

They for social  
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They lived a miserable life in the faraway villages and trekked to the cities for a better life. They may have here only sky as the roof, but at least they can manage to assuage the pangs of hunger. Most people who die during severe winter in northern India are the poor who cannot afford sufficient food and who do not have a shelter for spending the night. Delhi has its night shelters in different parts of the city to care to casual labourers. Even these shelters are not sufficient for a burgeoning floating shelterless population. The minimum needs programmes (MNP) was launched in the fifth plan to ensure a basic minimum standard of life for all sections of people in rural India and the urban area. The idea was to establish a network of facilities to attain an acceptable level of consumption in respect of selected items within a stipulated time frame. It was felt that the competitive demands for greater investment in other development sectors left relatively small allocations for social services.

It was found that whenever there was financial crunch, the planners were quick to enforce cuts in the allocation for social sectors. This apart, there have been wide regional imbalances in the provision of social services necessitating governmental intervention to bridge the yawning gap in the provision of vital social services. Initially, there were eight components of MNP, elementary education, rural health, rural water supply, rural electrification, rural roads, rural housing, environmental improvement of slums in cities and nutrition, Adult education was added to list of MNP components in the sixth plan, while rural domestic energy, rural sanitation and public distribution system were added during the seventh plan. But with all pious hopes and aspirations of the planners for millions of people, it has

been a big struggle to meet the basic needs even after the dawn of the new millennium, even well after we launched the tenth five year plan. The goal of the planners seems to elude us year after year and plan after plan. A bold initiative was taken by the chief minister's conference held in July 1996 to ensure access of all to certain Basic Minimum Services (BMS) in a time bound manner. The conference endorsed the seven basic minimum services as a paramount importance in securing a better quality of life for the people, especially those living in the villages.

Further, it observed that it would be in the best interests of the country if time bound action plans are formulated to secure full coverage of the country with those seven basic services by A. D. 2000. This was essential for the rapid growth of the economy and for social justice and hence, these basic services were to constitute the core of the social sector development plan.

The seven basic services identified for priority attention are: (1) Cent per cent coverage as regards provision of safe drinking water in rural and urban areas; (2) Cent percent coverage of primary healthy service facilities in rural and urban areas; (3) Universalisation of primary education; (4) Provision of public housing assistance to all shelterless poor families; (5) Extension of mid-day meal programme in primary schools to all rural blocks, urban slums and disadvantaged sections; (6) Provision of connectivity to all unconnected villages and habitations; (7) Streamlining of the Public Distribution system with focus on the poor. The twentieth century has passed by and we are now passing through twenty first century and still far away from achieving any of the goals mentioned above. In its vision 2020 document, the planning

commission itself has admitted that we could hope to secure these objectives only by 2020. You can't blame the leadership alone if we have fallen short of our expectations and if our hopes are not fructified.

If a political leadership has a strong will, it can achieve even the impossible. We must congratulate the Vajpayee government for making ceaseless efforts to make primary education a fundamental right. Efforts were made in this respect during the Narasimha Rao, Gowda and Gujral regimes, but it was the privilege of the Vajpayee government to make right to education a reality. What has been just an objective all these 55 years could become a reality in the foreseeable future. Launching a Rs. 1000 crore centrally sponsored watershed programme, 'Haryali', at a National conference of state ministers and secretaries of rural development, panchayati raj and public works in New Delhi. The prime minister said that the country had become self-sufficient in food production, yet the other face of rural India showed that 160,000 villages were not connected with good roads, and even today 60 percent of rural households had no electricity, education or health care. These figures cannot be wrong when they come from no less a person than the prime minister of India who is also chairman of the planning commission.

At the dawn of the New Millennium, let us face facts. We cannot have two India's within our national boundaries: one India, hi-tech with internet, mobile phones, big cars, five star hotels, five star hospitals, specialty hospitals and professional colleges charging capitation fees of Rs. 10-20 lakhs and the other India where there are no schools, no medical facilities, no safe drinking water and where people live, breed, sleep and defecate in the open. A house divided cannot stand for longer; even now we are still in <https://assignbuster.com/they-for-social-services-it-was-found/>

the stage of figuring out what could be the exact number of people living below the poverty line. We know what needs to be done, but we are not doing enough.

There is politicization of every social need and in the see saw battle of coalition politics in many states and in the monomania of politicians of somehow clinging on to the seat of power, the powers that-be and the corrupt officials do not see the children picking rags for a living, a mother dying in child birth for want of medical facility nearer home The child dying because of diarrhea caused by polluted water and the hundreds of migrant labourers using the footpath in Delhi as toilet. The Governments have the resources and their well conceived plans for them but most of the benefits of the plans do not reach them, as innocently acknowledged by our Prime Minister who has recently offered to give Rs. 60, 000 crore for connecting all the villages with an all weather road. But he regretted that most of states were guilty of tardy progress in the implementation of the programmes already entrusted to them. Many of the states go a step further by diverting resources meant for social services sector to other sector. Fifty years on, we still see a dismal picture in the social services sector. Millions of people in the countryside and the festering slums in the big cities are still struggling to meet their minimum needs; food, clothing, shelter, education, health, drinking water, sanitation and employment.

Will there ever be a dawn in their life in the foreseeable future? Nobody can say.