

India's Children -- A Silenced Generation

As the incumbent government goes to the polls with an *Indian Shining* campaign, neither the ruling party nor the opposition articulates the survival and rights needs of India's future, our children

A major criticism against the Opposition is that there is too little emphasis on the future

One way this can be rectified is by articulating positive agendas for the future

What better way than a Political Agenda for India's Children?

They are one-third of the population who will have no say in the elections

Hence This, The Children's Manifesto

After 57 years of Independence, about 60 million Indian children under the age of 6 live below the poverty line and every second child is malnourished.

[Hard Facts, Mobile Crèches]

Almost 2 million children die each year before reaching their first birthday. One in 11 dies before their fifth birthday. Seven to 8 lakh children die every year from easily preventable diseases like diarrhoea.

Children of 100 million families live without water at home; children in 150 million households have no electricity; less than half of India's children between the ages of 6 and 14 years go to school and a little over one-third of all children who enroll in grade 1 reach grade 8.

[<http://www.peoplesmarch.com/publications/globalisation/chapter15.htm>]

Religious fundamentalism, state led communal instigation and violence have increased and our children are subjected to textbooks that have been rewritten on communal lines.

Despite the growth in GDP, the share of government spending in the social sector has not increased. Successive five year plans have witnessed a steady and sharp increase in investments in defense while the investments in education and health have remained abysmally low if not declining.

In every case those worst affected are our children.

Right to Development and Education:

- *All* children in the age group 6-18 should be in formal full time schools and all children under 6 in anganwadi's. Government should ensure that all children complete schooling up to Class 10.
- *All* children without discrimination on account of class, gender, caste, disability and ethnicity, should receive good quality education in an inclusive environment and equal opportunities to excel.
- Ensure special services and opportunities for children with disabilities. Correct India's shameful record of providing services to only 5% of disabled children and schooling to only 2%.
- Education for all children under 18 years should be financed by the government and a minimum of 10% of the GDP be allocated for educating India's children.
- Employment guarantee and equal wages for all adults in order to ensure that children do not have to work and can go to school.
- No form of foreign funding should be allowed in financing education as it undermines the nation's sovereignty and the guarantee of free education.
- All schools be brought under the management of local self government bodies (Panchayat)
- Curriculum development must be decentralized and be determined by secular academic institutions keeping in mind geo-cultural diversity.
- Privatisation of schools should be discouraged and the Common School System that ensures equity in education for all children must be put in place.
- Revision of the Free and Compulsory Education Bill. The sanctions on parents to send children to schools must be removed and replaced by compulsion and penalties to concerned governments for failing in providing free education to all children.
- We oppose any form of fundamentalism in education in the name of value education and demand a secular education.

Right to Survival and Health

- Comprehensive community health programmes rather than specific disease oriented programmes are the need of the hour. We demand that the criterion for setting up Primary Health Care Centres and Health Sub Centres should include distance in addition to population.
- That health care be financed by government and managed by local self government (Zilla Parishad at the district level).
- That the government expenditure on health of all the citizens must increase from 0.87% to 5% as per the recommendation by the World Health Organisation.
- That dependence on foreign aid in health care be progressively reduced from 78% of total expenditure on health needs of children to 25% in the next five years and that the government takes full responsibility for financing and making available quality health care for all citizens.
- We demand a comprehensive rights-based policy on food security for all with extensive legal safeguards. In order that no child goes to bed hungry and no child be born underweight and stay undernourished, we demand that the criterion for poverty line and therefore coverage under the Public Distribution System for food be revised and expanded to include all families below the internationally approved poverty line (1 US \$ per day).
- The National Nutrition Mission should be activated on a priority basis.
- Immediate provision of nutritious, quality mid-day meals in all primary schools, as per the Supreme Court order of November 2001. Extension of mid-day meals up to Class 10 as a national programme, with inclusion of out-of-school children.
- The Integrated Child Development Services as per the Supreme Court order of November 2001 be universalized and made available to *all* children under the age of 6.
- We demand people's right over natural resources (land, water and forest) and their right to livelihood in order to ensure that no family is disrobed of its dignity and children are assured income and food security at the household level. We demand a nation-wide employment guarantee programme that is legally binding.
- We demand revision of the agriculture policy in favour of small and marginal farmers and an increase in government investment in agriculture.

Right to Protection

- Complete prohibition of all forms of child labour, including employment of children in so called non-hazardous sectors including agriculture.
- All currently working children should be brought into the formal school system including specific support for schooling of girls who are engaged in household work and child care.
- Enactment and implementation of effective legislation for preventing and prohibiting sexual abuse of children, trafficking in children and pre natal sex determination.
- Promotion of non-institutional nurturing care for children without families and establishment of quality standards in care for children who are living in institutions.

General Demands

In order for the above mentioned rights of children to be ensured the following must be adhered to:

- Revision of definition of the child to be uniformly applicable to all persons under the age of 18.
- Revision of the National Policy for Children (1974) to make it more comprehensive, statutory and in adherence to commitments made under the Constitution and the United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child.
- Establishment of the National Commission for Children with statutory powers.
- Comprehensive legislation to protect children from all forms of discrimination arising from family background, caste, gender, disability, community, region and religion. Severe penalty for such discrimination must be established.
- Accountability and transparency in all matters of governance. We demand that the Lok Pal Bill (that aims to fight corruption in high places) be passed and enforced with immediate effect.
- We demand that the Right to Information be made free for all citizens.
- 33% reservation of seats for women in all levels of governance from the Panchayat to the Rajya Sabha. Within this there must be reservations for women from the SC and ST and minority communities.

An Agenda for Child Rights!!