ECONOMIC REFORMS, SOCIO-ECONOMIC EXCLUSION AND INCLUSION IN INDIA: FROM GENDER PERSPECTIVE

SOME REFLECTIONS ON MANIPUR EXPERIENCES

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ABSTRACT

This paper looks at patterns of socio-economic exclusion and inclusion from the perspective of the gender, in India and Manipur in the context of specific processes of economic reforms that are driven by market. The paper seeks to highlight the persistence of socio-economic exclusion and inclusion of women and other forms of crime and violence and the absence of a level playing field for the women who constitute half of the sky. The paper attempts to examine critically the multiple dimensions of socio-economic exclusion in general and the gender-based exclusions and discrimination in particular which are seen as contributory factors for the deprivation of these groups in India with a case of study of Manipur. It also brings out evidence on the exclusionary and inequitable nature and attitude of the organs of the state in delivering growth with social justice. The paper concludes by calling for an alternative paradigm for gender equality, inclusive growth and development in which the state has to play an activist role.

INTRODUCTION

The issue of socio-economic exclusion and inclusion of deprived groups particularly of women has been a subject matter of intense debate among the academics, social scientists, gender activists and intellectuals particularly in the context of the new emerging scenario of Globalisation, Liberalisation and Privatisation. The deprivation of socially excluded communities, the issues of ethnicity, discrimination, social exclusion, human rights and poverty alleviation have gained academic discussion and discourse. The understanding of these issues and their linkages to the social, human, institutional and economic dimensions involved in the process of economic development, are important for effective policy paradigms. Combating gender inequity therefore calls for additional policies complementing antipoverty and inclusive development programs. In this context, the teachings of Mahatma Gandhi are clearly still of utmost relevance today. As is well known, central to Gandhi’s philosophy was the principle of ‘swadeshi’, which, in effect, means local self-sufficiency. Swadeshi is a program for long-term survival and inclusionary development. Mahatma
Gandhi was a champion of 'swadeshi', or home economy. Gandhi wanted the government to surrender much of its power to local villages. To him, the true India is to be found not in its few cities, but in its seven hundred thousand villages. If the villages perish, India will perish too. Though India follows the high growth trajectories, India’s growth has remained dividend and inequitable, and wealth has been remained confined to only a small segment of the society. It is an urban-centric and consumption-driven one. In fact, Indian economic growth story is an outcome of this inequitable achievement. Barely 7% of the economically active Indian workers is in the ‘organised sector’ compared to 97% in the ‘unorganised sector’. All of a piece with a society that only last year had 53 dollar billionaires (pre-global financial crisis) and has 836 million human beings who “get by” on less than Rs.20 a day. Nevertheless all the talk of ‘inclusive growth’, the reality is that during the course of over last two decades of economic reforms, there have been two Indias in the making – a ‘shining’ for the haves and a ‘suffering’ for the have nots. In this context, recollect what Baba Saheb Ambedkar had to say when he presented our Constitution’s draft for final consideration and adoption by the Constituent Assembly. "On 26th January 1950, we are going to enter into a life of contradictions. In politics we will have equality and in social and economic life we will have inequality. In politics, we will be recognizing the principle of one man-one vote and one vote- one value. In our social and economic life, we shall by reason of our social and economic structure, continue to deny the principle of one man-one value. "How long shall we continue to live this life of contradictions? How long shall we continue to deny equality in our social and economic life? "If we continue to deny it for long, we will do so only by putting our political democracy in peril. We must remove this contradiction at the earliest possible moment or else those who suffer from inequality will blow up the structure of political democracy which this Assembly has laboriously built up." (25th November, 1949)

The Parliament must enact necessary laws which empower our people economically, politically, socially and culturally. One man, one vote, one value must be transformed into one man, one value. The time has come for us to heed the above warning.

The current model of growth leads to widening disparities not only in income but also in other indices of social development including gender gap, it is more than evident that the gap between public need and actual availability in many important economic and social arenas, is huge and growing. It is relevant to note that Gandhi describes the ideal village as his dream. Social exclusion, lack of freedom for women and extreme inequalities have been part of village life in India from time immemorial to the present. Gandhi was uncompromisingly opposed to these. After sixty years of planned efforts, Indian economic development has not come anywhere close to fulfilling Gandhi’s economic aspirations. The same is also true in Manipur case. Many of the traditional cottage and small industries and units are closing down due to competition and import intensive consumer led growth strategy. The state’s economy is still characterized by low per-capita income, low capital formation, in-adequate infrastructure facilities, geographical isolation and communication bottleneck, inadequate exploitation of natural resources like mineral resources, hydro power potential, forests etc., low progress in industrial field, lack of investment and high un-employment rate among the relatively high literate people. The rural urban gap is widening both in per capita assets and per capita net worth (Maisnam, 2009). The income growth and wealth inequality in
the state have become significantly intertwined during the period of liberalization. Among the most important aspects of Manipur’s booming tertiary sector is the flow of the transfer payments and salary sector. The commodity producing sector however, is almost shrunken. The present state of violent conflict in Manipur has also compounded the problem. More recently, HIV/AIDS has emerged as a new form of stigma-related social exclusion. Problems of poverty, inequality, backwardness and social exclusion have a sharp gender dimension. Young people from poor households are also increasingly emerging as a socially excluded group. With limited education and skills and few opportunities for employment or self-employment, many are found to be following patterns of behaviour which would further damage their future: crime, drug abuse, human trafficking, alcoholism, early pregnancy and prostitution. The agenda of inclusion is perhaps informed by such an experience. The paper attempts to examine critically the Manipur’s experience in terms of gaps with respect to a set of socio-economic development indicators with special reference to women in the context of the neo-liberal trajectory of development. It also brings out evidence on the exclusionary and inequitable nature and attitude of the organs of the state in delivering growth with social justice. The paper concludes by calling for an alternative paradigm for inclusive growth and development in which the state has to play an activist role.

II

Concept of Socio-Economic Exclusion

We first look at the concept of socio-economic exclusion in general and the gender-based exclusions and discrimination in particular which are seen as contributory factors for the deprivation of these groups. The concept of economic and social exclusion was encouraged by debates in Europe on new forms of poverty in the wake of the crisis of the welfare state, more specifically, consequent upon World Summit for Social Development (Copenhagen, 5-12 March 1995), and endeavoured to explore the notion of social exclusion. Since the Social Summit, there has been increasing attention paid to the usefulness of the concept to concerns with poverty, inequality and social justice in the developing country context by, among others, the Institute of International Labour Studies, the Asian Development Bank, the Inter-American Development Bank and the World Bank. The concept has become increasingly concerned with the problem of “new poverty” associated with long term unemployment, unskilled workers and distress migrants. Economic and social exclusion involve socio-economic problems that have long existed, notably poverty, unemployment and various forms of marginalization. Socio-economic exclusion is a process and a situation that prevents individuals or groups from full participation in social, economic and political life and from asserting their rights. Socio-economic exclusion as a concept underpins a multidimensional approach to poverty by defining it as relative deprivation. If people are lacking in or are deprived of resources to achieve access to these conditions of life and so fulfilling membership of society they may be supposed to be in poverty. While unemployment does not in itself symbolize exclusion, it bears a relationship to exclusion in the sense that there is a route of exclusion associated with the increasing length of the unemployment period, the limited personal capabilities of the unemployed, which hamper integration, the loss of family support, which can help a person to face the unemployment...
situation and the growing isolation from public life. Moreover, being excluded from social associations can lead to other deprivations as well, thereby further limiting our living opportunities. For example, being excluded from the opportunity to be employed or to receive credit may lead to economic impoverishment that may, in turn, lead to other deprivations (such as undernourishment or homelessness). Social exclusion can, thus, be constitutively a part of capability deprivation as well as instrumentally a cause of diverse capability failures. Amartya Sen draws attention to various meanings and dimensions of the concept of social exclusion (Sen 2000). Distinctions are drawn between the situation where some people are being kept out (at least left out), and where some people are being included (may even be forced to be included)- in deeply unfavourable terms, and described the two situations as “unfavourable exclusion” and “unfavourable inclusion.” The “unfavourable inclusion”, with unequal treatment may carry the same adverse effects as “unfavourable exclusion”. The case for seeing social exclusion as an approach to poverty is easy enough to establish within the general perspective of poverty as capability failure (Sen, 2000:5). Sen pointed out that the term social exclusion is of recent origin, and he situated it alongside the older, and broader, concept of capability deprivation. Sen,s argument pertaining to social exclusion, is both constitutively and functionally related to capability deprivation. In other words, social exclusion represents an important loss of capability in its own right as well as being a cause of other deprivations which further remove the individual or group from access to the good life or the means to acquire it (Sen, 2000: 6). In Sen’s words, “poverty must be seen in terms of poor living, rather than just as lowness of income... look at impoverished lives and not just at depleted wallets” (Sen, 2000:3). In social sciences literature there is general agreement on the core features of socio-economic exclusion, its principles indicators, and the way it relates to poverty and inequality. (Mayara Buvinic 2005). Further elaboration of the concepts of exclusion or discrimination has come from the mainstream economics in the context of race and gender. The mainstream economic literature throws more light on discrimination that works through markets, and developed the concept of market discrimination with some analytical clarity. In the market discrimination framework, exclusion may operate through restrictions on the entry in market, and/or through “selective inclusion”, but with an unequal treatment in market and non-market transactions. These developments in social science literature indeed enable to grasp the meanings and manifestations of the concept of social exclusion, and its applicability in a class, caste, ethnicity and gender based exclusion in a developing society like India. The study on gender issues including socio-economic exclusion, crime and domestic violence against women has attracted so much attention in recent years in India. Many laws have been enacted and many inclusionary policies are being implemented to empower the women economically, politically and socially. Gender equality is guaranteed under the Constitution and the Government is a signatory to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and has adopted the Millennium Development Goals targets and indicators in national planning. The Government has a stated commitment to mainstreaming gender in its national programs and has targeted the education, health care, justice, and police sectors as priorities. However, there is still a fair way to go in developing legislation and regulations that enable the implementation of gender equality goals and objectives. The pressure of poverty and the phenomenon of what World Bank calls” inequality trap for
women” make them commodities even in this era of 21st century. A.K. Bagchi rightly observed, “She has had less control over resources, including her own body”. Where there is inequality, where there is more poverty in households, where there is growing unemployment, and then the main burden of it is taken by women. The cultures spawned by globalization has also contributed to the growing number of sexual attacks on women, child sexual abuse, sex rackets, incidents of sexual blackmailing and so on. With all pervading consumer values promoted through neo-liberal policies there is an increasing trend in the media of commodification of women and there is a propagation of serials and films etc. that expose women in a demeaning and degrading way. Thus, except in paper and speech, women’s empowerment, equality and real development don’t find place in their real lives.

III

MULTIPLE DIMENSION OF CRIMES AND VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN: MAIN ROAD BLOCKS TO GENDER EQUITY

Violence against women is becoming an endemic part of our society, and is getting dangerously institutionalised. They are increasingly unsafe, whether within or outside their homes. The waves of shocking atrocities on women that have hit the headlines in recent months indicate only the tip of the iceberg. The scale of violent crimes against women, the frightening regularity with which they occur, the huge increase in sexual crimes being reported from every corner of the nation are pointers to an alarming trend. According to the NCRB data for 2011, the most heinous crime of rape showed a rise of 9.2 per cent between 2010 and 2011. Girls under 14 constituted 10.6 per cent of the victims, 19 per cent were teenaged girls between 14 and 18 years of age. 4.7 per cent were young women in the age group of 18-30 years. These are the registered cases – as we know, many cases do not get reported at all. In 94 per cent of the cases the rapists were known to the victim! Kidnapping and abduction rose by 19.4 per cent in that one year. Cruelty and torture by husband and relatives that is Sec 498-A complaints went up by 5 per cent and molestation by 5.8 per cent. The overall incidence of crimes against children went up by 24 per cent over 2010, however, the conviction rate remained at 30 per cent.

Manipuri women have also been suffering from the prevailing tyrannical scheme. The 65 years of Independent India could not offer a unique opportunity for genuine socio-economic development and advancement of Manipuri women. Today Manipuri women face burden of class, ethnic, gender and conflict. They are engaged in the most serious, most difficult and most decisive battle of destiny, survival and empowerment. Between 1996 and 2012, there were more than 300 cases of rape and between 1999 and 2012; there were more than 1400 cases of crime against women Manipur. Gang rape, molestation, kidnapping and eve teasing etc., are the common cases. Domestic violence, including wife beating, mental and physical torture is also growing enormously in recent years. National Family Health Survey-2005-06(GOI, 2006) reveals a startling figure, that 44 per cent of Manipuri women have experienced spousal violence. Since there is no guaranteed work, she has to accept any type of works on worse terms. They are, in some cases involved in illegal and socially undesirable business including drug trafficking. We have seen an increase number of women
in prostitution as means of survival for their families in the state. The number is estimated at 9000. The NCRB data for 2011 released recently paints a very grim picture for Manipuri women. Crimes against women in Manipur are showing a significant increase in almost all categories. Under the IPC, which includes violent crimes like rape, molestation, kidnapping and abduction, there has been a steady increase every year. These are the registered cases – many cases do not get reported at all. The overall incidence of crimes against children also went up, however, the charge-sheeting and conviction rate continued to remain at zero. Domestic violence, including wife beating, murder, mental and physical torture is also growing enormously in recent years. Over 44 per cent of Manipuri women have experienced spousal violence.

In may be noted here that for centuries Manipuri women had been suffering from oppressive native feudalism and colonialism. The growing consciousness against oppressive colonial rule and native feudalism gave birth to the movement for social change in which women played an active and leading role. However, 65 years of Independent India and 61 years of planned development could not offer a unique opportunity for genuine socio-economic development and advancement of Manipuri women. The damage and trauma that have followed decades of violent-conflict has resulted in massive destruction and the virtual collapse of the commodity producing sectors and huge deficits in the human resource development and a massive loss of skilled personnel. The women have been the main victims of conflict and bloodshed. The generally violent and lawless climate created by conflict allows such crimes to be committed with impunity. Thus women are devalued in society particularly in times of violent conflict. Over the last three decades, conflicts have affected human and development costs. It is impossible to separate the immediate development and human cost from the longer-term development costs of conflicts. The immediate human cost includes the effect on macro-economic aggregates such as domestic income, investment and consumption; impacts on the volume and composition of public expenditure, including diversion from social investment to conflict-related expenditure; and, at the household or individual level, the human costs involved in mobilization, death, injury, migration and reduce access to social and development expenditures. The longer-term development costs include destruction of physical and human capital and reduction in savings and investment. This can set back development by several years, if not by decades. Loss of lives is one major element in both the immediate human costs as well as in the development cost over the longer run. Conflict related disruptions, such as strikes, security checks; curfew, blockades, shutdowns, and extortion have increased the costs of economic activity and contributed to an economic slowdown. Violent-conflict has altered the social fabric of Manipur. The present generation -- "the children of conflict" -- is still recovering from the shatter and trauma that have followed decades of conflict. The people are living under tremendous stress, and this has deeply changed their cultural and social values. There is the untold story of the devastating psychological and social consequences, in addition to the physical trauma. The decade’s long conflict has resulted in major social dislocation; conversely, it also creates opportunities for them, as traditional cultural stereotypes are gradually shaken and undermined. Women are being called on to play a range of roles in the changed situation. They also carry out a multiple range of tasks they had never done before. These realities pose
challenges and also provide opportunities for women to redefine their role and place in the new situation. Women’s organizations including NGOs have played a crucial role in assisting with service delivery and social mobilization campaigns around critical issues, such as domestic violence, drugs and human trafficking, Right to information act, divorce and social awareness-raising activities etc. In fact, there is hardly any activity in which women are not actively involved. The main road block to the advancement of women’s movement is the lack of a clear cut strategy mainly due to the lack of unity in the women’s movement.

Development theory suggests that an economy evolves from a predominant agriculture oriented set-up to a nature of industrial economy satisfying Rowstow’s four stages and Kuznet’s characteristic features of growth. The relationship between structural change and the process of economic development is extensively explored in Clark (1940), Fisher (1945), Kuznets (1957, 1971), Chenery and Syrquin (1975). Clark (1940), Fisher (1945) and Kuznets (1957) expressed the thesis that in the course of economic development, there would be a progressive shift of labour from agriculture and allied activities to the secondary and tertiary sectors. This has occurred in the western developed countries. With a shift of GDP from agriculture to industry, there was nearly proportionate shift in employment. Similarly, a rise in the share of services in GDP was accompanied by a proportionate increase in employment. But the general pattern of structural transformation of the production structure and employment structure as established in the studies does not seem valid in India and also in Manipur. In Manipur, there is rapid transition from agriculture to services, with industry lagging behind unlike what Kuznets proposed. The move has been mainly from agriculture to services in share of output and the structure of employment has been persistently resistant to change. The share of the primary sector in income has fallen to 26 per cent but the share of the primary sector in employment continues to be nearly 60 per cent, indicating a worrying persistence of low productivity employment for most of the labour force.

**Employment Status of Manipuri Women**

In the 11th plan document there is a section on ‘Bridging the Divides: Including the Excluded’. Employment has been the central objective in the agenda of inclusive development. Here, the employment means productive employment with reasonable earnings to overcome poverty. Despite the objective of inclusive growth, the quantum of employment generation with reasonable earnings and a minimum protection is not evident. Employed persons are categorised into three broad groups according to their status of employment. These broad groups are: (i) self-employed, (ii) regular employees and (iii) casual labour. Breaking down employment information by status in employment provides a statistical basis for describing workers’ behavior and conditions of work, and for defining an individual’s socioeconomic group. The most significant pattern of employment in Manipur is the overwhelming proportion of self-employment particularly among women. The towering proportion of self-employment particularly among Manipuri women, however, can hardly be a cause for celebration. The overwhelming proportion of self-employment consists of fragile working conditions and very low returns, in fact, as Jha and Negrel (2007: www.macroscan.org) rightly pointed out that the “substantial segments of self-employment, such as agriculture, are only parking sites for disguised unemployment”. A large part of the
increase in self-employment- and therefore in employment as a whole-“is a distress-driven phenomenon, led by the inability to find adequately gainful paid employment. So the apparent increase in aggregate employment growth may be more an outcome of the search for survival strategies than a demand-led expansion of productive income opportunities” (Chandrasekhar, 2007:72).The evidence further reveals that most self-employed workers are engaged in continuous, intensive but low productivity work, that provides little remuneration and is also prey to tremendous uncertainty because of the unpredictability of income. Thus, the soaring proportion of self-employment particularly among Manipuri women can hardly be a source for inclusiveness. The rosy image of new productive opportunities emerging from self-employment because of a vibrant fast-growing economy is unfortunately far from the truth for most self-employed workers, even in the urban areas which are currently seen as more economically dynamic. Of course it is true that in the highly-skilled professional categories new forms of highly remunerative self-employment are emerging. But this is only a minuscule drop in the ocean of self-employment. Instead, the evidence suggests that most self-employed workers are engaged in continuous, intensive but low productivity work that provides little remuneration and is also prey to tremendous uncertainty because of the unpredictability of income. But employment creation by itself is not enough. The fact is that in Manipur, most poor people are employed, nevertheless they are still poor. In short, to reduce poverty – to achieve some measure of inclusiveness – the productivity of much of existing employment needs to be enhanced and new jobs must be productive ones. The proliferation of low productivity informal employment, which has taken place in Manipur, is not the answer. Women’s reproductive work as primary caregivers in the home is also a major constraint to their income-generating activities. Their number is reduced when they go to the organised sector. The proportion of female employees as compared with male is negligible in private and public sectors. The rate of unemployment is higher among the educated females. A large chunk of youth attaining some level of education and training enter into the labour market, but many of them remain unemployed and continue to search for or be available for employment. As per live register of employment exchange (2012), there were more than 2 lakh educated female job seekers in Manipur. The agenda of inclusion is perhaps informed by such an experience.

Poverty, Inequality and Social Exclusion of Women

The gender break up of poverty is not available. The statistical data on the sectoral concentration of the poor shows that the number of agricultural labors and cultivators constitutes bulk of working force in Manipur. The bulk of this population have nothing other than power to sell, must seek opportunities to sell it on a day-to-day basis. Agricultural labours do not get job for more than 130 days on an average in a year and the wage paid is quite meager. They can, at best, be passive participants in reform process. Yet the Government claims that poverty is coming down. The number of rural poor in rural Manipur (BPL), as per the latest 61st round of the National Sample Survey (NSSO ; 2006), is 3.76 lakh down from 6.53 lakh in 1999-2000. As is well known, the poverty line of Manipur like other states of the North East is based on the figures of Assam which does not reflect the actual levels of poverty in the state. According to this flawed official poverty line, any adult
above an income of Rs 13 per day (less than the price of a battled water) in rural Manipur is not poor because he is above poverty line (APL). Those earning Rs. 13 and above per day are not entitled to subsidized food grains meant for BPL category. The distribution of food grains particularly rice through PDS fell sharply from 57.07 thousand tones in 1997-98 to just 21.08 thousand tones in 2004-05. (GOM, 2007a). The PDS system is, thus, being dismantled sharply in the state. However, owing to the resource crunch facing the state, public investments on agriculture and rural development are also being slashed, which will further affect growth rate and employment generation in rural economy. Plan outlay on agriculture and rural development declined from 10.82 percent in 8th Plan to 8.71 percent in 11th Plan.

Official poverty estimates show that Manipur is still home to nearly 4 lakh poor. The incidence of poverty is higher among households headed by women. More than one in ten households in Manipur is headed by a woman.

The rising consumption inequality is another dimension of socio-economic exclusion. The Chart clearly demonstrates that the difference in the level of household consumption expenditure of urban and rural areas. It shows that the rural-urban disparity in the Monthly Per Capita Consumption Expenditure (MPCE) at current prices has significantly increased during the reform period. The rural urban gap is widening both in per capita assets and per capita net worth. As can be seen from Table 1, the income growth and wealth inequality have become significantly intertwined during the period of liberalization.

**Inflation, Food Crisis and Social Exclusion:**

During the periods of high inflation in food prices, government must provide a basic minimum quantity of food grain and other food items at low prices through public distribution systems to low-income, food-insecure, and vulnerable populations. The evidence, however, shows that there is “high rates of exclusion of needy households from the public distribution system (PDS) The all India average indicates that 52 per cent of agricultural labour households either had no card or an APL card. The corresponding proportion of Manipur was 96 per cent in Manipur. The NSS data shows that large numbers of households do not have access to the PDS. In Manipur, 98 per cent of the total rice meant for BPL and 97 per cent of rice meant for AAY were diverted to either the non-deserving or the black market.

**Women’s Health: A Dismal Future**

The high degree of deprivations is reflected in other identical indicator of wellbeing. This is particularly reflected in the high level of under nutrition and related health indicators. A major health problem facing the country is the high figure of HIV/AIDS. Women also suffer from work hazard-related health problems such as chronic respiratory and heart diseases, due to constant exposure to fuel-based cooking fires, as well as back and spinal problems and miscarriages, due to carrying heavy loads. Mental health problems associated with the violence inflicted on women during the occupation (including rape and other forms of physical and emotional torture), as well as domestic violence, are also prevalent. Several findings point to the high prevalence of domestic violence as a major social and human rights challenge for the country. HIV/AIDS has also emerged as a major challenge to the health and
social status of the Manipuri women. The private sector has grown by leaps and bounds, as a result of the inability of the public system to provide care. The unprecedented growth of the private sector not only denies access to poorer sections of society, but also skews the balance towards urban biased, tertiary-level health services with profitability overriding equity, and rationality. The level of public health spending has fallen from

The status of women and children are often indicators of what a nation can expect for itself in achieving MDGs in future. When a nation suffers, the women and children are also bound to suffer. The high degree of deprivations is reflected in other identical indicator of wellbeing. This is particularly reflected in the high level of under nutrition and related indicators. It is a well-known fact that where there is inequality, where there is more poverty in households, where there is growing unemployment, then the main burden of it is taken by women. Again when economic vulnerability increases, the degree of crime and violence against women also increases. The present state of violent conflict in Manipur has also compounded the problem. The print and electronic media are full of crime and violence against women. It reflects the underlying belief that violence against women is a routine feature of daily life and does not require serious attention.

The essence of current development trajectory, as has been pointed out, is a move towards expenditure deflating policies at the macroeconomic level, whenever any cut is made to reduce the fiscal deficit, it is always the social sector (comprising education, social welfare nutrition, rural employment and minimum basic services) which has to bear the brunt of deficit reduction. Data for 2005-06 (NFHS-3) shows that 24 percent of under-3-year-old children in Manipur are underweight, and 25 percent are stunted. 53 percent of the children between 12-23 months are not fully immunized. 84 percent of the children age 12-35 months do not receive vitamin A dose in last 6 months. Poor nutrition can also be seen in the widespread prevalence of anaemia among children in the age group of 6-35 months, which affected almost 53 percent of children in 2005-06. Prevalence of anaemia, deficiency of vitamin A is clear manifestations of ill-health and malnutrition of Manipur women. It is worth stressing that the divide between urban and rural Manipur, in terms of most indicators of wellbeing, is a huge one. As reported by the GoI, for the indicators of access to safe water, Pucca House, literacy, formal education and life expectancy, the gap is truly alarming. For instance, most recent data obtained by the NFHS-3 for 2005-06 show that nearly half of the total households in Manipur do not have improved source of drinking water. Whereas this figure is around 88 percent for India.

Women and Media

The rapid development and massive proliferation of technology in the last fifteen years in the realm of audio visual as well as print media has influenced our lives in a very big way. This media boom has had a profound effect on women in Manipur. Women are, on the one hand, an important target group for mainstream media; on the other hand, images of women are all pervasive. In fact images of women are constructed and used by media in a big way to reinforce and to give public sanction to retrograde value systems. The increased presentation of 'sex and violence' is a matter that specifically concerns women because of the
importance of women's images in such presentation. The exploitation of women's body for sexual titillations in films, including advertisement films exemplifies this tendency.

Women and Politics

Women's participation in politics goes far beyond their numbers in elected bodies. In all major political movements of this century, in all movements of social change, women have played an extremely important role. But despite participation and mobilization of women in politics in this broad sense of the term, we have not seen a commensurate increase in the number of women in different levels of decision making. Indeed, the higher you go the fewer women you see. The question of women's representation in elected bodies and in other decision making committees, needs to be seen in the light of this blatant imbalance due to gender discrimination.

IV

CONCLUSION

It may be concluded that India has a huge challenge on its hands, in terms of designing and putting in place, a healthy agenda that facilitates mechanisms for inclusive growth. Problem of unemployment, poverty and deprivation have a sharp gender dimension. There is no denying the fact that the process of socio-economic transformation has already started in the country. However, the process has been too slow particularly in peripheral region. The period of high growth era has been less inclusive than before. The unprecedented rates of overall economic growth have not really trickled down to the deprived sections of the society. When the problem of gender inequality and socio-economic exclusion are combined, the problem assumes yet another dimension. The worst sufferers are women from the poorer households, in rural areas. The right to property is another dimension of great importance from a gender equity point of view. The challenge of overcoming socio-economic inequality and exclusion is compounded by the pre-existing and deeply entrenched structures and attitudes of inequality and exclusion. Unless the economic roots of this phenomenon are understood and its political and social repercussion are examined, not a single step can be taken towards the solution of the practical problems. The persistence of socio-economic exclusion of women and other forms of discrimination and human deprivation and the absence of a level playing field for the women who constitute half of the sky call for an alternative paradigm for radical social change and gender equality.

REFERENCE

GOI  Budget Documents, Various years.


