford University Press, 1999, p.3

<sup>6</sup> For an excellent analysis of poverty as capability deprivation, see Ibid, chapter 4, pp.87-110

<sup>7</sup> Ibid, p. 36

- protective security.<sup>8</sup>

Sen's formulation is particularly relevant for evaluating human security, as it considers whether the freedoms that people have are enhanced or not. As Sen says, "these instrumental freedoms directly enhance the capabilities of people, but they also supplement one another, and can furthermore reinforce one another."<sup>9</sup> Economic empowerment of the poor can be a great engine of economic growth. Creation of social opportunities can contribute both to economic development and to significant reductions in mortality rates. And reduction of mortality rates, in turn, can help to reduce birth rates.

### 3.2. THE KERALA MODEL

Amartya Sen has immortalised the Kerala model globally. The Kerala experience shows that even with low income, higher life expectancy, lower fertility and high literacy can be achieved. A variety of social opportunities - like health care and educational facilities - that have been enabled through governmental intervention have contributed to Kerala's phenomenal performance.

Kerala has an impressive record of overcoming poverty despite not so impressive economic growth. In many ways it is a unique case whose success is not easy to replicate. It had a long tradition of high value for education. Whereas kings and feudal lords in other parts of India consciously followed a policy of keeping the populace illiterate, princely rulers in Kerala took pains to spread literacy. Kerala, with a substantial Christian population, also benefited from missionaries' work in the field of education. Implementation of land reforms, comprehensive social and food security coverage, people-centred policies of successive Marxist governments, successful implementation of the *Panchayati Raj* (village self-rule institutions) and credible democratic decentralisation have contributed significantly to Kerala's advance in social development.

What is particularly significant is that despite "a moderate level of economic development, Kerala could make a significant dent on poverty during the last three decades."<sup>10</sup> The successful implementation of the *Panchayati Raj* and innovative People's campaign and *Kutambashree* (State Poverty Eradication Mission) programmes have helped in distributing the fruits of development to the grassroots level. While the Kerala model of development is impressive, the State has had limited success in building on its success in human development to raise its income levels. There are States like Punjab and Maharashtra that have reduced income poverty through high economic growth. In contrast, Kerala has used its high level of human development - such as better education, good and functioning health care and equitable land distribution - to wage a war on poverty. And it has had a faster rate of reduction in income poverty than other States. India is presently combining the

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid, p.38

<sup>9</sup> Ibid, p.40

<sup>10</sup> *India Development Report, 2004-05*, Oxford University Press, 2005, p.43



two models - getting rich first and hoping for the trickle down effect to do the rest and the human development model of Kerala.

**Table 1**

**Disparity in Performance Between the Best and the Worst Performing States**

| No. | Indicator  | Best Performer         | Worst Performer        |
|-----|--|------------------------|------------------------|
| 1   | Human Development Index 2001 (value)                     | Kerala (.638)          | Bihar (.367)           |
| 2   | Human Poverty Index 1991 (% of households)               | Kerala (20)            | Bihar (52)             |
|     | Indicators for all population                            |                        |                        |
| 3   | Income poverty 1999-00 (% of population)                 | Jammu & Kashmir (4)    | Orissa (47)            |
| 4   | Total literacy 2001 (% of population)                    | Kerala (91)            | Bihar (48)             |
| 5   | School enrolment rate, 6-14 years (%)                    | Kerala (99)            | Bihar (59)             |
| 6   | Infant Mortality Rate (per 1000 births) 2002 (estimated) | Kerala (10)            | Orissa (87)            |
| 7   | Kutcha (informal) housing 1994 (% households)            | Haryana (14)           | Orissa (77)            |
| 8   | Households with a toilet 1994 (%)                        | North East region (68) | Orissa (3)             |
| 9   | Households with electricity 1994 (%)                     | Himachal Pradesh (88)  | Bihar (9)              |
|     | Gender Sensitive Indicators                              |                        |                        |
| 10  | Gender Disparity Index (value) (1991)                    | Kerala (.825)          | Bihar (.469)           |
| 11  | Female life expectancy at birth 2001-06 (years)          | Kerala (75)            | Madhya Pradesh (58.01) |
| 12  | Female literacy 2001 (% of population)                   | Kerala (87.86)         | Bihar (33.57)          |
| 13  | Sex ratio, 6 yrs+ (females per 1000 males) 2001 Census   | Kerala (1058)          | Daman & Diu (710)      |
| 14  | Infant mortality, girls 1998 (per 1000 births)           | Kerala (13)            | Madhya Pradesh (97)    |
| 15  | Anaemia among women 1994 (%)                             | Kerala (23)            | Assam (70)             |
| 16  | Dropout among girls, primary 1994 (%)                    | Kerala (5)             | Rajasthan (63)         |
|     | Indicators for Scheduled Castes and Tribes               |                        |                        |
| 17  | Kutcha housing 1994 (%)                                  | Haryana (24)           | Orissa (87)            |
| 18  | Households with electricity 1994 (%)                     | Himachal Pradesh (84)  | Bihar (4)              |
| 19  | Overall literacy 1994 (% of population)                  | Kerala (78)            | Bihar (28)             |
| 20  | School enrolment rate, 6-14 years 1994                   | Kerala (97)            | Bihar (45)             |

Source: Indicators 1, 2, 4, 5, 10, and 12 are from Government of India (2002), Planning Commission, National Human Development Report 2001. Indicators 11, 13, and 14 are from Preeti Rustagi (2003), Gender Biases and Discrimination against Women, SWDSAND UNIFEM, New Delhi. The remaining indicators are taken from A. Shariff (1999), India Human Development Report, Oxford University Press, New Delhi. The Union Territories and Delhi and Goa have been excluded from this analysis.

#### 4. DEMOCRACY AND FAMINE

Amartya Sen's thesis on democracy and famine is equally fascinating. Democracies have avoided widespread hunger and frequent famines. Sen says that no functioning democracy has ever suffered a famine. Famines have never afflicted any country that is independent, that goes to elections regularly, that has opposition parties to voice criticism and a free press to question the wisdom of government policy. In other words, famine doesn't occur where information travels. Take the case of India. The East India Company's own report says that during the Bengal famine of 1770-72, close to 10 million people died. In all, between 24 million and 29 million Indians died in famines in the era of British good governance.<sup>11</sup> However, since independence, India has never suffered from this kind of affliction. Under-

<sup>11</sup> P. Sainath, "The Raj and the famines of good governance", *The Hindu*, 16 August, 2005

nourishment and malnutrition have occurred but there has been no famine in independent India. Contrast this with what happened during the Chinese famine of 1958-1961, the so-called era of a 'Great Leap Forward'. At least 30 million Chinese died from hunger.

Sen also dismisses the "Asian values" thesis or the so-called Lee Kuan thesis. This argues that freedoms and rights hamper economic growth and development. It is also argued that if poor people were to choose between political freedoms and fulfilling economic needs, they will invariably choose the latter. Finally, the proponents of the "Asian values" maintain that freedom, liberties and democracy are Western priorities. Sen counters these arguments forcefully. He says that there is no "definitive proof that authoritarianism does better in promoting economic growth".<sup>12</sup> He cites the example of democratic Botswana - one of the fastest growers in the world. There is no empirical data to conclusively prove that authoritarian polity and suppression of political and civil rights are beneficial to economic development.

## 5. INDIA, THE ELEPHANT

This is where the Indian model has relevance. Today the Indian elephant is on the march and is fast catching up with the Chinese dragon. India's Hindu rate of growth till the late 80s was ridiculed by *The Economist* and other Western journals; today India is the darling of the Western liberal press. Even though India tenaciously stuck to democracy, the West virtually shunned it for its hapless protectionism, suffocating bureaucracy and all-round commercial torpor. Today, the same neo-liberal press maintains that India's institutional depths - independent judiciary, free press and vibrant civil society - give it a distinct long-term edge over the high performer, China.

But how sustainable is India's growth performance? Is it enough to grow faster and let downward filtration do the rest? More importantly, can India grow while the state of *Bharat* remains mired in stagnation and hardscrabble conditions? Global experience doesn't inspire much confidence. It is only through an affirmative policy intervention that the State can address the acute problems of poverty and unemployment.

India is witnessing jobless growth. In the second half of the 1990s employment growth was one-third the rate of the growth of the labour force. Slow employment growth was especially serious in rural India where all forms of employment grew at only 0.6% per year between 1993-94 and 1999-2000. This meant that out of every three people entering the labour force, only one would get a job. Given India's demographic profile, an additional 71 million people will be added to the workforce in the next five years. As much as 54% of India's population is below 25 years of age. The future lies in tapping their potential and giving them proper knowledge, skills and employment. This is an arduous task.

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<sup>12</sup> Amartya Sen, op.cit, P. 149

## 5.1. HOW MUCH HAS POVERTY REDUCED?

“Poverty”, Gandhi said, “is the worst form of violence.” India has managed to fight poverty to a considerable extent and has good reason to feel confident about the future. The economy has grown about 6% per year since 1980, making it the fifth fastest growing major economy in the world over a 25-year period. India’s population growth has also begun to slow and in 1998 it was down to 1.7% compared to a 2.2% growth rate. Literacy too reached 65% in 2000 compared to 52% in 1990. More than 200 million Indians have risen out of destitution since 1980 as the poverty ratio has declined to 26%.<sup>13</sup> A high incidence of poverty is very worrying, but the overall decline is substantial. This can be attributed to a variety of factors like higher economic growth, improvement in real wages and the implementation of a plethora of anti-poverty programmes. As the *India Development Report, 2004-05* says, “The severity of poverty, reflected in the percentage of the very poor - defined as those whose total consumption expenditure is less than 75% of the poverty line - has declined at a faster rate than income poverty in both rural and urban areas.”

Table 2

Percentage Incidence of Chronic Poverty - by State, 1993-4 and 1999-2000 (Rural)

| NSS Code | State/ Union Territories | 1993-4           |           |                 |                           | 1999-2000        |           |                 |                           |
|----------|--------------------------|------------------|-----------|-----------------|---------------------------|------------------|-----------|-----------------|---------------------------|
|          |                          | Extreme -ly Poor | Very Poor | Moderately Poor | Poor (below poverty line) | Extreme -ly Poor | Very Poor | Moderately Poor | Poor (below poverty line) |
| 1        | All India                | 2.0              | 14.7      | 22.1            | 36.8                      | 0.8              | 8.2       | 18.3            | 26.5                      |
| 2        | Andhra Pradesh           | 0.6              | 4.1       | 11.8            | 15.9                      | 0.4              | 2.7       | 7.8             | 10.5                      |
| 3        | Arunachal Pradesh        | 2.5              | 16.1      | 25.3            | 41.4                      | 0.0              | 6.3       | 17.1            | 23.4                      |
| 4        | Assam                    | 0.7              | 12.3      | 33.0            | 45.3                      | 1.9              | 14.8      | 25.4            | 40.2                      |
| 5        | Bihar                    | 4.0              | 27.6      | 30.3            | 57.9                      | 1.9              | 14.1      | 29.9            | 44.0                      |
| 6        | Goa                      | 0.2              | 1.9       | 3.1             | 5.0                       | 0.0              | 0.0       | 0.0             | 0.0                       |
| 7        | Gujarat                  | 0.5              | 6.5       | 15.6            | 22.1                      | 0.2              | 3.3       | 9.1             | 12.4                      |
| 8        | Haryana                  | 1.1              | 8.8       | 19.5            | 28.3                      | 0.6              | 1.5       | 5.9             | 7.4                       |
| 9        | Himachal Pradesh         | 0.9              | 8.9       | 21.4            | 30.3                      | 0.0              | 1.3       | 6.2             | 7.5                       |
| 10       | Jammu and Kashmir        | 0.4              | 4.9       | 13.3            | 18.2                      | 0.0              | 0.5       | 4.2             | 4.7                       |
| 11       | Karnataka                | 1.4              | 11.2      | 19.0            | 30.2                      | 0.3              | 3.3       | 13.6            | 16.9                      |
| 12       | Kerala                   | 1.5              | 9.4       | 16.0            | 25.4                      | 0.2              | 1.9       | 7.5             | 9.4                       |
| 13       | Madhya Pradesh           | 2.6              | 16.9      | 23.8            | 40.7                      | 1.2              | 12.3      | 24.9            | 37.2                      |
| 14       | Maharashtra              | 3.2              | 16.0      | 21.9            | 37.9                      | 0.7              | 6.5       | 16.8            | 23.3                      |
| 15       | Manipur                  | 0.1              | 2.3       | 16.9            | 19.2                      | 0.0              | 2.4       | 11.7            | 14.1                      |
| 16       | Meghalaya                | 0.2              | 2.9       | 21.4            | 24.3                      | 0.0              | 0.2       | 5.8             | 6.0                       |
| 17       | Mizoram                  | 0                | 1.3       | 4.9             | 6.2                       | 0.0              | 0.1       | 2.7             | 2.8                       |
| 18       | Nagaland                 | 0                | 0.0       | 1.9             | 1.9                       | 0.0              | 0.0       | 0.2             | 0.2                       |
| 19       | Orissa                   | 3.1              | 21.7      | 28.1            | 49.8                      | 2.8              | 21.7      | 26.1            | 47.8                      |
| 20       | Punjab                   | 0.1              | 3.0       | 8.7             | 11.7                      | 0.0              | 1.1       | 4.9             | 6.0                       |
|          | Rajasthan                | 0.7              | 8.6       | 17.8            | 26.4                      | 0.1              | 2.4       | 11.0            | 13.4                      |
| 22       | Sikkim                   | 0                | 8.1       | 23.2            | 31.3                      | 0.2              | 3.2       | 18.5            | 21.7                      |

<sup>13</sup> Economic Survey, 2001-02

|    |                             |     |      |      |      |     |      |      |      |
|----|-----------------------------|-----|------|------|------|-----|------|------|------|
| 23 | Tamil Nadu                  | 1.9 | 12.4 | 20.6 | 33.0 | 0.6 | 5.7  | 14.4 | 20.1 |
| 24 | Tripura                     | 0.9 | 8.7  | 14.6 | 23.3 | 0.2 | 3.2  | 13.5 | 16.7 |
| 25 | Uttar Pradesh               | 2.6 | 19.4 | 23   | 42.4 | 0.5 | 8.7  | 22.3 | 31.0 |
| 26 | West Bengal                 | 1.4 | 13.6 | 27.6 | 41.2 | 1.1 | 10.8 | 20.9 | 31.7 |
| 27 | Andaman and Nicobar Islands | 0   | 0.0  | 1.1  | 1.1  | 0.0 | 0.0  | 0.3  | 0.3  |
| 28 | Chandigarh                  | 0   | 0.0  | 11.8 | 11.8 | 0.1 | 0.1  | 7.6  | 7.7  |
| 29 | Dadra and Nagar Haveli      | 0.1 | 18.5 | 33.2 | 51.7 | 0.0 | 4.7  | 11.9 | 16.6 |
| 30 | Daman and Diu               | 0   | 1.6  | 0    | 1.6  | 0.0 | 0.0  | 0.0  | 0.0  |
| 31 | Delhi                       | 0   | 0.0  | 2    | 2.0  | 0.0 | 0.0  | 0.7  | 0.7  |
| 32 | Lakshadweep                 | 0   | 0.0  | 0    | 0.0  | 0.0 | 0.0  | 0.0  | 0.0  |
| 33 | Pondicherry                 | 0   | 5.3  | 13.6 | 18.9 | 0.5 | 2.9  | 8.6  | 11.5 |

Source: India Development Report, 2004-05, p.50.

The majority of India's poor are concentrated in the rural areas. The latest data released by the government suggests that poverty fell at an annual rate of 0.74% between 1993-94 and 2004-05, not the 1.66% implied by the 1999-2000 survey that showed a sharper decline in poverty due to a change in the data-collection methodology. That survey had brought down the number of poor to 260 million. But in reality, the absolute number of people below poverty line could still be as high as 305 million.<sup>14</sup>

Nearly all the States have succeeded in reducing poverty but some, particularly the southern states, have done much better. Assam, Orissa, Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh have remained behind in poverty reduction. Incidentally, these States have equally fared poorly in reducing illiteracy. Obviously there is a linkage between poverty and illiteracy. Certain trends have emerged. As *India Development Report, 2004-05* (P.4) points out, the poor are getting concentrated in less developed States. Rural poverty is getting concentrated mostly in the agricultural labour and artisan households. Poverty is disproportionately high among the "lower" castes and tribes.

It is more than apparent that trickle down alone will not spread the benefits of reform. What is needed is measured state intervention with adequate provision for safety nets to protect the vulnerable groups. Kerala and to some extent Tamil Nadu have shown good results of state intervention in health and nutrition programmes.

India spends a much lower percentage of GDP on public health than most countries. Amartya Sen sees three deficiencies in this regard. First, there is an "awfully inadequate amount of investment...the amount of public resources going into providing health care is often totally absent or thoroughly defective." Second, the monitoring of the performance of public health centres is equally deficient. Third, "there is no way the government helps patients diagnose who is a quack and who is not."<sup>15</sup>

India is also wrestling with the HIV/AIDS pandemic. According to a UNAIDS report, India now has 5.7 million HIV-positive people which is higher than South Africa with 5.5 million people. This rise is assuming shocking proportions even though the Indian government seems

<sup>14</sup> *Hindustan Times*, 9 June, 2006

<sup>15</sup> "India's poor need a radical package", Interview with Amartya Sen, *The Hindu*, 9 January, 2005

to think it is still some one else's problem. Rather than facing the problem head on, India's Health Minister, A. Ramdoss, insists the UNAIDS figure is wrong. The National AIDS Control Organisation admits that official figures in India exclude mother-to-child infection and older people because only the 19-49 age cohort has been enumerated. The rate of infection in India is much lower, at 0.9%, against South Africa's 18.8%, but that is hardly a consolation. According to UN projections, AIDS could kill 31 million people in India by 2025.

The public health care system in India is under-funded, under-staffed and over-stretched. It is important to note that there is an immense amount of conceptual clutter and lack of direction in the discourse on health. In jumping to the ideological position that public is bad, private is good, governments are bad and markets are good, there is a tendency to trivialise a serious issue.

The business-centric view of India suppresses more facts than it reveals. Malnutrition affects nearly half of all children in India and there are no signs that they are being helped by the reform agenda, which flaunts the modern glass-and-chrome skyscrapers and spanking flyovers of Delhi and Bangalore while hiding the crushing miseries of the people living below the poverty line. It is indeed ironical that while the World Bank's latest figures place India as the 12<sup>th</sup> richest country in the world, wealthier than Mexico, Russia and Australia, around 100,000 farmers have committed suicide between 1993 and 2003 according to the government. A recent United Nations Children's Fund report on malnutrition of Indian children scandalised the Indian government. It said India has the highest number of malnourished children in the world, with Madhya Pradesh in central India being the worst-affected State. About 47% of under-fives, numbering 57 million, are underweight. Even sub-Saharan Africa, where 33% of children are malnourished, is better off. The government simply dumped the data. Reasons for such a state of affairs are all poverty-related - early pregnancy, undernourished mothers, poor sanitation, access to poor quality water and a negligent governance system.<sup>16</sup>

India no longer experiences famine. One can say that India has achieved freedom from hunger. And yet, food security (at the level of access to a balanced diet and clean drinking water) remains a far cry. Indeed, the food security situation over the years has deteriorated. Annual production of wheat has stagnated at around 72 million tonnes through this decade. India needs a 4% farm sector growth in order to sustain an 8% GDP growth. In fact the problem of food insecurity is very acute in rural Bihar and Jharkhand, followed by Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Gujarat, Orissa and Andhra Pradesh. India needs a second green revolution.

Three factors are essential for food security. These are:

- availability of foodgrains - this is subject to production and import;
- accessibility to foodgrains for those relying on purchasing power; and

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<sup>16</sup> Hindustan Times, 4 May, 2006

- consumption and availability of potable water, health and education.

The bottom line is that no State in India can lay claim to being totally free of concern on the food front. Indeed, even in Punjab and Haryana, the bread-basket of India, things are getting difficult. Sixty per cent of Indians still depend upon agriculture for their livelihood. India badly needs to pull out at least half of all those from agriculture. On the other hand, it also needs another green revolution to stem the rot in agriculture. The National Commission on Farmers has suggested a series of measures like improving soil health, better water conservation and management to bridge the gap between potential and actual yields in most cropping systems. It has also recommended the establishment of Grain Banks to fight hunger.

The rural-urban divide in India is also getting wider. While the urban literacy rate in India is 80.6%, the rate in the rural sector is 59.21%. The infant mortality rate is 51 per thousand for urban India and 84 per thousand for rural India. Urban India has 70.7% pucca (formal) houses but rural India has only 29.2 % pucca houses. Similarly, 63.8% of urban households have access to toilet facilities but rural India has a depressingly low 9.4 %. Compared to 81.3% urban households with safe drinking water facilities, only 55.3% of rural houses have this facility. Prosperity and progress that one associates with India's impressive economic growth has yet to touch India's 550,000 villages where two-thirds of its population live.

## 6. HUMANE GOVERNANCE

Gandhi said that "independence must begin at the bottom". This has now become a reality after the establishment of the Panchayati Raj. The 73<sup>rd</sup> and 74<sup>th</sup> Constitutional amendments have created a third tier of government at the village level. Instruments are now in place for ushering in a new era with greater public participation in governance. India is growing into the world's most intense democracy.

Good governance is the key to equitable growth. Participatory development, freedom of choice and improvement of service delivery are prerequisites of growth with equity. India's experiment in democratic decentralisation is equally instructive. Decentralisation is the essence of democratic governance. But we must remember what Gandhi said: good government is no substitute for self-government. The introduction of the *Panchayati raj* system has sought to transform India. Today governance is more structured, more broken-down. There is also greater transparency and accountability. As many as 3.4 million people (of which one million are women) are elected to the three-tiered local government institutions every five years. Not less than one-third of seats are reserved for women. A quota has also been provided to the so-called "lower" castes and tribes. Not all governments have implemented the *Panchayati raj* system in letter and spirit, but it has changed the very grammar of Indian politics.

## 6.1. THE PANCHAYAT'S CRUCIAL ROLE

What is quite interesting is that the devolution of power and the empowerment of grassroots institutions coincided with the economic reform. What this means is that India now had the democratic structure in place to take the benefits of economic growth to the grassroots. That perhaps explains India's success in reducing poverty at a rather faster rate. Today all government poverty alleviation schemes are being implemented through the *Panchayati raj* institutions. As Amartya Sen has so definitely demonstrated, it is empowerment that leads to entitlements; and entitlements that lead to enrichment.

On February 2, 2006, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh launched the National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (NREGS), by far the most ambitious programme to alleviate poverty. It envisages a legal guarantee of a minimum of 100 days' work in a year to one person in each of India's 60 million rural households. It also aims to create durable assets and strengthen the livelihood base of the rural poor. Under the scheme, the village panchayat will register households and issue them job cards. These are legal documents entitling people to ask for work and to get work within 15 days of their demand. If the job is not provided, he/she will receive an unemployment allowance from the government. It has been introduced in 200-odd backward districts. But when it is fully introduced in all 600-odd districts over the next three years, it is expected to transform the face of rural India.

## 7. OTHER SOURCES OF INSECURITY

Internal insecurity has several dimensions. While India is looked upon as a model of democratic governance, many of its pressing problems have nothing to do with conventional external threats. Several parts of the country are afflicted with ethnic insurgency while others are plagued by communal and caste wars. Environmental degradation threatens the livelihood of vast sections of the people; and globalisation processes are eroding the traditional notion of national community and fuelling fears of exploitation and cultural homogenisation.

These internal, non-military and newer sources of insecurity pose as much, if not more, of a challenge than the traditional threats to national security. The problems of human insecurity get manifested in three interrelated dimensions:

- First, there is a deepening of polarisation along ethnic, linguistic and religious lines and the undermining of social values which bind together diverse communities in a pluralistic society;
- Second, there is reluctance on the part of centralised structures to share political power and give adequate representation to all strata of society. This, in turn, breeds militarisation and encourages the use of coercive state power to quell resurgent nationalism; and

- Third, a development model that aggravates endemic poverty, interpersonal and interregional disparities, erosion of the natural resource base and dependence on foreign aid is favoured. This results in tensions and violent movements representing the poor and marginalized, threatening the security of the people.

The strong link between mis-governance and insecurity points to the imperative of greater democratisation of the polity and the empowerment of citizens. In the plural, stratified and fractious countries of South Asia, the test of good governance must be premised on how the state and civil society democratically negotiate differences via constitutional guarantees and political institutions. It is only through the institutionalisation of pluralism and diversity as sources of strength, rather than being viewed as threats to the state and polity, that there can be humane governance. Here India's record is quite impressive.

Discontent among vulnerable sections of the population is often fuelled by the denial of access to basic human security such as water, nutrition, housing, health and education services. Human lives are at risk from guerrilla wars, separatist movements, and political and ethnic violence. These revolve around highly contentious issues such as ethnic status, caste and tribe, religion and language; inequitable distribution of assets, lack of employment, and imbalances in regional growth. India's experience suggests that ethnic and sectarian resentments are fed by a sense of deprivation and discrimination on the part of minority groups against the perceived appropriation of the state's political and economic capital by the majority community or dominant ethnic group. A major part of India is currently under the sweep of communist insurgency where the writ of the state hardly runs. The reform has done precious little to ameliorate their conditions.

## **8. INDIA'S DEMOCRATIC RECORD**

There is the need to create an economic and political framework to accommodate the aspirations of people who are on the margins. The saving grace of India has been its functioning democracy. Democracy invents and reinvents itself in the wake of such challenges. To many outside, India may appear to be a land of a million mutinies, but Indians have learnt to live with its "functioning chaos". Six decades of democratic life has helped to put in place mechanisms, processes and institutions through which citizens and groups articulate their interests and aspirations, exercise their legal rights and mediate their differences.

Contemporary challenges to governance also arise from the need to respect diversity. Few countries have succeeded in this respect as India has. India is host to all conceivable religious faiths. Its linguistic diversity is mind-boggling. It is India's tradition of tolerance and respect for diversity that has made it a mosaic and not a melting pot. Unity in diversity is slowly giving way to diversity as unity.



## 9. CONCLUSION: OUTLOOK FOR THE FUTURE

Despite the spectacular gains made by India in the war against poverty in the last two decades, more than a quarter of its population is still below the poverty line. That amounts to more than 250 million people or about a quarter of the world's poor. To some, this figure is nearly 300 million. Besides, at least 100 million Indians are vulnerable to slipping back into poverty if the war against poverty is slackened. India also has a sizeable chunk of children out of school, people without access to primary health care and those suffering from hordes of diseases.

India is racing against time. The Millennium Development Goals are still far away. But the government has taken a series of policy measures which, if pursued meticulously, could take it nearer the goals. It is necessary to remember that the world cannot win the war on poverty if India doesn't win it. In order to bridge the urban-rural divide, the government is contemplating what has been called 'Providing Urban Amenities in Rural Area' (PURA). Instead of people from the rural areas going to urban towns in search of jobs in manufacturing and services sectors, PURA will create employment in the rural areas. PURA can provide physical, electronic and knowledge connectivity to a cluster of villages, leading to their economic connectivity and prosperity.

With the right to information Act, now in place, and the promotion of e-governance progressing in a big way, India appears to be on the cusp of a new revolution. For the first time it has a law which casts direct accountability on a public service officer for non-performance. If an officer doesn't provide information in time, a penalty of Rs.250 per day of delay can be imposed by the Information Commissioner. If the information is false, up to Rs.25,000 can be levied as a penalty. Incomplete information or rejection of an application for *mala fide* reasons can also invite penalty.

The government is also stepping up rural infrastructure and irrigation. It has already launched rural business hubs along the lines of China's townships and village enterprises in partnership with the Confederation of Indian Industries (CII). The government has lined up a series of measures to transform rural India. Fullest implementation of minimum wage laws, crop and livestock insurance, and an improvement in rural credit, are high on the agenda.

The employment guarantee scheme, touched on earlier, can be a useful tool for removing poverty. But unless a sound monitoring system and grievance redress mechanism are put in place, India will still be chasing a chimera - as has been the case with many of its well-conceived schemes like 'education for all' and 'health for all'.

The country continues to rank low in the Human Development Index. The 2005 UN Human Development Report presents a disappointing picture of India's position in the global arena. It ranks 127 in the world. India's Human Development Index - a statistic that is compiled on the basis of life expectancy, literacy and GDP - is estimated at .602. This compares poorly with high performing countries like Norway (.963), US (.944), Japan (.943),

and UK (.939). China at .755 is far ahead of India. India's HDI value has increased from .577 in 2002 to .602 in 2005, but its ranking has slipped from 124 in 2002 to 127 in 2005. In terms of the Human Poverty Index, India ranks 58 among those for whom the HPI is calculated. The above data in respect of human development clearly shows the considerable distance that India will have to go before it can rank among the better-off nations.

The Indian model underlines the fact that democracy and development can go together. Indeed, the democratic form of governance and its right implementation enables better, sustainable growth. There are mistakes no doubt, for Gandhi said, "freedom is not worth having if it doesn't include the freedom to make mistakes."

All said, the statistics do not do justice to India. Whether it is the UNDP's Human Development Index or the World Economic Forum's Growth Competitiveness Index or the Centre for Global Development's Commitment to Development Index or Transparency International's Corruption Perception Index, the real India does not emerge. In this case, the whole is much more than the sum of its parts. Here the elephant has a distinct disadvantage. But must we pin our hopes on figures alone? After all, a statistician's joke says that a man with his head in the oven and his feet in the fridge is on average ok; in reality he is dead.