

Reaching the excluded

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THE journey of post-colonial India presents a mixed but depressing picture. Despite significant achievement in some sectors and dimensions of economic development, the state has massively failed in addressing basic human needs like food, shelter, education and health. However, the biggest failure is that the poor, marginalized and deprived groups and communities have remained excluded from the fruits of economic, social and human development. This failure sharply highlights the persistence of widespread inequality. India's low level of human development also reflects the extensive nature of human deprivations, suggesting a denial of rights and the absence of freedoms along critical dimensions of human life. Illiteracy, ill health, malnutrition, insufficient earnings, social exclusion, and lack of say in decision-making – all these have to be viewed as a 'set of un-freedoms constituting human poverty'.¹

This paper attempts to locate the extent and persistence of underdevelopment among the excluded groups as also identify some key causes of this persistence, particularly with reference to processes of governance and planning in the country.

Development indicators for excluded groups continue to be grim, despite constitutional guarantees, political rhetoric of successive governments and state interventions through targeted programmes and policies (Table 1). As expected the women, dalits, adivasis and children have remained the most marginalized in the developmental process. Significantly, marginalization in addition to caste and gender has a strong regional dimension.

Excluded groups are often faced with double and triple discrimination. A dalit or adivasi woman faces discrimination on account of gender as well as caste, leading to increased vulnerability and exclusion from the process of development. For example, the male literacy rate in India is 75.3% compared to the much lower female literacy rate at 53.7%. This disparity is in itself alarming. However, it is the low rate of literacy among the SC and ST females at 41.9% and 34.8% respectively, which reflects the double disadvantage faced by the dalit and adivasi women.

Moreover, aggregate data for excluded groups do not reflect the heterogeneity within groups. For instance, adivasis are not one homogeneous group and show different levels of developmental indicators for different tribes depending on a range of factors, including geographical location. For instance, the Pahari Korwas of Chhattisgarh, a primitive tribe, have a much lower access to basic services in comparison to the Meenas of Rajasthan. Similarly, specific dalit communities (for instance, communities involved in manual scavenging) are comparatively worse off than other dalit communities. It is, therefore, important to underscore that some specific groups are marginalized even within the broad category of socially disadvantaged groups and have much poorer developmental indices.

The data clearly indicates that with respect to most of the objectives of the 10th five year plan (particularly with reference to the socially disadvantaged and excluded groups), we are going to miss the goalpost by a long shot. This failure to achieve targets should lead to some serious reintrospection and analysis of the causes of failure of successive governments to deliver the minimum needs and rights as guaranteed in the constitution, to the socially disadvantaged groups.

Dalits and adivasis constitute about a quarter of the country's population. In 1999-2000, almost 40% of the dalits and adivasis were officially recognized to be below the poverty line. In 2001, more than half of the adivasis were illiterate. While the enrolment rates for dalit and adivasi children, at the level of elementary education, are reported to be almost at par with the all India figures, their dropout rates are much higher than rest of the population. In 2002-03, the dropout rates in Classes I to VIII were found to be about 60% among dalit children and 69% among adivasi children. Such high dropout rates certainly point towards very slow progress in their development in the field of education.

On the other hand, some of the information presented in Table 1 emphasizes the fact that dalit/adivasi women and children suffer from deprivation to a much greater extent (double disadvantage). For instance, even in 2001, about two-thirds of adivasi women and about 60% of dalit women were illiterate. Similarly, a comparison of the Under-five mortality rates (per 1000 live births), in the year 1998, brings out the significantly higher levels of mortality among dalit and adivasi children.

The 10th five year plan puts down the following goals for the socially disadvantaged groups:

'To continue the process of empowering the socially disadvantaged groups viz. SCs, OBCs and minorities, which would help develop their capacities and to become active partners and partakers of country's development and thus raise their status to that of the rest of the society by adopting a three-pronged strategy of empowering the socially disadvantaged groups through (i) social empowerment through the removal of all the still existing inequalities, disparities and other persisting problems, besides providing easy access to basic minimum services; (ii) economic empowerment through employment-cum-income generation activities with an ultimate objective of making them economically independent and self-reliant; (iii) social justice through elimination of all types of discrimination against the socially disadvantaged groups with the strength of constitutional commitments, legislative support, affirmative action, awareness generation, conscientization of target groups and change in the mind-set of people.'

Table 1 tells an interesting story, which might get lost in the aggregate all India picture. It shows that certain pockets of the country (particularly the BIMAROU states) are worse off than even the sub-Saharan region of Africa in terms of many developmental indicators. The regional dimension of deprivation and marginalization needs to be brought centre-stage for effective solutions.

The causes for the continuing underdevelopment of socially disadvantaged groups are complex, multifold and multilayered. For a comprehensive analysis we would also need to investigate and probe social, economic and political constructs and phenomenon like patriarchy and the caste system. However, given the limited scope of this paper, as an attempt to flag some key issues from the governance lens, we limit our analysis to three themes: first, inadequacy of resources and design; second, institutional reforms and shrinking state action; and third, lack of political will and the gap between political reality and rhetoric.

Since independence almost all state and union governments have politically articulated an agenda of reaching out to the excluded groups for ensuring the realization of their rights and effective delivery of basic services. Successive governments have formulated laws and legislations, special programmes and policies for reaching the excluded and marginalized groups, which over the decades have taken the shape of mammoth developmental initiatives ranging from the five year planning process, creation of district developmental administration, to institutionalization of local self-governments as vehicles of economic and social development.

The postcolonial consensus of India entrusted the primary responsibility of socio-economic development, particularly of the marginalized groups, to the state. Inspite of the apparent political consensus almost no government (union or state) has taken the promises of reaching the excluded beyond mere rhetoric, as its primary agenda and governance priority. Since budgets and actual expenditure demonstrate the real intent of a government, we analyze some budgetary data to identify the actual intent of successive governments. And to substantiate the point that inadequate resources (and resource allocation) for reaching marginalized groups and social sectors has been one of the primary reasons for the failure of governance in terms of ensuring the needs and rights of marginalized groups.

TABLE 1						
Human Development Indicators for the BIMAROU States						
Indicator	All India	Bihar	Madhya Pradesh	Rajasthan	Uttar Pradesh	Orissa
Population (in crore) [2001] ¹	102.7	8.3	6.03	5.64	16.6	3.67
Per cent of population below poverty line ²	26.1	42.6	37.4	15.3	31.1	47.1
Under-5 mortality rate (per 1000) [1998] ³	94.9	105.1	137.6	114.9	122.5	104.4
MMR (per	408	452	498	670	707	367

100,000 live births) [1998] ³						
Per cent of underweight children among children under-3 years age [1998]	47	54	55	51	52	54
Gross enrolment ratio (Class I to VIII) [2002-03] ⁴	82.5	73.52	95.02	97.25	91.25	103.02
Dropout rates in classes I to VIII [2000-01] ⁵	54.65	74.79	50.11	53.56	60.11	60.74
(Estimated) No. of children in the age group of 6-14 years who are out of school(in million) [2000-01] ⁶	35.36	8.4	1.4	0.21	15.9	0.64
Per cent of population with access to safe water [2001] ^{7 1}	84	86.6	68.4	68.2	86.6	64.2
Per cent of population with access to improved sanitation [1997]	-	58	8	65	33	9
<p>Source: 1. Human Development Fact Sheets, Human Resource Development Centre, UNDP (India) (http://hdrc.undp.org.in).</p> <p>2. Estimates by Planning Commission of India.</p> <p>3. National Family Health Survey-II, 1998 (Cited in National Health Policy 2002, Government of India).</p> <p>4. Selected Educational Statistics 2002-2003, Government of India.</p> <p>5. Rajya Sabha, Unstarred Question No. 1145, dated 12 December 2003.</p> <p>6. Rajya Sabha, Unstarred Question No. 1908, dated 10 March 2003.</p> <p>7. Economic Survey 2004-05, Government of India.</p>						

Since marginalized groups are economically among the most backward, their socio-economic development requires substantial resource support from the Centre and states for the social sectors. In this context, it is important to note that the combined expenditure from the union and state budgets on social and community services has been around 5.3 % of the country's GDP over the decade from 1996-97 to 2004-05. Not only is this very low in comparison to the severity of the problems, more disturbing is the fact that over the last five years, the expenditure on social sectors (as a proportion of the GDP) both from the Centre's budget as well as those of the states have registered a declining trend.

With the Union Budget 2005-06, the central government has initiated an exercise of identifying those budgetary allocations which are earmarked for the development of dalits and adivasis. Despite dalits and adivasis constituting nearly a quarter of the country's population and representing a section that faces acute levels of socio-economic deprivation, only about 1.2% of total budgetary allocations made by the union government in 2005-06 (BE) was meant for programmes/schemes that were expected to substantially benefit dalits and adivasis. Moreover, the allocation of resources by the union government shows a decline over the last four years.

In the past few years, policy analysts have conducted innumerable studies to identify the causes of state failure in reaching the excluded groups. The findings provide significant insights, including that policy design and implementation has often been faulty. We present a case study of government's efforts for liberation and rehabilitation of manual scavengers to highlight this point.²

Worse, despite the continued failure of the policy and the programme for liberation and rehabilitation of manual scavengers, successive governments have continued with the same policy design (in new *avatars*) with only minor alterations. Every new regime undertakes a review of the performance of existing policies and programmes as also examines the reasons for inefficacy of governance in reaching the excluded groups. But despite the reviews, the new regimes or new plans often repackage the same policies in a rehashed form without making fundamental shifts in the central framework and premises of the policy and programme, ensuring in some ways the doom of 'new' policies. There is thus an urgent need for conceptual shifts and new imagination while framing policies and programmes which would seriously challenge and attempt to overcome existing institutional, administrative and social roadblocks.

With the objective of eliminating manual scavenging in India, the National Scheme for Liberation and Rehabilitation of Scavengers and their Dependents was launched by the Government of India on 22 March 1992 with the objective that by the end of the 8th plan (i.e., by 1997) the inhuman practice would be stopped and the people associated with the practice suitably rehabilitated.

It was in the third plan period that for the first time a centrally sponsored scheme was introduced with the objective of improving the social and economic status of the manual

scavengers. However, the scheme failed as its primary focus was only to shift the mode of carrying night soil from the head to an iron cart. The strategy and progress made on this front since then has been summarised in the accompanying Box.

<i>Plan Period</i>	<i>Primary Strategy</i>	<i>Allocations and actual spending(Rs Crore)</i>	<i>Remarks Ministry of Home Affairs was the nodal Ministry</i>
Third (1961-66)	1. Improvement in the working conditions of persons engaged in unclean occupations including eradication of the practice of carrying night soil as head loads; 2. Subsidies for housing for sweepers and scavengers; 3. Provision of house sites for members of scheduled castes – who are engaged in unclean occupations	3.44	
Fourth (1969-74)	Improvement in working and living conditions of those in unclean occupations	3.00	
Fifth (1974-78)	Discontinued following the realisation that the practice was linked with a stratified social structure		A pilot project was undertaken for conversion
Sixth (1980-85)	Scheme deleted from the plan as there was no element of subsidy and state governments could not generate necessary internal		However, the approach was very urban centric

	resources. The Home Ministry introduced a toilet conversion strategy which was dovetailed with the scheme for removal of untouchability under the IPCR Act 1955		
Seventh (1985-90)	<p>Elimination of scavenging – about 10 lakh service latrines in 490 towns in 19 states were taken up for conversion into pour flush latrines.</p> <p>By the end of the Seventh Plan, 9.63 lakh dry latrines were converted, 14,529 scavengers rehabilitated and scavenging was eliminated from 40 towns.</p>	82.00	Scheme transferred from the Home Ministry to the Ministry of Welfare in 1985
Eighth (1992-97)	The target was that by the end of the 8th plan (i.e., by 1997) the inhuman practice was to be stopped and to suitably rehabilitate the people associated with the practice. On 22 March 1992, the National Scheme for Liberation and Rehabilitation of Scavengers and their Dependents was launched by the Government of India.	368.2 (out of which Rs 384.67 crore was actually spent)	
Ninth	The objective could not be realised during	421.50 (out of which Rs	In three subsequent years

(1997-02)	the 8th plan and rolled over till the end of the 9th plan	236.02 crore was spent)	during the 9th plan, the entire fund was disbursed only during the month of March(See Table 2)
Tenth (2002-07)	The scheme was transferred to the Ministry of Urban Development and Poverty Alleviation, and the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment started a new scheme of scholarship for the children of scavenger parents.		However; gaps still remained even at the end of the 9th plan. (See Table 3)

TABLE 2		
Delays in Disbursement of Funds		
Year	Total actual expenditure during the year(Rs crore)	Disbursed in the month of March (last month of the financial year) as % of total expenditure
1997-98	90.00	13%
1998-99	5.9	100%
1999-00	70.00	100%
2000-01	60.92	100%
2001-02	9.2	24 %

Source: Report of the C&AG of India for the year ended March 2002, Union Government, Performance Appraisals, No.3 of 2003.

TABLE 3			
Number of Manual Scavengers Rehabilitated and the Gap till 2002			

	<i>Total number of identified scavengers</i>	<i>Number of scavengers rehabilitated</i>	<i>Gap remaining as of 2002</i>
Andhra Pradesh	30921	28167	2754
Assam	40413	1594	38819
Bihar	12226	285	11941
Gujarat	64195	11653	52542
Haryana	36362	15558	20804
Himachal Pradesh	4757	2023	2734
Jammu & Kashmir	4150	211	3939
Karnataka	14555	11847	2708
Kerala	1339	141	1198
Madhya Pradesh	80072	80755	-683
Maharashtra	64785	19086	45699
Orissa	35049	10681	24368
Punjab	531	2988	-2457
Rajasthan	57736	14169	43567
Tamil Nadu	35561	23687	11874
Uttar Pradesh	149202	180391	-31189
West Bengal	23852	2338	21514
Delhi	17420	2941	14479
Nagaland	1800	0	1800
Meghalaya	607	0	607
Pondicherry	476	1290	-814
TOTAL	676009	408644	267365
<i>Note:</i> The (-) figure clearly indicates faults in the identification process.			
<i>Source:</i> Lok Sabha Unstarred Question 4940, answered on 20 December 2002.			

Despite the effort post the third plan following the recommendations of the Central Advisory Board of Harijan Welfare (1956) and the Protection of Civil Rights Act (1955), even after almost fifty years there are more than 2.67 lakh scavengers involved in this inhuman practice and awaiting rehabilitation (see Table 3). In the year 2003, the Comptroller and Auditor General of India released its performance appraisal for the scheme launched in the year 1992 at the national level for the liberation of scavengers. The highlights of the CAG appraisal are:

- * The scheme failed to achieve its objectives even after ten years and involving an expenditure of more than Rs 600 crore since 1992.
- * The strategy lacked coherence and a comprehensive focus as it conceived rehabilitation and liberation as two isolated issues as far as the practice of scavenging is concerned.
- * 16 state governments responded to the central legislation on the Employment of Manual Scavengers and Construction of Dry Latrines (Prohibition) Act 1993 and adopted the same in their respective states. But till April 2002, it was not enforced in any single state. Therefore, the scheme suffered due to the absence of linkage with the law.
- * Necessary networking among the agencies responsible for the liberation and rehabilitation scheme was missing. ‘Rehabilitation’ was taken care of by the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, while ‘liberation’ was entrusted to two nodal ministries through two different schemes such as Low Cost Sanitation Scheme (Urban Development and Poverty Alleviation) and Rural Sanitation Programme (Ministry of Rural Development).
- * The methodology adopted for identification of beneficiaries in different surveys was not credible. For example, the 1992 survey identified 7938 beneficiaries in Andhra Pradesh alone, of which 5537 were rehabilitated by 1995-96. The resurvey in 1996 again identified a total of 7448 beneficiaries (5047 beneficiaries over and above the remaining 2401 backlog). By the year 2000, 6493 beneficiaries were rehabilitated but the resurvey conducted in the year August 2000 confirmed that the number of beneficiaries was as high as 30921 (8402 scavengers and 22519 dependants). Similarly, in Assam, the identified scavengers increased three-fold between January 1994 and March 1997.
- * In the year 2001, the government of Uttar Pradesh announced itself a scavenger free state. However, the third survey identified 38253 scavengers awaiting rehabilitation. Despite receiving notifications from the states, the ministry never revised the targets upwards.
- * Many trained scavengers were not rehabilitated whereas non-trained scavengers were. The banks outright rejected credit applications of the trained scavengers.
- * A huge unspent balance was accumulated as funds were only released at the eleventh hour (see Table 2). In 14 states, more than 40% funds remained unutilised. Utilisation certificates for around 91% of the total releases were not submitted.

This analysis of government's efforts over the decades strongly substantiates the points made earlier regarding the poor framing and implementation of policies for the socially excluded groups. It also reflects the inertia of the government in shifting the focus of the policy to address the core concerns through 'new imagination'. The CAG report highlights the lack of coherence in policy focus, unthinking change and poor coordination amongst implementing agency, compartmentalised vision of liberation and rehabilitation, deplorable data base, and poor resource support and flow, as factors contributing to the failure of government's initiatives for liberation and rehabilitation of scavengers.

TABLE 4			
Fund Flow under the National Scheme For Liberation and Rehabilitation of Scavengers (1997-2005)			
<i>Year</i>	<i>Budget estimate</i>	<i>Revised estimate</i>	<i>Actual expenditure</i> (in Rs crore)
1997-98	120	90	90
1998-99	90	20	5.9
1999-2000	70	70	70
2000-2001	67.5	60.94	60.92
2001-02	74	8.21	9.2
2002-03	80	33.33	NA
2003-04#	40	40	NA
2004-05	20	20	NA
2005-06	0		

In year 2003-04, the scheme shifted to the Ministry of Urban Development and Poverty Alleviation.

Sources: 1. Report of the CAG of India for the year ended March 2002, Union Government, Performance Appraisals, No.3 of 2003.

2. Budget Documents for various years, Expenditure Budget Vol. II (Ministry for Social Justice and Empowerment till 2003-04, Ministry of Urban Development and Poverty Alleviation for the rest of the years), Union Budgets.

However, a charitable evaluation of the policy would suggest three important shifts in the policy: first, the focus on shifting of carrying night soil on the head to iron carts in the early sixties; second, the focus on elimination of scavenging by conversion of dry latrines to pour flush latrines in the late eighties; and third, the focus on empowerment of scavenging communities by providing scholarships to the children of scavenging parents in the 10th plan. Unfortunately, the most important insight of the 5th plan that the practice of scavenging is rooted in the stratified social structure of Indian society was ignored. A serious engagement with this insight might have led to fundamental shifts in the policy strategies for liberation and rehabilitation of scavengers. This lack of serious engagement can at best be termed a lethargic and inefficient governance response, and at worst a reflection of the deep malaise of the caste system plaguing the Indian state.

The governments own appraisal reports have some useful and pertinent recommendations for reaching the excluded groups. The mid-term evaluation of the 10th plan has also made significant recommendations for reaching the excluded groups. The recommendations emerging from these appraisals and evaluations, coupled with sincere attempts (backed by serious political will to translate the lofty promise into reality) to implement the CMP, can create positive opportunities for reaching the excluded. In addition to these recommendations and suggestions already made in the paper, we would like to emphasize some key points.

* To effectively reach the excluded groups it would be important to take a holistic picture and not look at service delivery and provisioning of basic services in isolation of the macro trends towards liberalization and privatization.

* It is equally important to re-establish and highlight the political nature of the planning process. From the position of the excluded it is critical to view planning as a political process of effective allocation of resources in line with a political framework of social justice, and not as a mere techno-managerial approach to governance.

* The planning and governance process needs to make the paradigm shift of looking at social, economic and cultural rights of every citizen, including the most marginalized and excluded groups, as the basic rights guaranteed in our Constitution and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and not as mere services to be provided to the citizens of this country.

* In a largely neo-liberal context, it is important to continue and systematically expand state action for ensuring the basic rights and needs of the most disadvantaged communities in the country.

* Institutional reforms for systematic decentralisation of power to the people for making government accountable, transparent and responsive to the needs and aspirations of people ought to be strengthened.

India is at a crossroads in her development. The failure of the Indian welfare state in addressing the key problems of continued exclusion and marginalized of a majority of the Indian population for more than sixty years, coupled with a strong impetus towards a neo-liberal framework of development and governance, is leading to a schizophrenic and paradoxical India. A strong ‘new imagination’ rooted in the Gandhian notion of comprehensive democracy, which is not limited to political democracy but extends to social and economic democracy, can challenge this schizophrenic paradox from the position of the marginalized and excluded. Hopefully, the 11th five year plan would move in this direction, which would also be a move towards bridging the gulf between an institutional form of democracy and ushering of substantive democracy.

* This is an abridged version of the paper presented at the National Consultation on Children in India: Priorities for the 11th Plan.

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Footnotes:

1. Amartya Sen, *Development as Freedom*, Oxford University Press, 1999, pp. 15-17.
2. The case study on the National Scheme for Liberation and Rehabilitation of Scavengers and their Dependents has been prepared by Sibasankar Mohanty, NCAS-CBGA.