



ICDD

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**Politics of
public policies in India:**

Explaining the institutional internalization
of inequality in policy legislation

The International
Center for Development
and Decent Work

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Abstract

The focus on poverty and inequality in development discourse has generally been an acknowledgement of the gaps between the poor and the affluent. This is seen as an economic condition linked to livelihoods and employment deprivation, or a condition rooted in the broader socio-cultural moorings of the society creating entitlement and capability deprivations. However, the issue here is how inequality concerns impact and are reflected in public policies. What are the drivers that determine the interests and structural coalitions that shape government welfare agendas, and in turn public policies on inequality? The processes shaping the conceptualization of inequality concerns within the policy framework have not been adequately comprehended in the development discourse. This involves a focus on policies that address the need for human capital development (e.g. social sector policies like health, education, and employment and livelihoods). However, it also requires a focus on institutions and processes that can impact the ability of people to influence public policies affecting them directly and their ability to build and protect their assets, and to gain access to public and private resources and services. Policy legislation is, in other words, also a product of different interests represented in the policy domain and the structural coalitions through which interests become represented, such as political parties and civil society groups, and how this determines the politics of state action, particularly in federal-parliamentary systems like India. In the process of governance, this creates an institutional landscape of competing pressures that forms the core politics of public policy formulation and public service provision. This paper discusses the institutional internalization of the politics in public policy legislation in India to address inequality. Constituting a major characteristic of the 'patronage democracy' witnessed in the country, public policy legislation reflects the politically construed institutional internalization of concerns. The policies not only reflect equality concerns, but also involve a comprehension of equality within the framework of citizen demands for development and inclusion, and the political rationalization of what can secure electorate support.

1 Introduction

The 'inclusive' growth approach, with its focus on public policies aimed at eradication of poverty and inequality, is not new to the discourse on development for the world in general, and India in particular. But, the poverty-inequality focus in this process has generally been an acknowledgement of the gaps between the poor and the affluent seen as an economic condition linked to livelihoods and employment deprivation, or a condition rooted in the broader socio-cultural moorings of the society creating entitlement and capability deprivations. In the process of party democracy in a federal-parliamentary system, this implies: (i) a policy environment originating in ways in which the state interacts with economy (Katzenstein, 1978; Williamson, 1985), or, the state-business relations (Wilson, 1985); and (ii) the networks as institutionalized channels of interactions representing, besides state-economy relations, other types of state-society relations like clientelism and pluralism that speak of interconnectedness between government and public administration, and political parties in parliament (van Waarden, 1992).

Thus, policy approaches to inequality are not just about the poverty alleviation exercise. True, the issue of inequality is a concern of humanity and well-being, including the right of people to have a life of dignity and access to basic goods and services. Acknowledged globally, the population of 1 billion who live in developed countries earn 60 *percent* of the world's income, while the 3.5 billion living in low-income countries earn less than 20 *percent*, with as much as 1.7 billion people in Asia alone living without access to basic sanitation facilities and electricity¹. In keeping with this understanding, an approach of 'growth with equity' has been the accepted development policy pathway in many countries of the world and this is true of India, too. This is particularly reflected in the shifting comprehension of inequality concerns in public policies from merely viewing it as 'income inequality' to 'economic inequality' (Sen, 1973 and 1997).

However, the issue here is how do the inequality concerns get reflected in, and impact public policies? What are the drivers that determine the interest and structural coalitions that shape the welfare agenda of governments, and in turn the public policies on inequality? This raises questions about 'who' are the stakeholders, 'what' are the driving interests, and 'how' do the interests get articulated in the policy domain? It is important

¹ For details, see R.V. Moorthy, 2014, '*Growing Inequality is Worrying*', The Hindu Business Line (Our Bureau), February 6 (www.thehindubusinessline.com/news). Also see Kofi Annan, 2000, '*We the People: The Role of the United Nations in the 21st Century*', The UN, New York (www.un.org).

to note that the processes shaping the conceptualization of inequality concerns within the policy frame has not been adequately comprehended in the development discourse. This, therefore, raises a need to better comprehend the nature of shifts in the policy focus on two related points: (i) what are the public policies regarding provisioning of various types of primary goods²/resources, and what is the nature of shift in focus, if any; and (ii) how do the consequent structural and process conditions underlying resource provisioning address issues of access and utilization, which can be impacted by the people's/target groups' individual, environmental, social and relational diversities? On one hand, this embodies a focus on policies that address the need for human capital development (e.g. social sector policies like health, education, and employment and livelihoods). It also calls for a focus on institutions and processes that can impact individuals' ability to influence public policies that affect them, their ability to build and protect their assets, and their ability to gain access to public and private resources and services.

This broadening of focus from incomes alone to primary goods through which 'inequality' is approached within policy legislation is important by itself. However, it is not a sufficient explanation. Policy legislation also needs to be viewed through the lenses of the different interests that get represented in the policy domain, the structural coalitions through which the interests get represented such as political parties and civil society groups, and how this determines the politics of state actions, particularly in federal-parliamentary systems like India. The reference here is to public provisioning activities that involve actions of the state as an important player, intervening directly or indirectly in activities that produce or distribute resources and services. In highly plural and diverse societies like India, the powers and actions of the state are increasingly bound by a number of government and non-government agencies, and supranational and sub-national governments and players.

² Reference here is to the general resources used to generate capabilities, including infrastructural and social sector resources like education and health.

These are often embedded within dynamic and interdependent contexts of systems and structures representing varying interests. In the process of governance, each of these agencies, governments and players jostle for influence, creating an institutional landscape of competing pressures that form the core of the *politics* of public policy formulation and public service provisioning (Sekher, 2014). This *politics*, too, forms an important dimension in the overall conceptualization of inequalities in public policies. The institutional internalization of this reality, both through individuals' and communities' abilities to promote/not promote their ends, and the government's acknowledgement of demands in the larger vision of public policy, could provide useful insights into who/what are the *drivers* in the process and, hence, into the politics underlying policy legislation to address *inequalities*.

Accordingly, the remainder of the paper is structured as follows. Section 2 briefly presents insights from literature about the inequality-politics link, while Section 3 provides a reality check of inequalities in the country. Section 4 provides an analytical framework to capture the policy perspective that shapes concerns regarding inequalities and the need for creating '*equal opportunities for the excluded*' within the federal-parliamentary system of India. Finally, Section 5 presents a discussion of the Indian state's role and the politics underlying policy legislation to address inequality.



2 Inequality and public policies in India: Insights from literature

Economic inequality in the policy domain has often been viewed as synchronous to the choices made by national governments to address their economies (Aisbett, 2003). This reflects their agenda and approach to the development process and, in turn, to the issue of inequality. The policy choices could be either in the nature of:

- (i) integration with the global economy through a liberalized market, free flow of labor and integration agreements, such as conditional lending from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) for adherence to structural adjustment programs (Bhagwati, 2000, 2004; Krueger, 1980); or
- (ii) domestic neo-liberal economic policies, famously referred to as the 'golden-straight jacket' for economic policy makers (Friedman, 2000), aimed to attract foreign investments and which could imply restrictions in provisions by the government of public goods, social insurance and environmental regulation.

However, it is to be noted that the public has more interest in poverty reporting based on total head-counts rather than poverty incidence, and this acknowledges the non-monetary dimensions of poverty (Aisbett, 2003). Policy choices by governments to address poverty, therefore, also show a cognizance of the associated concerns of inequalities observed in non-monetary issues like access to public goods and services, in addition to inequalities in income distribution. Economic inequality and untangling the politics behind the shifts in the approach to addressing it in public policies thus needs an understanding of what the concept means.

True, there is no disagreement in concerns about poverty and inequality. The problem is in its treatment, leading to differing normative positions and policy prescriptions. As per the critics of globalization, one of the pre-eminent consequences of social process and other associated phenomena of economic liberalization is market segmentation. And, under conditions of imperfect competition, the oligopolistic reach of big market players could spread all corners and the distortions can adversely affect the poor, both in terms of their role as suppliers of labor and raw produce, as well as their role as consumers of finished products (Bardhan, 2008; Ghosh, 2004; Kanbur, 2001; Nissanke & Thorbecke, 2008; Sen, 2002). At the same time, a positive correlation is usually found between foreign direct investment, trade and growth, and the opportunities for increased competition and accountability provided by openness under globalization, which has also raised

arguments in favor of sound political institutions and civil society to foster development³ (Krueger, 1980; Woolcock, 1998; Woolcock et al., 2001). However, the central concern in this debate is not so much the contention over economic liberalization itself, nor is it the use of the market as an institution, but the overall inequities in the institutional arrangements that produce unequal sharing of goods and services, and benefits of the development process (Sen, 2002)

As far as India is concerned, it has been argued that globalization appears to have been a cause for transforming India's existing highly segmented economy into a genuine common market, but this has in no way spelled out an erosion or a dismantling of the economic and welfare role of the state (Nayar, 1974, 1997, 2009). While imperatives of globalization have brought a focus on economic development, the nature of the country's political system, a federal-parliamentary democracy drawing its support base from a highly plural and diverse society, has its compulsions on the political leadership shaping the politics in the process, and the consequent emphasis on welfare policies. It is this "politics of development"⁴ that is a crucial factor in defining India's policy approach towards addressing its problems of poverty and economic inequality, and its policy choices for achieving its development goals. This is an interesting dimension of policy legislation seen in India that needs further dialogue within the development discourse. Essentially, it pertains to questions such as: what are and how have political postulations been made towards 'inequality' and the nature of consequent policy legislation?

³ This has a reference to an understanding of development seen in terms of gains from globalization, and has a resonance on opportunities that shape income distribution.

⁴ For details, refer to Nayar 1974 (Nayar, 1974), pp 364.

2.1 Poverty-inequality scenario

Often, India has been referred to as a vibrant democracy. The word ‘vibrant’ needs to be well-explained. If vibrancy is taken as depth of diversity, it suggests that India is the most diverse nation in terms of its physical, cultural and social context. Unfortunately, this legacy of vibrancy holds a gloomier side too. It is the depth of economic inequality which existed in the country and has consolidated over the ages. And, the most common way by which the economic inequality has been examined over the time is through the lens of poverty and the capacities of people to access basic services like drinking water, sanitation, housing, education and health (Drèze & Sen, 2013; Narayan et al., 2000).

References to inequality and social exclusion of the impoverished section of society in India, as early as late nineteenth century, highlight a social and economic structure that saw the growth of a rich peasant class who capitalized from the commercialization and tenancy legislation in agriculture⁵, and who preferred to buy lands, become landlords, or turn to money-lending (Chandra et al., 2008). The reforms thus failed to benefit a vast section of impoverished cultivators, most of them small peasants, tenants-at-will and sharecroppers, who had neither resources nor the incentive to invest in the improvement of agriculture. Lop-sided industrial development was yet another striking feature, with industries mainly concentrated in a few regions and cities of the country, thus indicating the unequal nature of growth the country was witnessing (Chandra, et al., 2008). Studies on shares of top income in India also point towards a skewed pattern in income distribution. The shares of the top 0.01 to 1 *percent*, though shrinking considerably from the 1950s to the mid-1980s, are again seen rising to levels almost on par with what they were prior to the 1950s. In other words, the average top Indian incomes, which were about 150–200 times larger than the average income of the entire population in the 1950s, have again risen to these levels (Banerjee & Piketty, 2005). While this U-pattern growth story of India’s rich could be attributed to the shift from the early socialist approach towards a

⁵ In India 70 *percent* of the population is dependent on agriculture. At the time of independence, almost half of the arable land was cultivated by tenants (those who are not in direct relationship with the state, but pay rent either in cash or kind to the landowner – tenancies may be recorded or unrecorded, short term for only a crop or extending over life time, and legal or illegal) and sharecroppers who paid rent to the landowner. Tenancy reforms during the first two decades after independence aimed at giving the tenants permanent rights to the land they cultivate, subject to a limited right of resumption to the landowners. Though the implementation of tenancy laws led to some tenants acquiring ownership rights, the incidence of tenancy still continues to be substantial. The banning of tenancy and various lease restrictions has only pushed the phenomenon underground, rendering the tenants’ position even more precarious, often making them victims of a corrupt bureaucracy. For details, refer to N.C Saxena, ‘Tenancy reforms vs. open market leasing – what would serve the poor better?’, A Discussion Paper, Planning Commission of India, New Delhi (Website: planningcommission.nic.in/hindi/reports/articles/ncsxna/index.php?), Accessed on 05-05-2014.

more liberal economic growth approach, it is also suggested that this may be due to the shift in power within the Congress party, which was the elected political party forming the national government in the late nineties, towards a technocratic/pro-business group from the earlier socialistic principles of the party since independence (DeLong, 2001).

It has also been argued that, while there was a marked increase in inequalities in the country in the 1990s, the inequalities reflect three striking scenarios (Deaton & Drèze, 2002):

- First, there was a strong ‘divergence’ of per capita expenditure across states, with the already better-off states (particularly in the southern and western regions) growing more rapidly than the poorer states.
- Second, rural-urban disparities of per capita expenditure have risen.
- Third, inequality increased within urban areas in most states.

Based on head-count ratio (HCR)⁶, the study (Deaton & Drèze, 2002) brought out some grave scenarios of inequality in the country:

- Most of the western and southern states (with the important exception of Andhra Pradesh) have done comparatively well;
- The eastern region achieved very little poverty reduction between 1993–94 and 1999–2000; and
- There is a strong overall pattern of ‘divergence’ (states that were poorer to start with had lower rates of poverty reduction).

In another study of growth in India also using HCR to assess poverty levels and comparing the 1987–1993 pre-liberalization situation with the 1993–2000 post-liberalization reform period, it is observed that certain regions of the country, like the states of Bihar, Gujarat, Maharashtra, Karnataka, Haryana and Punjab, witnessed an accelerated decline in poverty levels during the post reform period (Mazumdar & Sarkar, 2008). According to this account, less spectacular declines in poverty levels were seen in Tamil Nadu, Rajasthan, U.P. and Kerala, while states like Andhra Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Orissa, West Bengal and Assam suffered a decelerated decline. Both studies, the one by Deaton and Drèze (2002) and the other by Mazumdar and Sarkar (2008), agree that the states which already had a malfunctioning inequality scenario deteriorated further during the post-reform period.

⁶ The proportion of the population below the poverty line.

2.2 Internalization and overlapping of economic and social inequality concerns

The monster of poverty, inequality and discrimination still reigns high in India in spite of the country's potential as an emerging economic power (Bardhan, 2010; Basu, 2008). There are marked regional inequalities (Rao et al., 1999), while income inequalities seen in terms of wealth concentration in a small segment of the population have also increased (Deaton & Drèze, 2002). Why have different regions or states within the country witnessed different levels of growth or, for that matter, why there are different degrees of income inequality and poverty? Research to answer questions about why the rich population is growing acknowledge, among other concerns, a need for greater focus on factors such as governance, institutions and the cultural context, as having a defining role in determining a country's growth path (Hayami, 1997). However, studies directly linking income inequality and institutions in India are limited (Kalirajan & Takahiro, 2002). Recognizing that 'economics is concerned with expanding the pie while politics is about distributing it', it is noted that there is a relationship between politics and economic growth, and, as such, between politics and public policies seen in terms of the influence of different actors: average citizens, economic elites and interest groups (Alesina & Rodrik, 1994; Gilens & Page, 2014). But, the politics of public policies in India has not been sufficiently examined to explain how this consideration is built into the country's public policy approach.

The political positions of different elected governments in the country have over the years resulted in piecemeal strategies to deal with issues of growth and inequality. It is only now, after the opening up of the Indian market during the 1990s, that policy makers and leaders of the country have recognized the importance of an integrated effort towards growth with inclusion of the weaker sections of society to fulfil the country's long desired dream of being a sovereign, democratic, economic power in the world forum. Though studies provide a narrative of India's political economy and an analysis of the Indian state critiquing the dominant state-business alliance and the shift to pro-business policies (Kohli, 2010), the underlying politics of this process is a vital factor that needs further examination. This is important in view of the fact that in India, with its highly diverse and plural demographic characteristics and multiple levels of social and economic inequalities, the role of the state is shaped by the politics of interest representation that condition the democratic polity of the country.

3 Inequality concerns: A reality check

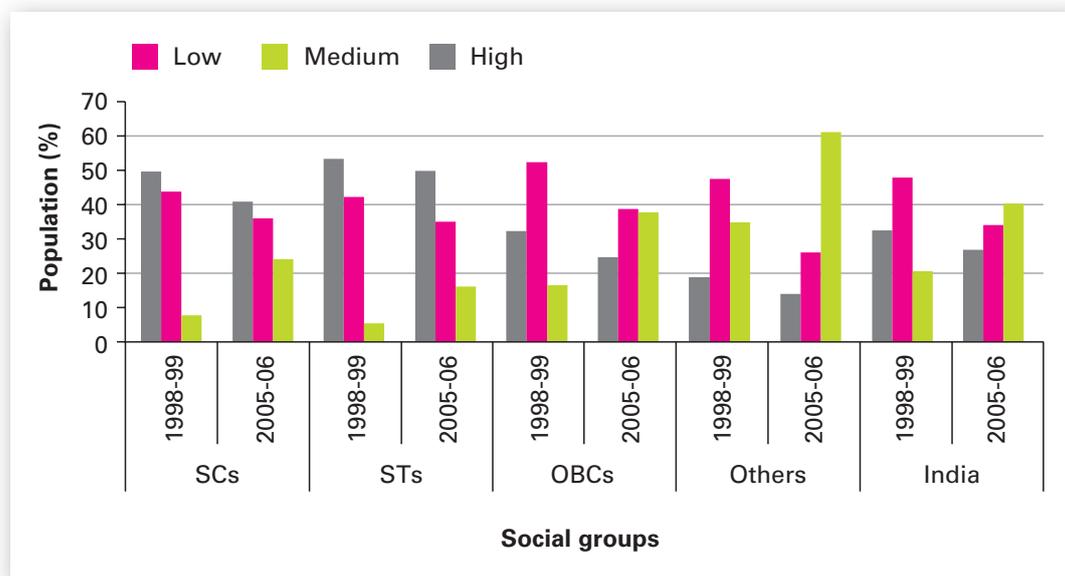
Along with recognition of the need for *'growth with inclusion'* in the quest for India's development, inequality concerns and how these concerns get channeled into the policy domain also assume importance. The economic inequality seen in India has, undoubtedly, a double effect in terms of creating a cohort of poor, mainly comprised of women, children, and the socially marginalized groups such as the Scheduled Castes (SCs), Scheduled Tribes (STs), and the other backward castes (OBCs) and religious minorities. It is this population that is not only economically poor, but also their social standing in a largely hierarchical society creates many barriers to their freedom from the structures of social deprivation which, in turn, limits their opportunities for upward economic mobility (Thorat & Newman, 2009). The inequality is also seen in terms of the poor's lack of access to basic services like safe drinking water, sanitation, health, education, and housing. An attempt is made here to revalidate this argument by presenting a synoptic picture of the ground reality. For this purpose, we have used the National Family Health Survey (NFHS) data from 1998–99 and 2005–06⁷. One reason for this is that the NFHS is considered to be one of the best scientifically organized surveys with a nationally representative sample of more than 100,000 households, providing detailed information on availability and utilization of basic services. This section not only re-emphasizes our concerns about inequality and the politics of policies underlying the approaches of the Indian state to address it, but also helps us to outline an analytical pathway in the following section to better understand the factors that define how inequality concerns are perceived within Indian society and the consequent influences on policies.

Figure 1 clearly shows the vivid prevalence of economic inequality in the country. The proportion of people belonging to the lower wealth quintile from among the deprived castes of the population, i.e. SCs and STs, is consistently higher compared to others, including the OBCs. This substantiates the claim we make here about how lack of opportunity for upward social mobility has transcended from economic inequality.

⁷ National Family Health Survey (NFHS) – 2 and 3 (1998–99 and 2005–06, respectively), India. For details see URL: www.rchiips.org/nfhs/. The NFHS – 2005–06 is the third round of the National Family Health Survey in India (equivalent to demographic health surveys, or DHS, in other countries). The fourth round of the NFHS survey is in progress and the results are expected to be in the public domain in 2017.

India

Fig 1: Economic inequality measured through wealth terciles across social groups



Note: The wealth index is divided into low, medium and high income group using the data from National Family Health Survey of the years 1998–99 and 2005–06. Scheduled Castes (SCs), Scheduled Tribes (STs), other backward castes (OBCs) and religious minorities (others).

There is a vicious cycle of inequality, consisting of low economic status, lower castes, informal occupation, and lack of access to education/health services. Added to this, there is a gender dimension, with the women constituting a significant proportion of the economically deprived.

Table 1 shows that in the decade from 1998 to 2006, around 41 percent of SC and OBC women and 68 percent of ST women were engaged in agricultural and unskilled work, which formed a highly insecure employment segment characterized by exploitation, deprivation and poor quality of life. In addition, a significant proportion of women in the survey sample (NFHS-3) and the SC and ST men were reported as 'not working' in the period under reference here. The table clearly highlights that although the policies and approaches of the government towards inequality and employment generation have brought some positive changes, the situation is still highly disappointing.

Table 1: Employment status bifurcated for gender and social group (*as percent of the total*)

INDICATORS	SOCIAL GROUPS									
	SCs		STs		OBCs		Others		India	
	1998–99	2005–06	1998–99	2005–06	1998–99	2005–06	1998–99	2005–06	1998–99	2005–06
WOMEN										
Not working	53.3	49.4	36.7	27.5	58.5	52.5	72.1	71.0	61.0	55.4
Professional	1.2	1.7	1.2	1.3	1.5	1.8	3.0	3.6	2.0	2.3
Clerical	0.3	0.4	0.3	0.4	0.3	0.6	0.7	0.9	0.5	0.6
Sales worker	1.2	1.3	1.9	1.5	1.5	1.8	1.3	1.8	1.4	1.7
Agricultural worker	31.0	31.2	49.3	54.2	27.8	32.3	16.0	12.8	25.6	28.0
Service worker	2.1	5.7	1.3	1.8	1.2	2.5	1.0	2.7	1.3	3.2
Semi & unskilled	10.4	10.2	9.1	13.3	9.1	8.4	5.6	7.2	8.0	8.9
Don't know	0.3	0.0	0.1	0.0	0.1	0.0	0.3	0.0	0.2	0.0
Total (N)	16,511	18,905	7854	8237	29,715	39,833	35,306	29,783	89,386	97,293
MEN										
Not working	NA	12.0	NA	8.8	NA	12.6	NA	14.4	NA	12.7
Professional	NA	4.1	NA	3.2	NA	4.9	NA	9.2	NA	6.0
Clerical	NA	2.9	NA	2.0	NA	3.2	NA	5.0	NA	3.6
Sales worker	NA	7.2	NA	4.0	NA	12.5	NA	15.6	NA	11.7
Agricultural worker	NA	28.1	NA	48.7	NA	31.3	NA	24.4	NA	30.0
Service worker	NA	5.6	NA	2.5	NA	4.6	NA	4.5	NA	4.6
Semi & unskilled	NA	40.1	NA	30.8	NA	31.0	NA	27.0	NA	31.4
Don't know	NA	0.0	NA	0.0	NA	0.0	NA	0.0	NA	0.0
Total (N)	NA	13,964	NA	6061	NA	29,025	NA	22,822	NA	72,062

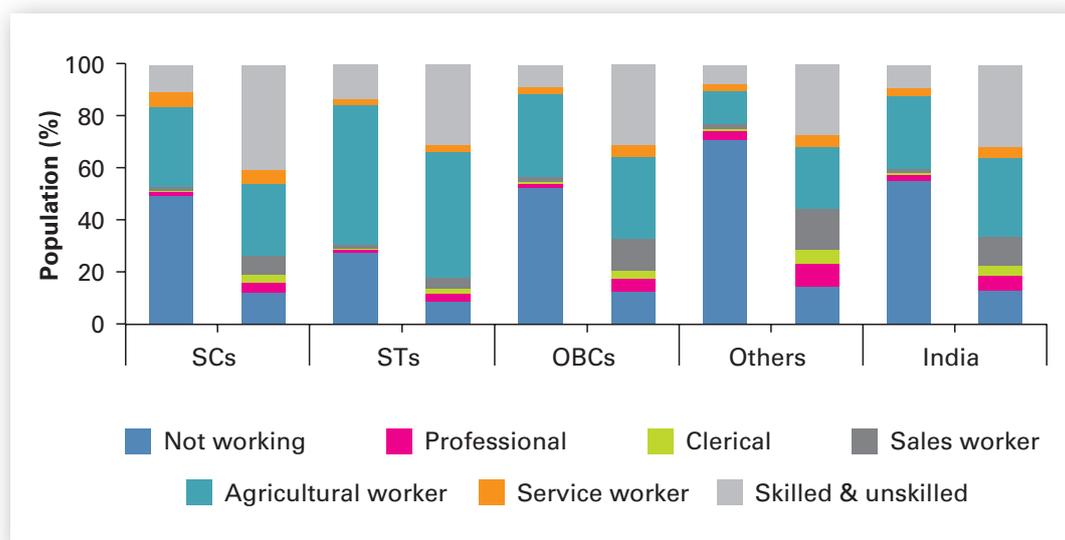
Note: Data from National Family Health Survey of the years 1998–99 and 2005–06. Scheduled Castes (SCs), Scheduled Tribes (STs), other backward castes (OBCs) and religious minorities (others).

'NA': Not applicable as the data was not collected for men during NFHS-1998–99.

'Don't' know': The respondent could not respond about his or her occupation in the last 12 months at the time of the survey.

As indicated in Figure 2, agriculture forms the major employment share of India’s economy. This agrarian economy is largely comprised of farmers with tiny landholdings and landless workers. Significantly, the proportion of women employed in agriculture is much higher compared to men, re-emphasizing the fact that, in India, economic inequality often transcends into social inequality.

Fig 2: Change of employment between the years 1998–99 and 2005–06 bifurcated for social group (as *percent* of the total): A trickledown effect of economic inequality



Note: Scheduled Castes (SCs), Scheduled Tribes (STs), and the other backward castes (OBCs) and religious minorities (others). Data from National Family Health Survey of the years 1998–99 and 2005–06.

An important dimension of this inequality, which is also a core cause of its perpetuation and the persistence of a fragmented society, is lack of access to education. In spite of the Government of India’s massive attempts to promote education through various welfare initiatives and educational campaigns, the picture is still gloomy. As shown in Table 2, according to the NFHS-3 data, almost half of the female population in the country remain in the darkness of illiteracy and, from among this illiterate population, the SC and ST women constitute 56 and 63 *percent*, respectively. This makes for a very disheartening picture of India’s development story.

Table 2: Educational attainment across social groups (*as percent of the total*) depending on gender

INDICATORS	SOCIAL GROUPS				
	SCs	STs	OBCs	Others	India
MEN					
Illiterate	37.1	44.6	32.9	24.1	32
Primary	27	28.6	25.7	22.3	25.2
Secondary	31.9	24.2	35.5	40.9	35.5
Higher	4	2.6	5.8	12.7	7.3
Total (N)	13,964	6061	29,025	22,822	72,062
WOMEN					
Illiterate	55.6	63.6	51.2	51.2	48.5
Primary	22.7	21.4	22.2	22.2	22.3
Secondary	19.9	14	23.7	23.7	25
Higher	1.7	1	2.9	2.9	4.1
Total (N)	18,905	8237	39,833	29,783	97,293

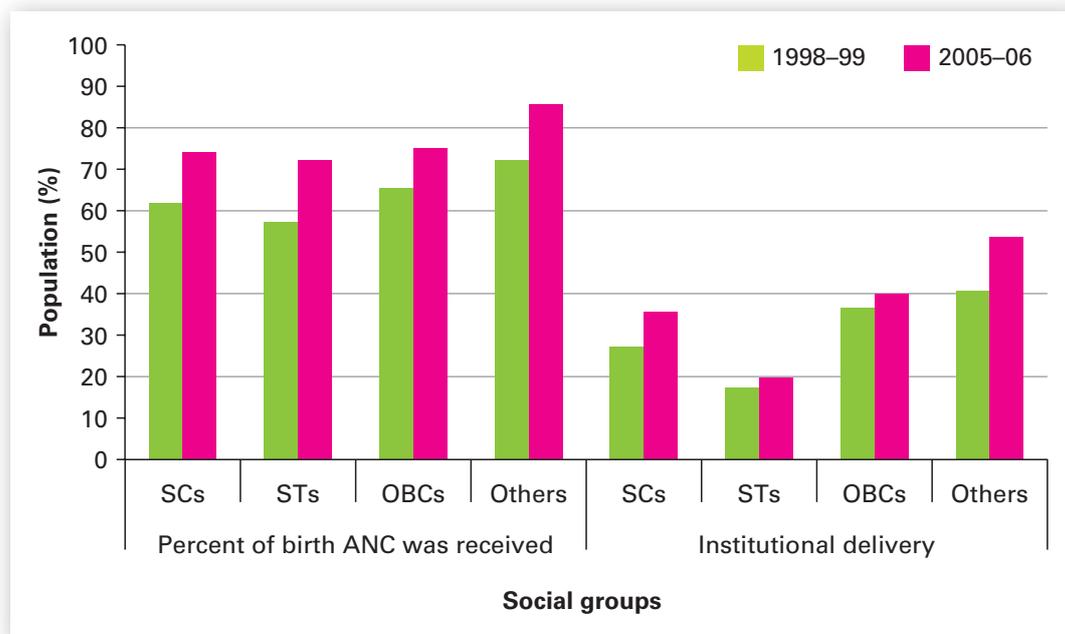
Note: Data from National Family Health Survey of the year 2005–06. Scheduled Castes (SCs), Scheduled Tribes (STs), other backward castes (OBCs) and religious minorities (others).

When inequality of access to healthcare is taken into consideration, the picture becomes even more complex. In spite of the high growth rate that India has achieved in last couple of decades, infant mortality, maternal mortality, immunization coverage, institutional delivery and antenatal care (ANC) services in India are dismal. A prime, though not the only, reason for such a scenario is insufficient political motivation to bring about the change. The National Rural Health Mission (NRHM) has led to institutionalization of maternal and child health care in the country through the Janani Suryaksha Yojana⁸ (JSY), and the appointment of Accredited Social Health Activists (ASHA) and Auxiliary Nurse Midwife (ANM). However, aside from the formation and implementation of decentralized health plans at state, district and village level resulting in commendable improvement in the services reaching all sections of society, the overall picture is far from satisfactory.

⁸ Social policy for the welfare of lactating mothers.

Figure 3 shows that although institutional delivery, an important indicator of access to healthcare services in a society, has improved, there is no denial of the fact that still a significant proportion of the population do not have access to institutional delivery in the country. A major reason for this failure has been the weak financial conditions of the poor coupled with a general lack of awareness. In spite of being provided with free-of-cost institutional delivery provisions at hospitals, many of the poor are not accessing the service.

Fig 3: Social inequality in terms of health care to pregnant women



Note: Data from National Family Health Survey of the years 1998–99 and 2005–06. Scheduled Castes (SCs), Scheduled Tribes (STs), other backward castes (OBCs) and religious minorities (Others).
ANC=Antenatal care

The scenario pertaining to reducing infant mortality rates (IMR) and improving nutrition status has been the biggest worry for the country. Table 3 shows that high disparities in infant and child mortality rates still persist along the social stratum. Almost 87 percent of illiterate mothers face infant mortality as per NFHS 1998–99, and 70 percent of illiterate mothers face this situation according to NFHS 2005–06. The number is more than 80 percent for SC and ST women as per NFHS 1998–99, although a marked decline was seen during NFHS 2005–06 indicating significant success of child health programs.

Table 3: Change of social factors in India within a period of 10 years

	1995–96		2005–06	
	Infant mortality	Child mortality	Infant mortality	Child mortality
SEX OF CHILD				
Male	53.8	14.6	43.7	9
Female	44.3	19.7	39.1	12.4
MOTHER'S EDUCATION				
Illiterate	86.5	39.7	69.7	26.9
Literate, < middle complete	58.5	18.4	52.33	10.3
Middle school complete	48.1	10.5	36.5	3.6
High school complete and above	32.8	4.4	25.9	3.9
CASTE/TRIBE				
Scheduled caste	83	39.5	66.4	23.2
Scheduled tribe	84.2	46.3	62.1	35.8
Other backward class	76	29.3	56.6	17.3
Other	61.8	22.2	48.9	10.8
Total	73	30.6	57	18.4

Source: Computed from NFHS-2, 1998–99 & NFHS-3, 2005–06

Note 1: The 10-year period preceding the survey does not include the month in which the interview took place. Rates are specified on a per-thousand basis. See text for definition of rates. Total includes children with missing information on mother's education, caste/tribe, whose mortality rates are not shown separately.

Note 2: Infant mortality: The probability of dying before the first birthday. Child mortality: The probability of dying between the first and fifth birthdays.

Three standard indices of physical growth that describe the nutritional status of children are height-for-age (stunting), weight-for-height (wasting) and weight-for-age (underweight). Table 4 shows that a similar scenario of inequality exist in terms of nutritional status of children by social groups, with children of the socially marginalized groups showing a poorer health status compared to others.

Table 4: Percentage of children under 3 years classified as undernourished on three anthropometric indices of nutritional status, according to selected background characteristics

CASTE/TRIBE	UNDERWEIGHT		STUNTING		WASTING		NO. OF CHILDREN
	Severely	Moderately*	Severely	Moderately*	Severely	Moderately*	
NFHS 1998–99							
Scheduled caste	21.2	53.5	27.5	51.7	4	16	4919
Scheduled tribe	26	55.9	27.6	52.8	4.4	21.8	2236
Other backward class	18.3	47.3	23.1	47.7	3.4	16.6	7941
Other	13.8	41.1	19.4	42.7	1.8	12.8	9265
Total (N)	18	47	23	45.5	2.8	15.5	24600
NFHS 2005–06							
Scheduled caste	18.5	47.9	27.6	53.9	6.6	21	9531
Scheduled tribe	24.9	54.5	29.1	53.9	9.3	27.6	4448
Other backward class	15.7	43.2	24.5	48.8	6.6	20	18969
Other	11.1	33.7	17.8	40.7	5.2	16.5	13351
Do Not Know	16.3	35.1	22.3	45.8	3.1	14.1	193
Total(N)	15.8	42.5	23.7	48	6.4	19.8	46492

Source: NFHS-2, 1998–99 & NFHS-3, 2005–06

Note 1: Each index is expressed in standard deviation units (SD) from the median of the International Reference Population. Total includes 3, 23, 239, 7, 42, 78, and 278 children with missing information on mother’s education, religion, caste/tribe, mother’s work status, mother’s height, mother’s body mass index, and the standard of living index, respectively, who are not shown separately.

Note 2: * Includes children who are below –3 SD from the International Reference Population median

Note 3: Underweight-Weight-for-age, where severely underweight is percentage below -3SD and underweight is percentage below -2SD Stunting- Height-for-age, where severely stunted is percentage below -3SD and stunted is percentage below -2SD Wasted- Weight-for-height, where severely wasted is percentage below -3SD and wasted is percentage below -2SD

Note 4: ‘Do Not Know’ category in caste was added in NFHS 3

4 Institutional internalization and policy legislation: An analytical framework

The above discussion on inequality in India reflects that it is a condition coterminous with lower economic and social status. Discussions on economic inequality often overlook issues of social inequality and the need for an inclusive society. Inability to participate effectively and with dignity in economic, social and political life may be seen in processes that construct the inequalities, both in *distributional* and *relational* aspects. Cyclical in interaction, both *distributional* and *relational* aspects of inequality constitute the major domains that influence economic inequality in India. Thus, endeavors of the state to address inequalities in society, from a policy perspective cannot ignore the unequal interactions and treatment of certain population groups in relation to their counterparts, in terms of accessibility to or allocation of resources and in extracting societal benefits.

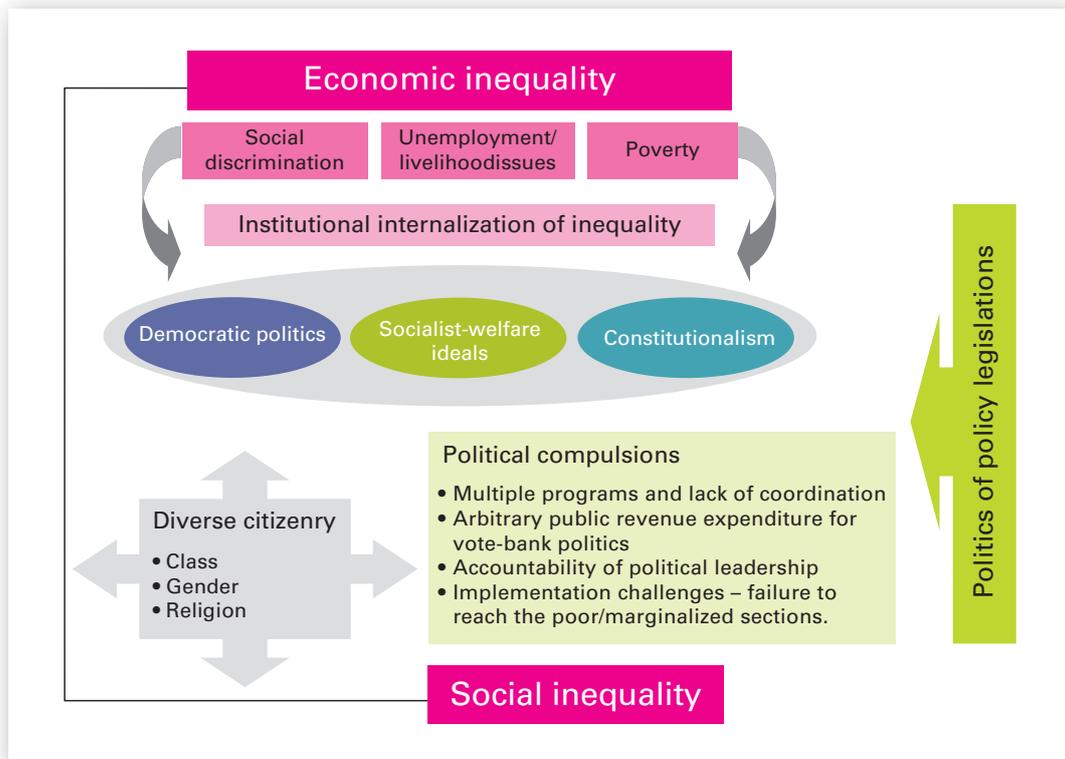
Accordingly, this section presents the analytical framework applied in this paper to explain the institutional internalization of inequality in the policy legislation process within a federal-democratic polity like India. This framework is rooted in the literature discussed in the above sections on inequality and the politics of public policies. It draws on the Institutional Rational Choice (IRC) conceptualization of public policies as institutional arrangements requiring actions by rational citizens and public officials, both aiming to improve their circumstances (Bromley, 1989; Ostrom, 1991). Using a structural-functionalist approach, the framework assumes an inter-link between politics and the functioning of the state administrative structure, wherein agenda-setting for policy legislation to address inequality is: (i) at one level, a function of recurring interactions between conflictual/diverse interest groups guided by their perceptions of expected benefits and costs; and (ii) at another level, a product of legitimate institutional practices and prescriptions that define the decision situation and process. The politics of policy legislation is more evident in the first instance when interest groups, mainly through citizen and non-governmental participation and political representation, attempt to set policy agendas and advance their preferred policy options to address inequalities.

India is one country that has, since 1950s after its independence from colonial rule, been able to use state interventions to usher in policies aimed to tackle its inequalities. As illustrated in Figure 4, the institutional internalization of inequality in India is largely an outcome of three influences: (i) the democratic polity of the country; (ii) the mixed economy strategy, along with socialist-welfare ideals that characterize the country's development approach; and (iii) the principles of constitutionalism defined in the Constitution of the country. In this analytical framework, inequality is viewed as a product of poverty, lack of employment/livelihood opportunities and social marginalization, and the policy legislation process to address inequality is a result of the internalization of inequality concerns into legitimate state structures and institutions for policymaking. The Indian state, by nature, monopolizes access to resources (Harris, 2010), be it land and natural resources (*such as water, forests, or mining resources*), labor (*such as jobs in public services or employment in public works, as well as goods and services linked to the production of human capital and entrepreneurship*), or capital goods (*monetary resources, and physical assets like roads, bridges, buildings, production facilities, and inputs for agriculture*). In this scenario, the state's approach to address inequality through program benefits or allocation of goods and services is a political decision wherein the government, through the political party/political leadership enjoying a majority position in parliament, has defining authority.



In addition to the compulsions of democracy in a highly plural society, which is often characterized by vote-bank politics and associate compulsions, policy legislation in India is also guided by: *socialist-welfare principles* that underlie India’s mixed economy strategy to meet its development goals, and the principles determining Indian *constitutionalism* that reflect *the foundational or normative concerns and the institutional prescriptions* shaping the country and its government. The inequality concerns in the policy domain are essentially viewed through the lens of diversities based on: (i) acquired status, i.e. class; (ii) marginalization linked to ascribed status, i.e. caste, ethnicity, or religion; and (iii) gender related discrimination. It is presumed here that in a social system characterized by such inequalities, those at the bottom-rung experience multiple disadvantages. Policy legislation to address these inequalities are not independent of political considerations of gains, and are often used as tools to serve the interest of the political party with majority support and forming the government in the federal-parliamentary polity of the country.

Fig 4: Analytical framework explaining the institutional internalization of inequality in policy legislation



5 The state's role and the politics of policy legislation

How has the Indian federal system fared in its handling of inequality concerns and the linked issues of diversity? How has this diversity been organized and experienced within a single democratic polity? These questions are becoming especially pertinent, considering that the country has dissatisfied communities questioning their status and situation. The response to growing demands of diversity within the existing state has been a constant challenge to the Indian federal parliamentary system. This section discusses the institutional internalization of inequality concerns and the state's role in addressing them through policy legislation. Along the lines of the above mentioned analytical framework, policy legislation to deal with inequality issues in India are guided by three different, but interrelated, considerations:

5.1 Constitutional provisions to address inequalities

The first are the prescriptions and foundational concerns enshrined in the Indian Constitution to address the country's diversities and support the socially marginalized.

"The constitution-makers had then to embody 'subaltern' expectations in ways that negotiated avoidance of wholesale derangement of dominant expectations. They accomplished this in a whole variety of compromistic ways, by a mix of the 'symbolic' and 'instrumental' strategies ... [That] free India would be constituted as a republic, enunciating the equal worth of all citizens" (Baxi, 2008: p103)

In keeping with the differential social expectations of people differently endowed, constitutionalism in India thus oriented a legitimization of state conduct towards expectations of the citizens with an underlying emphasis on social justice and equality (Baxi, 2008). Chief characteristics of this construction of citizenship by the Indian Constitution pertains to outlawry of the practice of untouchability (*as a fundamental human right under Article 17*), forms of subservience, such as the practice of the forced labor/bonded labor system (*under Article 23*), discrimination on the grounds of gender (*under Articles 14–15*) and special provisions for minority/religious rights (*Articles 25–30*).

Indian constitutionalism thus creates a notion of inclusive citizenship that ensures the same fundamental rights to all. While equal access to the normative order of rights is guaranteed, the Constitution of India also reconciles a commitment to equality by ensuring that the rights are differentially distributed among all citizens of the country, through preferential provisions, to remedy the effects of past discriminations. Although cognitive bias-type discriminations on caste, ethnicity and gender status is still a serious continuing problem in India, the constitutional provisions for affirmative action make it an obligation of the state, through the working of its executive and legislature, to focus on eradicating the inequalities and segregation in society.

Such a construction of equality can be, however, criticized as being largely state-centric and state-driven, with ground realities often belying the constitutional ideals. For instance, under the principle of universal suffrage and '*one person one vote*', all citizens have the right to vote and contest in the electoral process irrespective of their socio-economic background. But, non-participatory and non-integrative development practices and the presence of vote-bank politics playing to a multicultural electorate can also create situations of rightlessness and inequalities where resources and power can be concentrated with the dominant, whether numerically dominant, or the socially and economically dominant few. Aside from other factors like a focus on social sector development and building capabilities, equality concerns and pro-poor growth can be addressed if the poor and marginalized have an opportunity to shape the decisions that affect their lives. The essential element of a constitutional approach to diversity is the capacity to accommodate differences and emphasize equality. But this is not sufficient by itself. Participatory opportunities creating multilevel relationships within the federal regime are also important, as this politics of representation has a defining influence on institutional internalization of inequality in policy legislation. And, in the democratic landscape of India this is expressed through the federalization of electoral politics at the national, provincial and local government levels, and a multi-party political system.

The ideals of equality outlined in the Constitution of India cannot, by themselves, be taken as cause for removal of inequalities in society. But, at the same time, there cannot be any doubt that these provisions become the first set of influences creating a broader frame on the lines of which inequality issues get internalized into the institutional domain of the Indian state and its government's policy frame.

5.2 Socialist-welfare approach to create equality of opportunity

A socialist-welfare state ideology to create equality of opportunities is another influence on how inequality concerns get institutionally internalized in the Indian state. The approach strongly underlies India's development planning process, and is amply evident in the development priorities outlined periodically in the country's five-year plans. From the beginning, since India achieved freedom from colonial rule, policy strategies to tackle poverty and address inequality concerns have been the thrust of the country's development planning process. The country follows a two-pronged policy approach to address poverty. One strategy is a targeted approach aimed to build capabilities and capacities of the poor for gainful employment and livelihood options. This not only involves providing employment and livelihood opportunities, but also provisioning better health and education facilities for the poor, and creating physical infrastructures like irrigation, power, roads, transport and communication systems, which can improve the poor's income-earning capacities. At the same time, keeping in tune with the constitutional ideals of inclusive citizenship and social justice, the other strategy has been to recognize the adverse social consequences of inequities (for example, rising rural distress, food insecurity, inequitable landholdings and land alienation, and wide difference in agriculture and non-agriculture *per capita* incomes), and the need for redistribution. This is seen in terms of concerted policy interventions that provide *institutional credit to agriculture, extension services to small and marginal farmers, micro-credit to women, providing heavily subsidized food to poor households, and other programs for supporting the poor like subsidized housing, old age pensions or maternity assistance*), while the first set of policy legislation focuses on growth and strategies for growth driven economic well-being, the second set of policy interventions largely address the inequalities⁹ arising, or even persisting, in the event of growth and the need for redistribution.

⁹ Estimates from four different National Sample Survey (NSS) rounds for the agricultural years 1993–94, 2004–05, 2009–10, and 2011–12, show that economy growth in India is a story of exclusionary growth confined to the better-off sections (Suryanarayana & Das, 2014).

Table 4 briefly outlines the focus of the different five-year plans, beginning from the 1st plan (1951–55) to the present 12th plan (2012–2017), to highlight the nature of the country’s policy approach to inequalities, and to trace the policy shifts. Though inequality, seen in terms of poverty/economic deprivation, has been the focus of the policy interventions through the country’s five-year plan approach, it would be a gross understatement to say that the policy prescriptions in the five-year plans do not give adequate focus to inequalities arising from low capabilities and social deprivations, and to the exclusionary impacts of an economy growth-model. Indicating this, a review of the policies through the lens of the five-year plans clearly shows a shift in the country’s approach to tackle poverty and inequalities from rigorous socialism to a more moderate socialist-welfare perspective, along with a pro-industry and pro-market development strategy.

Five Year Plans in Combating Inequality

PRE LIBERALISATION APPROACH

1st Plan (1951–55): Harrod-Domer Model based planning. Achievements are evolution of irrigation facility, focus on price stability and other social infrastructure improvement. Though, good concluding years of the plan the impact was limited. No exclusive focus on inequality issue.

2nd Plan (1956–61): Mahalanobis Plan was successful in improving people’s standard of living through land reform measure, expansion of railway facility and emphasis on employment generation especially in industrial sector. The major drawback was the License Raj which spur the bureaucratic elements in the economy fastening the pace of growing economic inequality.

3rd Plan (1962–66): The major credits of the plan in to lay the founding stone of decentralisation through formation of panchayats, zila-panchayats along with a rapid green revolution. Though decentralisation was a major step towards curbing the inequality but Indo-Sino war accelerated the inflation and widen the divide.

4th Plan (1969–74): A significant period in reference to growing inequality. While reforming and restructuring government expenditure lead to high grow of national income, a recognition of a powerful country on the world and the fruits of green revolution lead to increase in production of food grains, the gap between rural urban widened at a lightning speed, worsened by famine, drought and recession.

5th Plan (1975–79): A commendable plan laid by D.D. Dhar, in spite of international economy being in turmoil and prevailing high inflation, a more concrete emphasis was given to the ever-growing economic and social disparity and hence small scale, labour inclusive industries were encouraged.

Rolling Plan (1978–80): Political instability played a major role in halting all the developmental measures of the country.

6th Plan (1980–85): Under Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi, development was the focus of the plan. To combat poverty and inequality and provide quality life for people actions like Minimum Need Program and Family Planning initiative were taken, but were slow in pace due to opposition pressure.

7th Plan (1986–91): In spite of facing a foreign exchange crisis, the plan had quality stock on hold like anti-poverty and other social programmes, but political instability prevented the five year plan implementation.

POST LIBERALISATION APPROACH

8th Plan (1992–97): With emphasis on private investment in developmental sectors plans for poverty reduction, self-reliance and generation of employment were developed.

9th Plan (1997–2002): Liberalisation has had a profound impact on the mode of planning. As a combined effort of public-private and all level government was talked about to prioritise rural development, price stability, employment opportunity and women empowerment. A liberal market with private investment for all developmental plans was talked about.

10th Plan (2002–2007): Along with ever emphasizing goal of achieving higher level of growth the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) were considered for development of programmes conceptualising “social safety net”.

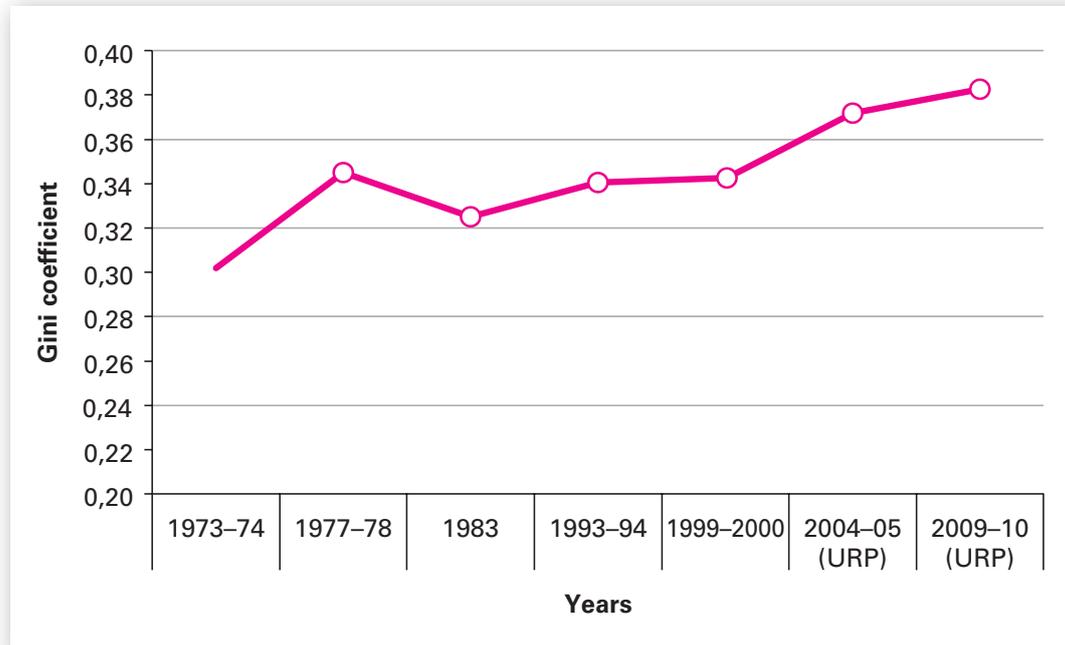
11th Plan (2007–12): Along with proposal for National Skill Development Mission and attention to several other social issues the plan spoke of finding remedies for various deficiencies by seeking to accelerate pace of growth making it more inclusive.

12th Plan (2012–17): A multi-dimensional plan which does not narrowly focus on GDP growth but speaks of inclusiveness of the growth is first set on table by this plan. Thus the plan proposes extensive range of programmes covering wide variety of sectors to achieve sustainable and inclusive growth.

This shift in the policy agenda to growth and inequality can be specifically traced by comparing the plans during the pre-1990s and post-1990s (Lahiri, 2014). As listed in Table 4, during the early plan periods beginning from the first five-year plan (1951–55) until fourth five-year plan (1969–1974), the policies to create equal opportunities mainly focused on institutional reforms through: (i) the Community Development Program initiated in 1952 that aimed to decentralize local development programs specifically targeting the poor; (ii) the Green Revolution to increase production and accessibility of food grains; and (iii) land reforms to remove the influence of intermediaries and improve the quality of life for the poor. The plan periods during the 1980s and early 1990s saw a more targeted program approach to provide income and livelihoods to the poor, such as the Integrated Rural Development Program introduced in the late 1970s. This employment generation program subsequently saw many refinements and transformations, culminating in the National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme in 2005. The post-2000 plan phase witnessed a focus on inclusive growth issues to shrink inequalities, such as a focus on growth of the Gross Domestic Product, human resource development, public service delivery, infrastructure development (both physical and social), investments in agricultural growth, and governance reforms to enhance accountability and people's participation in program implementation.

What was the situation that marked this shift in India's planned policy prescriptions towards inequality? Figure 5 shows the trend of the inter-state gini-coefficient for the past three decades, tracing economic inequality in the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of the country. It is evident that the gap between the better-off sections and the economically deprived has not been bridged. In fact, the rapid rise of the inter-state gini-coefficient, particularly in the post-1990s liberalization period, shows how unequal the benefits of growth have been in the country. Of course there have been some crests and troughs in the short run. As explained in the subsequent section, this can be attributed to the parliamentary-democracy and the politics of pro-poor policies that has characterized the working of the Indian state and its machinery.

Fig 5: Inter-state Gini coefficient analyzing economic inequality in India over a period of 36 years



Source: Adapted from (Ahluwalia, 2011); Computed from Planning Commission Databook, 2011, http://planningcommission.nic.in/data/datatable/data_2312/DatabookDec2014%20106.pdf

Note: (a) The Gini coefficient is calculated assuming that all individuals within each state have gross income equal to per capita Gross State Domestic Product (GSDP). This method ignores the inequality arising from the unequal distribution within each province of the country, and focuses only on inequality arising from inter-state differences in per capita GSDP.

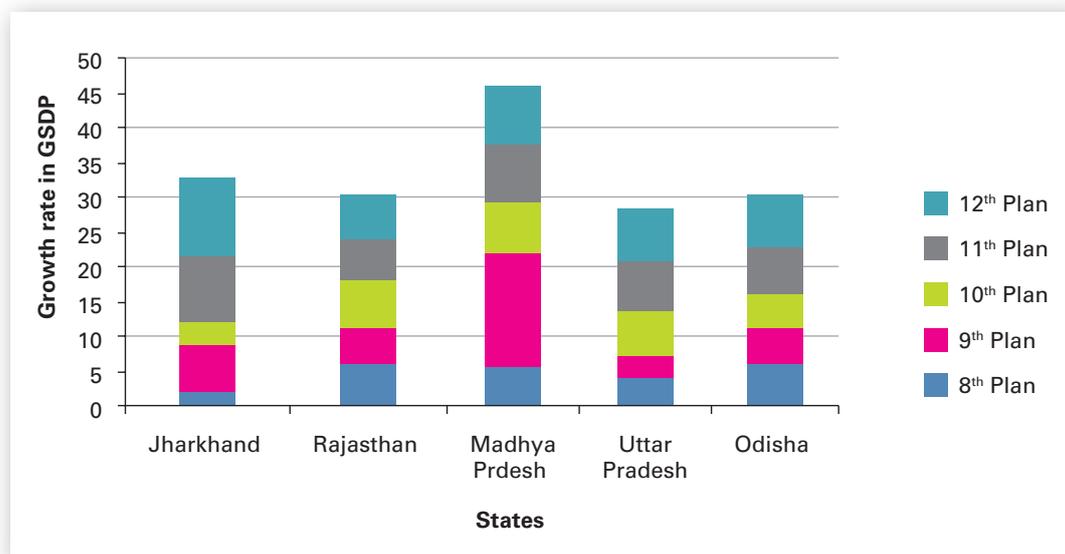
(b) URP stands for 'Uniform Reform Period'

Estimations presented in the twelfth five-year plan (Planning Commission, 2013) show differentials in the growth of the Gross State Domestic Product (GSDP) across the preceding four plans: the eighth plan, ninth plan, tenth plan and eleventh plan in five low-income provinces of the country (Figure 6). During the eighth plan, while Rajasthan's GDP grew the highest and the province of Odisha recorded very low growth, in the ninth plan period the province of Uttar Pradesh failed badly with very low GDP growth while Rajasthan and Odisha shared the top spot. During the eleventh five-year plan period, the picture became much more symmetrical. As shown in Figure 6, clear trends of gradual improvement in GDP in the five selected low-income provinces were observed, particularly during the eleventh five-year plan period. The average GDP growth rate of these states increased

from 5.16 percent in the eighth plan to 6.38 percent in the tenth plan and 8.80 percent in the eleventh plan (Planning Commission, 2013: p 303–304).

It has been noted that factor inputs such as property rights (defined primarily as land rights), access to credit, labor market flexibility, literacy and other investments to build human capital (such as health and basic services like housing and sanitation) as well as institutional provisions to hold governments accountable can go a long way in shrinking poverty and delivering inclusive growth (Besley et al., 2007). The eleventh plan period saw a convergence of many of these factors in India’s policy approach to address poverty and disparities, and this becomes evident from the visible growth rates of the low-income provinces during this plan phase.

Fig 6: Comparative growth rates in gross state domestic product (GSDP) for selected low-income states showing regional economic inequality.



Note: Average GDP growth rates of provinces of India with lowest per capita income.

Adapted from the 12th five-year plan report (Planning Commission, 2013, p–304),

http://planningcommission.gov.in/plans/planrel/fiveyr/12th/pdf/12fyp_vol1.pdf (accessed on 17-11-2016))

5.3 Democratic politics and pro-poor policies in India

What explains the policy shifts? As hinted to in the forgoing discussion in Section 5.1, the politics of pro-poor policies, characterized by interactions constituted through collectives of electorates seen in democratic regimes, is another influence on how inequality concerns get institutionally internalized. Described as ‘interest group economism’ (Moore, 1999), the politics underlying the structure of the bargaining process in which the state itself and, in turn, the democratically elected government are responsible for agenda setting and policy formulation, may not be a neutral arbiter. This process can also be one explanation for the policy shifts seen in India. It is a recognized fact that in democratic regimes where minimum standards of policymaking have been institutionalized, cumulative interactions of the people organized in participatory processes (for example, pressure groups and civil society organizations or political parties) with central or local agencies of the state for policymaking, can result in political engagement and actions that drive policy legislation (Gray-Molina & Whitehead, 1999). It may thus be the case that policy legislation for the benefit of the poor and marginalized are promoted for political reasons. On one hand, they reflect what the people have been successful in articulating as their demand/need. On the other hand, the policies are also an outcome of what concerns the political system, i.e., the government, (in India, this reference is to the political parties and the policy-making process that structures the bargaining process), rationally internalizes to maximize its electoral support.

At the same time, the delivery of public policies and services in India is a responsibility of the state and, as such, their implementation has an important bearing on pro-poor growth. Both improving governance and changing the role of the state to refocus its activities on core services that address inequalities also assume importance. But in most cases implementation deficits are observed; pro-poor policy legislation benefits some of the target population at the cost of others, and may also benefit the non-poor. There is no denial that reforms in India over recent decades have spurred economic growth and contributed to a decline in poverty. But, India’s various public policy programs including the National Food Security program through the Public Distribution System, the National Rural Employment program, and the universal education program, are all replete with instances of implementation lapses. For instance, problems with the Public Distribution System as a social protection instrument have been well known for some time. It has been mired in administrative problems, and targeting of beneficiary households has often been faulty (Currie, 2000; Pritchard et al. 2013). So, isolating the understanding of policies for pro-poor development and tackling inequality as purely a linear process of agenda-setting, policy formulation and implementation institutionalized

within the government system is a distortion. Thus, public policies for pro-poor growth and inclusive development are not just the result of straight government strategies, but are largely politically driven and systemically structured, which defines their nature and impact. There are several reasons why democracy survived in India: the decision of the Congress party to forsake rapid industrialization for democratic stability in the early decades after independence; the dispersed pattern of ethnic cleavages and workings of federalism, which localized outbreaks of conflict; and the commitment of political leadership, particularly under Nehru, to democratic practices (Varshney, 1998). Put differently, the politics of recognition, based variously on identities of caste, language, and religion, is a crucial feature of democratic politics in independent India (Ruparelia, 2008). This, in turn, defines how and what interests are represented, and how and what interests get articulated through policies.

For instance, the Congress party's approach to address the issue of inequality has generally been through affirmative provisions for the marginalized population, an increase in investments in rural and social development, and a thrust toward employment assurance. For example, during the general election in 2009, the Congress party fought the electoral battle on the promise of ensuring comprehensive coverage of social security to all persons who are at special risk, including: (i) single-woman headed households; (ii) the disabled and the elderly; (iii) the urban homeless; (iv) released bonded workers; (v) members of primitive tribal groups; and (vi) members of designated "most backward" communities. To combat the inequality in rural areas and in agriculture, comprehensive crop insurance schemes were also proposed to be implemented.

Attempts of the Congress party to push for policy legislation in keeping with its election promises could be seen during its government tenure in the federal polity, such as the enactment of the National Employment Guarantee Scheme, the National Food Security Act, the National Rural Health Mission, the *Sarva Siksha Abhiyan* universal education program, and the *Rashtriya Krishi Vikas Yojana* agricultural development policy. The ambitious *Bharat Nirman* program to transform rural India by expanding and providing irrigation, all-weather roads, houses for the poor, drinking water, electricity for all poor families and phone connectivity in all villages, also features as part of the political party's policy drive to meet its electoral promise.

Questioning the federal government's working under the Congress party-led alliance (the United Progressive Alliance-UPA) in the last decade from 2004–2014, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and its political alliance (the National Democratic Alliance, NDA) fought the last general elections in the country in 2014 on questions of effective government for good governance, along with promises to end corruption. It is this electoral promise that won the people's mandate and has brought BJP, under the leadership of Narendra Modi, to power at the center to form the national government. Expectations are that the new government will work on its promised approach of 'minimum government and maximum governance', bringing policy initiatives for effective governance, with investments in infrastructure development, agriculture growth and employment opportunities.



6 Conclusions

Described as ‘patronage democracy’ in the federal-parliamentary system witnessed in India (Harris, 2010), public policy legislation in the country to address inequality is a politically construed institutional internalization of concerns. The state, through its political machinery, is not neutral. In other words, it cannot be disputed that public policy legislation in a democratic regime like India is not just equality concerns in terms of income opportunities, but also involves a comprehension of equality within the frame of the demands of citizens for development and inclusion, and the political rationalization of what can secure the electorate’s support. Public policies to address inequalities in the country are thus a product of:

- democratic politics
- constitutional provisions for people’s development and
- public provisioning of basic amenities and facilities in the planning process

Although India’s political leaders and policy makers have acknowledged the fact that the five-year plans are a rational strategy to avoid the hit-miss method that can plague the process of development, analogous to this is the fact that the plans have often been driven by the political considerations that underlie the nation, its politics and its larger development agenda. Policy legislation in India is a unique balance between the constitutional ideals and pragmatism of democratic politics. However, it is a challenging task for any political leadership to effectively govern a country as diverse as India, with varied and increasing aspirations of its citizens. In addition, fulfilling the promises as outlined in the election manifestoes of political parties is not going to be easy given persisting implementation bottlenecks in the public administration of policies and services. Notwithstanding this, it would be unfair to say that the result has always been disappointing. It is an undisputable fact that economic inequality and poverty have decreased substantially over the years. The politics of interest representation in public policies marks an institutional internalization process, away from a top-down bureaucratic approach, to a more politically participatory process.

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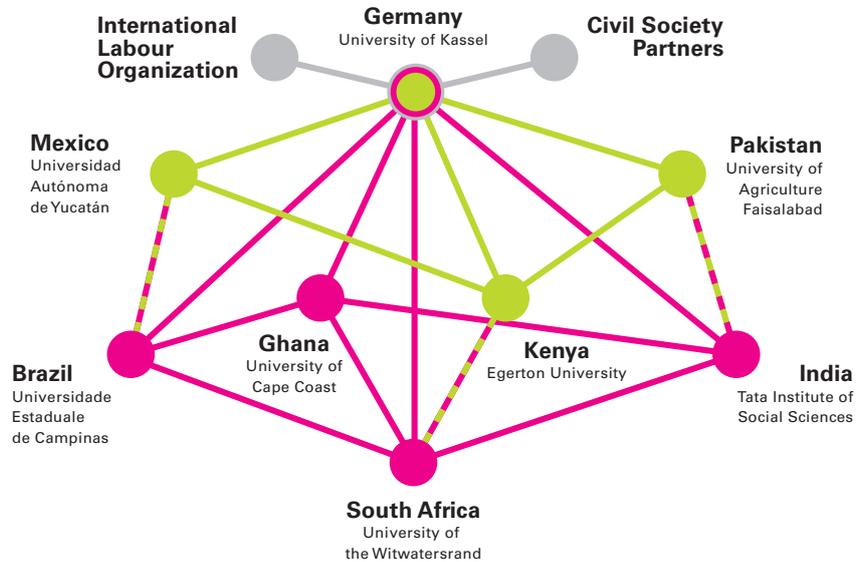
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