

A Prelude ...

Although many social science research and teaching institutions in India for several decades have been functioning under the umbrella of the Indian Council of Social Science Research (ICSSR), it was primarily owing to a novel initiative of Professor V. K. Nataraj that a new form of collaboration among them took shape. This was the annual Development Convention, hosted by the ICSSR supported research institutions in the Southern Indian region, comprising the following: Madras Institute of Development Studies (MIDS), Chennai; Centre for Development Studies (CDS), Thiruvananthapuram; Centre for Multi-disciplinary Development Research (CMDR), Dharwad; Centre for Economic and Social Studies (CESS), Hyderabad; and the Institute for Social and Economic Change (ISEC), Bangalore. Professor M. Govinda Rao, the then Director of ISEC volunteered to host the Second Development Convention at ISEC during the month of February 2003. Professor G. K. Kadekodi, who succeeded Professor Govinda Rao as Director of ISEC took up the baton. The theme for the Convention had been 'Social Sector Development: Current Status and Future Challenges,' with over 25 papers presented by scholars from across the country as well as from the participating institutions. With a view to bringing together a set of papers presented and discussed in the Convention, I was joined by a group of scholars (Professors Padmini Swaminathan, P. Sivanandan, P. R. Panchamukhi, and S. Subrahmanyam) to screen them and, in turn, to request a few referees to review the shortlisted papers. Based on such a screening and refereeing process, twelve papers have been brought together under this Monograph.

... As an Introduction

The last two decades of the previous century were marked by a concern for what the goals of the state and civil society should be in the new millennium. The seeds of this concern had already germinated in the wake of launching Structural Adjustment Process (SAP) and the heralding of New Economic Reforms (NER). At least in India, as had been the feature in many other less developed and developing nations, development hitherto, had been chiefly conceived as economic development. The role of the state in the erstwhile regimes had been the chief agent, therefore, the immediate worry with the SAP and NER was over their consequences to

the poor and vulnerable, and the social sector in the wider economy. At least four of the papers in this volume express this concern, some pertaining to the impact at regional levels, while others over a sector such as health or education.

Seema Joshi examines the trends in social sector outlays of the central and the state governments during pre- and post-reform periods and assesses their impact on the performance of social sector in India. Defining social sector expenditure as the total of expenditures incurred by the central and the state governments on promotional and protective measures, she asserts that the principal reasons for India's low ranking in development performance is its poor achievement in the social sector. Keeping education, health, water and sanitation in focus, she finds that there is a long way ahead in reaching the goals of social development despite a decade of economic reforms. Historically, there have been inter-state variations in the financial allocations for the social sector. What has been the trend in the southern states in India? Basing on an analysis of primary data, K. Gayithri finds in the states of Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu and Kerala an increase in the absolute *size* of social sector expenditure while its *share* in the total expenditure has been declining. It is not merely the size and rate of growth of expenditure that is important in the social sector development but also the quality of such expenditure. Her findings from the villages in the four states reveal in regard to education, for instance, that facilities for secondary level education are quite poor except in Kerala. Not much of a different pattern is to be found in regard to health, water and sanitation across these states.

A major concern in recent years has been the fallout of economic reforms and globalisation that is characterized by intensification of competitive pressures in the educational sector, in turn, de-emphasising the redistributive strategies. Equity comprises of two elements, i.e., *access and financial support* to a number of socially and economically disadvantaged groups. They comprise students from rural and isolated areas, students with disabilities, women, and the first generation university students. Geetha Rani examines equity in terms of access to higher education and subsidies and incentives utilised by the students enrolled in higher education across different income groups both from rural and urban areas and across male and female students. The Indian government has encouraged augmentation of resources by higher educational institutions, especially to make good a part of the cost of education by way of full cost recovery from the students. Such an approach has been thought of even in regard to public

higher educational institutions. A comprehensive student support system must be in place when fees are raised. But, as Geetha Rani observes, the number of scholarship schemes and share of resources allocated to scholarships has been declining. Further, the new student loan programme, introduced in 2001, is insensitive to the needs of the weaker sections. Hence, she argues that an alternative loan programme must be evolved which is sufficiently flexible to suit the requirement of students. If the larger social objective of such a loan scheme is to encourage equal access and participation of the weaker sections, the cost of its administration would be higher than the actual amount of loans recovered from poor students. Hence, instead of loans to poor students, means-tested fee exemption and scholarships should be in place.

A problem nearly nagging in social development has been the unevenness either in access or achievement across different social groups. When it concerns the spread of literacy and primary education, this becomes even more of a challenge. Despite repeated efforts, enrolment into and or dropout from the very primary level of education continue to pose threats. While some states have a better track record in this respect, a few others trail behind, often notwithstanding the political climate being more or less similar among them. Sharmishta Sen takes a look at Kerala's experience with a view to showing what West Bengal can learn. Universal achievement of this goal, she notes, is subject to the extent to which there is an improvement by the low achievement groups in this regard. Most educational initiatives have bypassed these groups. Despite some improvement, the extent of socially induced disadvantages has been daunting. Interlinking and integrating the targeted educational programmes with other development programmes seem warranted, as the former proves to fail or be inefficient without any change in the living conditions of target groups. Kerala's relatively successful experience in this respect indicates the importance of promoting social mobilisation of such groups to better articulate their demand for education.

Sen's invitation for social mobilisation for better performance in terms of literacy and education is reflected in the paper by Sankaran and Vijaya Kumar. They examine the performance of education sector in the light of the radical changes that were effected under the 73rd and 74th Amendments to the Constitution, paving way for a system of decentralised local governance. Although there is not much research based evidence to which decentralisation *per se* can be said to improve the efficiency of schools through people's voice and participation, the authors assess the impact of

constitution of Standing Committees on Education, as per The Kerala Panchayati Raj Act/ Kerala Municipality Act (1994). Taking the case of Thiruvananthapuram Municipal Corporation in Kerala to represent an urban context, and a sample of Grama Panchayats in Thiruvananthapuram District during the annual plan of 2001-02 within the Ninth Five Year Plan period (1997-02), they find the outcome to be of little significance in terms of quality. Nearly 90 per cent of the money allocated has been spent on physical works such as construction or improvement of schools, while the quality of teaching remains what it was. It seems to the authors that the interventions laid undue emphasis on more populist physical achievements in the sector, which seems to render more elastic political mileage to the elected functionaries of local governments than benefiting the members of the community.

Social exclusion in education for deprived children, and the causes and consequences of child labour have been a constant source of embarrassment to planners and policy implementing agencies. Basing his analysis on the Census and NSS Data, Venkatanarayana reports the slow but gradually declining intensity of child deprivation. Yet, he finds a wide variation in educational deprivation of children across the districts of Andhra Pradesh. Rural and female children are more deprived than their urban and male counterparts. It seems agro-climatic regions show significant variation in terms of the educational deprivation among children rather than in terms of conventional administrative regions. Venkatanarayana emphasises the linkages between child deprivation with the nature of rural and agrarian economy.

While many states in the country have made concerted efforts, such as the programme of Education for All (*Sarva Sikshana Abhiyan*) launched during the Ninth Five Year Plan, the accomplishment has not been uniform, and not unexpectedly. This is reflected not so much because of lacking in efforts, but in a comparative perspective, and many other states have tended to fare better than some. Andhra Pradesh belongs to the latter category. Subrahmanyam shows that because of poor primary education, about one-third of the children of 12-14 years in Andhra Pradesh remained illiterate in 1991. There has been a declaration in gender disparities in literacy rate significantly during the last four decades and they are mostly concentrated among Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. Any further reduction in gender disparities in literacy needs a focus on these two groups. Low literacy areas are geographically contiguous and 164 out of 1,099 of the Mandals (Development Blocks) deserve special focus on literacy. Since

literacy has significant externalities, he argues, households with all illiterate adults need special emphasis. Focusing on the alarming rate of school dropouts, especially involving girl children and children of Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe, he makes a plea for the improvement of quality of education at the lower school levels. His observations and that of Venkatanarayana have several elements in common. For, they both attribute the chief reasons for high dropout rates to be due to the nature of agrarian economy. Subrahmanyam lists some of these causes, which also reflect the social and economic character of the state: First, the proportion of agricultural labourers in rural workers is the highest in Andhra Pradesh. Second, female participation rate in rural areas is the highest in this State. Third, very high proportion of rural households has no literate adult female members. These characteristics make a child highly vulnerable to dropout.

A key indicator of human development has been the infant mortality rate. Sham Bhat, Pratheeba and Tripura Sundari make use of the National Family Health Survey (II) to find that the decline in infant mortality rate in many Indian states is due largely to the decline in the neo-natal and post neo-natal mortality rates. In turn, the latter decline is due to an effective programme of immunisation, and improved health care facilities. Another important factor is which, according to them, has a positive relation indicating a decline in infant mortality rate is the percentage of children breast-fed for as long as 20-23 months. Many other factors that are usually considered to be important, such as female literacy rate, percentage of births by intervals since previous birth and the percentage of currently married women aged 13-49 using any contraceptive method show statistically a negative relation with the infant mortality rate. In the light of these findings, the authors suggest that the state should undertake activities that are directed towards the promotion of food supply and improvement in the nutritional status. This would enhance women's health, thereby bringing about a reduction in infant mortality rate. If the minimum dietary requirements of the people are met, the level of morbidity too would be reduced. For this to happen, micro-level planning at the village is recommended. Such a planning enables the identification of the weaker and the more vulnerable sections of the community, who could be meaningfully targeted.

Opening up of the economy has also meant a commitment to the norms that are evolved at levels beyond a national boundary. The World Trade Organisation is one such institution with its terms and conditions commanding commitment on the part of nations such as India. What is considered to be 'good globally' then becomes a factor for reckoning even

if at times they are not perceived to be 'good locally', be they a protocol over environmental protection or patents over pharmaceutical products. As a signatory to the World Trade Organisation, India has introduced reforms in the patent laws concerning the pharmaceutical sector (January 2005). This has raised issues concerning health, particularly access to medicines by the poor. In anticipation of the introduction of pharmaceutical patent laws, Lalitha has raised issues relating to access to patented and off-patent medicines. Though India has had a vibrant domestic industry, which can produce drugs that are sufficient to meet the prevailing tropical diseases, prevalence of global diseases is also evident. Research on some of these diseases is carried out by the private sector, which will eventually be patented. While patented medicines can be accessed through availing of flexibilities in the TRIPS Agreement, access to off-patent medicines can be ensured by effective implementation of some of the domestic policies. In both the cases, as Lalitha underscores, role of the government is very important especially in meeting the needs of the poor. Taking a non-alarmist viewpoint she reposes faith in the pharmaceutical industry in India: 'The domestic pharmaceutical industry of India has adequate capacity to produce and supply medicines for the prevailing diseases in India and the patent transition will not have any direct impact on this segment. If the domestic policies are appropriately implemented, then access to medicines to all can be ensured.'

Repercussions of economic reforms on health sector have been another important issue that has been debated considerably. Using the NSS data for two periods (1986-87, reflecting the pre-SAP and reforms era; and 1995-96 as the post reforms era), T. R. Dilip finds in the state of Kerala an unprecedented increase in the costs of inpatient care treatment, while those of outpatient care treatment has remained unchanged/ declined. Variations are evident between the sectors: the gap between public sector and private sector has sharply increased for inpatient care services, while the gap has narrowed down in regard to the costs of outpatient care services. Dilip finds a considerable social class differences also in respect of 'out of pocket expenditure' incurred on medical care. He points out to what he calls a self adjustment strategy in expenditure on health care adopted by the households to counter structural changes in the health sector during this period.

In many respects, performance of social sector development is dependent upon how the situation concerning poverty is understood and policy measures aim at them. Professor V. M. Rao makes a lucid statement on the social science's understanding of poverty in India. Most suggestions made are worthy of adherence. In his Presidential Address, Professor V.

R. Panchamukhi, Chairman of the ICSSR, reiterated the need for re-examining social sciences methodology to understand the emerging dimensions of poverty in India.

... And, an Expression of Gratitude

In bringing out a monograph meant to address different dimensions of social sector development, its present status and future challenges, we certainly have a few limitations staring at us even as we present them before the readers. The first set of limitations concerns an inadequate coverage of all issues. Some themes have more than one contribution, while there are some not addressed. Housing and gender concerns are two such important omissions. Secondly, there is a limitation in terms of geographical representations. Not all themes have a national or a 'macro' focus, while in terms of regions or states not all have been represented in the collection of papers. Finally, there has been considerable delay in bringing these papers together. Although most authors were enthusiastic in revising the papers based on the comments they received from discussants, referees, and the editor, the pace was not necessarily uniform.

Several institutions and individuals have to be gratefully acknowledged for their contributions both to the Development Convention that formed the platform in which these papers were first presented, and in processing them for publication. Shri L. C. Jain, formerly Member of the Planning Commission, inaugurated the Development Convention, and set the tone of deliberations. Professor V. M. Rao, formerly of ISEC, and the Commission on Agricultural Costs and Prices (Ministry of Agriculture, GoI), delivered a befitting Valedictory Address. It is in response to the views expressed by Shri Jain and V. M. Rao that many of the papers included in the volume underwent considerable revisions. All the contributing authors join me, besides Shri T. R. Satish Chandran, Shri S. L. Rao, Professors V. R. Panchamukhi and G. K. Kadekodi, in acknowledging our intellectual debt to Shri Jain and V. M. Rao. To the participating institutions (MIDS, Chennai; CDS, Thiruvananthapuram; CMDR, Dharwad; and CESS, Hyderabad), I remain grateful for facilitating the team of scholars to work together. I should like to thank Professors V. K. Nataraj, Padmini Swaminathan, V. Chandrasekhara Naidu, P. R. Panchamukhi, S. Mahendra Dev, S. Subrahmanyam, and P. Sivanandan for their support and contributions.

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To Professor G. K. Kadekodi, Director of ISEC, there are more than one reason for me in this venture to be thankful. Chief among them is that but for his prodding, the volume may have taken a little more time to come out. I am grateful that a tradition for which V. K. Nataraj as the Director of MIDS and nurtured by G. K. Kadekodi, K. P. Kannan, and S. Mahendra Dev has carried forward and with greater success.

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G.K. Karanth
Editor