



Part II

Rhetoric and Reality – Policy Watch

Fifty years into the life of our Republic we find that justice—social, economic and political—remains an unrealised dream for millions of our fellow citizens. The benefits of our economic growth are yet to reach them. We have one of the world's largest reservoirs of technical personnel, but also the world's largest number of illiterates, the world's largest middle class, but also the largest number of people below the poverty line, and the largest number of children suffering from malnutrition. Our giant factories rise out of squalor, our satellites shoot up from the midst of the hovels of the poor. Not surprisingly, there is sullen resentment among the masses against their condition erupting often in violent forms in several parts of the country. Tragically, the growth in our economy has not been uniform. It has been accompanied by great regional and social inequalities. Many a social upheaval can be traced to the neglect of the lowest of society, whose discontent moves towards the path of violence.

—K R Narayanan

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This part of the report focuses on the policy prerogatives of the Union Government in the year 2002 in the larger context of the last decade of economic liberalisation. The report is essentially based on three major socio-economic themes viz. health, education and poverty alleviation. This part critically looks at the policy trends in the last 10 years in these three sectors. The consequences of the liberalisation process in the increasing non-availability and lack of affordability of these services, especially to the marginalised sections has been highlighted particularly in the context of the new policy initiatives in 2002. Efforts have also been made to contextualise the discourse within the international developments that have a bearing on the themes discussed. There has also been a thorough analysis of the relevant policy documents that have evolved in these areas.

Introduction

The fact that substantial sections of Indian population suffer from serious deprivations vis-à-vis a set of commonly acknowledged basic needs, such as adequate food, shelter, clothing, basic health-care, primary education, clean drinking water and basic sanitation, is well known.

Indeed, the major shortcoming of the State-led economic transformation in India after independence is not the lack of economic growth or industrialisation (as is often portrayed in some quarters), on the contrary, in these respects Indian performance has been at least respectable, but it is in the realm of policies and processes that could have facilitated the fulfilment of the basic rights and needs. Moreover, there is some concern that with reference to some of these basic needs the prospects may have worsened relatively during what is commonly described as the period of economic reforms (i.e., the period since July 1991 onwards).

This report attempts to review the current policy commitments of government with respect to health, education and poverty alleviation, mainly with reference to 2002, although obviously locating these in the context of the framework of economic reforms unfolding for well over a decade now. For

reasons of information availability, it is largely the central government's policies which form the basis of discussions. Core features of the relevant policy pronouncements and their implications are outlined, and to the extent possible, the facts and figures are looked at. As is well-known often there are significant time lags between a policy pronouncement and its implementation, and such lags are even larger when it comes to the data availability relating to implementation and its outcomes. Thus, at this point, tracking down what happened in the year 2002 due to the relevant policies can only be a quick assessment keeping in mind the limitations mentioned in the foregoing, and a more substantive analysis can be undertaken only at a later date. It may also be noted here that the important concern of this paper is to explore specific connections between the relevant policies and the possible consequences for the relatively marginalised social and economic groups.

It may be in order here to begin with a discussion of the salient features of the avowedly stated commitments of the state to the fulfilment of these basic needs. The public provisioning of these basic needs may be considered inalienable human rights guaranteed to all citizens by our constitution.