Growth, Well-being and Institutions in India: A Historical Perspective

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1. Introduction

The present inequality and mass poverty are not a recent phenomenon but have their deep roots in the severe stagnation that gripped the Indian society for centuries. The colonization strengthened the forces underlying poverty by creating barriers to the absorption of the fruits of industrial revolution. The development programmes initiated in the post-Independence period did not make substantial improvement on the poverty front, although economic aggregates reflected progress. This paper attempts to view the present mass poverty and economic disparities in the backdrop of the evolution of institutions and economic classes. Section 1 depicts the economic society in the pre-colonial period. Section 2 traces out the evolution of colonial institutions designed for exploitation and the emergence of mass poverty. Section 3 briefly gives an account of the institutional reforms in post-Independence period. Section 4 deals with the emerging perspective of growth, well-being and economic disparities. Section 5 presents India's position in the international ranking on well-being. Section 6 identifies the challenges of achieving peaceful and harmonious society.

2. India in Pre-Colonial Era

Self-Sufficient Village Economy existed in the Indian Society during the Pre-Colonial Era. Despite of the upheavals and various vicissitudes, Indian society, before the advent of British rule was a picture of stability. The predominant feature of the Indian economy was the existence of isolated self-sufficient village economies (Metclaf, 1974; Gadgil, 1971; Thorner and Thorner, 1962). The village itself consumed a major portion of the foodstuffs and other raw materials it produced. A part of the produce was appropriated in the form of land rent by the feudal ruling class. Its requirements of handicrafts were satisfied by the families of craftsmen associated with the village. It was this close union of agriculture, weaving and handicraft industry which made the village economically independent of the outside world. The social makeup through its caste structure provided the basis for the unalterable division of labour (Gadgil, 1971). This was reinforced by the comparative isolation in which the villages were held by the virtual absence of a network communications (*ibid*). The urban structure of life was sustained by the rural produce, which extracted in the form of rent. It was mainly a one-way flow of wage goods from the rural sector as the cities had nothing to offer in return. Thus, exchange did not play a decisive role in the economy. The local artisans in the urban centers produced the basic necessities and luxuries needed by the ruling class.

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* Originally published in Ranjit Guhan (ed.), ***Peace, Harmony and Happiness: Transition to Transformation***, Centre for Research in Rural and Industrial Development, Chandigarh, 2020.

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While there are divergent views regarding the growth or stagnation of the economy during pre-colonial period, there seems to be a greater degree of unanimity on the class formation and structure of Indian society. The method of appropriating the peasants' surplus for the ruling hierarchy and the existence of caste system laid the foundation for economic classes (Levkovsky, 1966; Habib, 1974). The big feudal lords (*jagirdars*) were officers and servants of the emperor. They received large administrative areas for support. The middle feudal lords possessed inheritance rights to the land. These formed the powerful local elite and were used by *jagirdar* for the collection of land revenue from the peasantry. In turn, they were allowed a compensation either of a percentage of revenue or free lands. Considerable antagonism seems to have existed between the imperial ruling class and the middle feudal lords on the issue of appropriating the share of surplus produce of the peasantry (Habib, 1974). The lowest and largest stratum of the feudal class was peasants, drawn chiefly from the higher castes. They enjoyed security of occupancy in general but not the right to abandon it. They were forced by officials to cultivate and were not allowed to leave villages. Considerable economic differentiation existed even among this class. At one end of this spectrum were the headman and the rich peasant cultivators, while the poor and small peasant cultivators generally sunk in debt in meeting the expenses of cultivation existed at the other end (*ibid*). The landless workers were mostly drawn from menial castes such as *Chamars*, *Dhanuks*, *Thoris*or *Batahars*. They were prohibited from cultivating the soil on their own. Besides following their prescribed professions, such as shoemaking, tanning and scavenging, they formed a rural reserve force to work on the fields of peasants. Among the artisans there existed a close association between caste and occupation. The merchant and the moneylender class, drawn mainly from the upper Hindu caste, formed the other dominant class and carried on internal as well as external trade The large export of grain and other produce extracted from the peasants in the form of revenue maintained a class of grain merchants. They financed wars among kings and supplied loans to petty feudal lords and craftsmen (Levkovsky, 1966).

3. Colonial Institutions and their Consequences

The penetration of British imperialism played an important part in the disintegration of India's economy; on the one hand, it undermined the foundations of self-sufficient village economy and wrecked the handicraft industries, on the other, it hastened the growth of commodity trade in the economy. By controlling trade and administration, the colonialists designed institutions for extracting surplus. As a first step they devised land revenue systems which shook the old structure of village life in India (Thorner and Thorner, 1962).

Land Revenue Systems

The initial assessments of land revenue levied by the British were very heavy. "Under the *Zamindar's* settlement, former tax gatherers (known as *zamindars*), who were no more than mere agents of the former governments appointed for the collection of land revenue were, by the Permanent Settlement Act of 1793 declared full proprietors of the areas over which their rights of land revenue collection extended. Thus, by the force of authority of the British Government in India, millions of cultivators were transformed, almost overnight, from peasant proprietors to tenants at will" (Patel, 1965). "There is no parallel in the history where a whole people were thus converted by the exercise of sovereignty into a nation of estate coolies with their own natural aristocracy reduced to the position of foremen and superintendents through the work exacted and oppression carried out" (Panikkar, 1953). Government limited its own land revenue demand to a certain fixed ratio, of the output. The *zamindars* were rendered secure against any further encroachment upon their profits, while the poor cultivators and labourers were still left in a precarious position with regard to their occupancy rights which were wholly dependent upon the arbitrary will of his superiors. The peasant under the *Ryotwari* system, the other extractive institution, fared somewhat better than the *Zamndari* system. The cultivator was required to pay to his government twice a year a fixed sum of money, crop or no crop. If the cultivator failed to pay the revenue in time, his land was made subject to forfeiture (Patel, 1965). The exploitation of the tiller grew in sharpness with the introduction of a host of parasitic intermediaries and the methods pursued in the collection of land revenue.

Legal System

By bringing in sophisticated legal institutions through the apparatus of law courts, lawyers and formal procedures, the British legal system made land transfer a matter of extreme, almost fearful, transaction. Ignoring Indian custom, the civil courts rigorously enforced the English contract law which made a man's entire property liable for the satisfaction of his debts. Upon the production of a bond from the moneylender, the courts would automatically decree sale of a defaulting cultivator's landholding. Pitched high and rigidly collected during the early years of British rule, it (land revenue) drove the peasant to the moneylender to meet its claims. Once in debt, a peasant was usually unable to extricate himself. Interest rates ranged upwards of 25 per cent, so that even small debts rapidly mounted up to enormous proportions. The moneylender was adept at fraudulent practices in the keeping of accounts and did not in any case want to be paid off. His aim was to make the peasant into a perpetual bonded servant by a mortgage which gave him control of the crop or by a forced sale in which he would take title to the land while retaining the farmer proprietor as his tenant. In either case the moneylender had the upper hand and the courts, restrained by their belief in freedom of contract and laissez-faire, were little more than instruments of his will (Metcalf, 1964).

With the mounting indebtedness of the peasant in an atmosphere of insecurity and tension, agriculture stagnated. Polarization, advanced with the landlord and the moneylender at one pole and the mass of enslaved and poverty-stricken peasants at the other (Levkovsky, 1966). Foundation had thus been laid for the emergence of an immiserised segment of landless poor on a vast scale from the rural landscape of India.

British Industrialization and its Backwash on Deterioration of Artisan Class

Introduction of another institution underlined by commercial agriculture and a monetary form of rent marked the beginning of another stage in the exploitation of rural India. They undermined the cohesion and the self-sustaining nature of the Indian village by bringing in distortions in the patterns of division of labour. The rapid spread of plantations and commercial agriculture, the foremost forms of capitalist enterprise in India, was a welcome development to the British, as they served their trading interests and met the rising tempo of demand for raw materials thrown up by the industrial development at home. As the pace of her industrial expansion accelerated, the British manufacturers' clamor for markets reached a crescendo. Indian coastal towns were linked with Britain in the 1840s by steamships and the interior of India was covered after the 1850s by the most elaborate railway network in Asia. The location of the railways was determined by strategic considerations and by the desire to secure the best markets and raw materials. These developments were detrimental to the Indian society in many ways (Thorner and Thorner 1962).

Further, "The same railways which carried away the commercial crops brought back machine-made industrial products to the villages. The village weavers and traditional handicrafts men had to compete in the second half of the nineteenth century with products like Lancashire cloth, which was then overrunning world markets. The village artisans no longer were sheltered by the friendly backwardness of the older village commune. Furthermore, the union of agriculture and handicraft industry which had been the basis of village could no longer remain the compact social and economic unit that it had been. The growing tendency was for each family to make ends meet as best as it could ... in the coastal zones and in the regions lying along the new railroads. The ancient village handicrafts declined. The village potter, tanner, dyer, oilman, the jeweler, and all faced strong competition from machine products. Since 1850 a dwindling proportion of the village artisans of the subcontinent have been able to subsist on what they have received for their services from the village. Millions of them have had to find other ways to gain a livelihood or to supplement their scanty earnings from the village. In most cases the only avenue open to them has been agriculture, and they have added steadily to the great pressure on land" (*ibid*).

This army of dispossessed craftsmen went only to swell the segment of landless labour. This crowding into agricultural pursuits resulted in sharing the poverty of the already impoverished peasant. Misery multiplied and the distress was so acute that the Governor General reported in 1834-35: "The misery hardly finds a parallel in the history of commerce. The bones of the cotton weavers were bleaching the plains of India" (Dutt, 1950). This transfer of working force from the secondary to the primary sector was a unique characteristic of the development policies pursued by the British colonialism while the reverse was taking place at home in her economic expansion. The transformation of these "self-sustaining communities into mere farms producing opium, cotton, indigo, hemp and other raw materials in exchange for British Stuff" (Marx, 1859) not only provided a handle for increased seizure of surplus product through the innocuous looking commodity-money relations, but also exposed the Indian economy to the threat of severe famines in years of successive drought. The heavy exports of grain draining away the surplus on the eve of the 1896-97 famine, the most severe in India during the 19th century, is a standing testimony to the colonial statesmanship of Britain (Bhatia, 1968). The series of famines which occurred in India in the 19th century since the 1860s aggravated rural poverty and enslaved the peasant further to the landlord and the moneylender. Large masses of peasantry began to roll down the social ladder as tenants-at-will and landless labourers (Patel, 1965: 15). The upshot of all these changes was the progressive impoverisation of the peasant and the heightening of inequalities of wealth and income among the social classes in the society.

Regional Inequalities

The other consequence of transforming India into an agrarian and raw material adjunct of capitalist Britain was the aggravation of regional inequalities. In facilitating the flow of raw materials and finished products, centers of trade and transport grew in size and importance. It was through these centers, the basic resources were drained off from the hinterland to grease the wheels of British industry; at the same time they acted as funnels through which the finished products of Britain filtered back to reach the Indian masses. A network of financial institutions cropped up at these centers in support of the trading operations. The growth of a small segment of processing industries was the concomitant outcome of the parasitic operations of the British capital. All these developments helped in creating a climate in which the pressure of externalities, both social and economic, exerted a strong pull on the upper strata of the village community. They shifted to these urban centers and forged links with the British capital in their eagerness to share the spoils of exploitation. Chancel and Piketty (2017) pointed out that the income inequality increased during the colonial rule and it peaked in 1939-40, with top 0.01% of the earners capturing 8.9% of the total income.

4. Institutional Reforms in Post-Independence Period

On the eve of Independence, India acquired an economy with a colonial heritage characterized by parasitic agglomerations and structural stagnation. The end of political subjugation on the advent of Independence marked the beginning of an era of transition from stagnation to growth. Attempts were made to correct some of the inherited imbalances and distortions to achieve a breakthrough in the legacy of low-level equilibrium, at which the economy had been operating. Planning was initiated to promote rapid industrialization with particular emphasis on the development of basic and heavy industries to make the growth self-sustaining. At the same time, promotion of social justice through the equitable distribution of income and wealth; and eradication of poverty through special programmes were emphasized. Attempts were made to bring about institutional changes through land reforms, tenurial reforms and cooperative movement. Despite these well-meaning efforts, the benefits of development failed to percolate to the majority at the bottom of the socioeconomic hierarchy. Policies and programmes designed to ameliorate the conditions of the poor had little effect on their levels of living. This view has been emphatically documented in the writings of Gadgil and Dandekar and empirically sustained in the writings of the latter and further studies stimulated by their works.

Eliminating Exploitation

The initial measures focusing on the abolition of anachronistic institutions like the princely states and zamindari system did not lead to any radical change in the colonial structure of agrarian relations. The economic power probably shifted from one layer to the other at the top; this shift confined only to forward caste groups. The development schemes initiated in the rural areas in the post-independence period strengthened the position of large and medium sized holders. This top layer of the rural hierarchy has the political maneuverability as an additional asset at the state and local levels and dominated the local institutions through which the inputs of development flowed into the region (Parthsarathy, 1971). The introduction of land reforms by mid-1960s in the form of land ceilings and tenancy regulations had little impact as these measures remained mostly on paper; attempts at their implementation were sabotaged by a host of *benami* transactions in collusion with local bureaucracy (Planning Commission, 1965). After the Ministry of Home Affairs released in December 1969, "Report on the Current Agrarian Tension", Government‖ again thought of land reforms by imposing reasonable ceilings on land. Central Land Reforms Committee was formed to formulate fresh guidelines. Later the National Guidelines for ceilings, reducing the limits and exemptions, were approved (GOI, 1976). Thereafter laws gradually obtained some surplus land and the same was distributed. But the process was inadequate and inefficient.

Panchayat Raj Institution (PRI)

The PRIs are meant to create a social structure based on upliftment and empowerment of the lower castes, equitable distribution of land, toning down the advantages of status and privileges enjoyed by the rural elite and democratic polity at all levels from the village upwards. Given the conditions that prevailed, many powerful influences worked against the realisation of such a social structure in rural India. These include: the political clout of the groups which are now wielding power and influence in villages; linkages of these groups commanding vote banks to political powers at the central and state levels; weak "political will" at the highest level to implement radical measures like redistribution of land. Thus, the process of implementation of many substantive provisions of the Constitutional amendment involving reservations for weaker categories to enable them to participate actively in the PRIs, devolution of finances, and powers for district planning left to be much desired .

Formation of new institutions particularly institutions like PRIs whose progress is conditional upon basic changes in social structure is a long-drawn-out process whose pace and outcome are difficult to see in advance and regulate. Such processes need to be assessed in terms of direction in which they are moving and progress in the effectiveness of institutions. Judged by these criteria, the process appears to be moving ahead in some states in India. Attempts to encourage participation in *Panchayats* by weaker sections like scheduled castes and women through reservation of seats for them are showing good results. Relatively fast progress may be expected along this dimension in the years to come; once they are formally brought into being, *Panchayats* exert pressure on the state government for larger funds and freedom to allocate them according to the local priorities.

Special Measures for Vulnerable Groups

The post-Independence period has witnessed ambitious and wide-ranging legislative and development measures to improve the economic conditions and the social status of the groups among the poor-unorganised workers, women, scheduled castes and tribes in need of special attention as they belong to the poorest among the poor and tend to get bypassed by growth and development processes. The experience with these initiatives has been mixed. While the policy makers show considerable enthusiasm in passing legislation and in setting up commissions and organisations focusing on these groups, they pay much less attention to implementationof legislations and effective operation of bodies vested with responsibilities of reaching development to these groups. As a result, the enduring benefits derived by the vulnerable groups from the initiatives taken by the policy maker have been modest. More important, the initiatives have hardly had the thrust needed to help the vulnerable groups along the tortuous path of human 'development and empowerment. Thus, these groups find themselves today somewhat better off than what they were in the past but could hardly look forward to a future of steady progress and development.

Micro Finance

The micro finance movement in India has shown significant potential, and with intensive official support, the coverage has considerably expanded. The RBI has also expanded the scope by giving freedom to institutions to charge interest rates at their own discretion and more importantly to cover not only consumption and production loans but also credit needs of housing and shelter improvements. Self Help Groups (SHGs) involve thrift as well as credit arrangements. NABARD and SIDBI have provided for SHGs and SHG members scope for capacity building through training and other inputs by NGOs. Peer monitoring helped better credit recovery. Finally, the SHG movement so far has shown that the outcomes have gone beyond thrift, credit and economic well-being. It has served as an instrument of social change essentially the empowerment of women. Improvement in literacy levels, children's education, particularly girls' education, housing facilities, abolition of child labour, decline in family violence, and banning of illicit distilleries in the villages have all been reported in different studies. Women have acquired better communication skills and self-confidence; they have also acquired better status within families.

5. Growth, Poverty, Well-being, and Inequality: Emerging Perspective

Growth Performance

On the eve of Independence, India's GDP (Gross Domestic Product) growth rate lagged far behind that of the developed world. Periodic estimates of national income available since mid-19th century indicate that the per capita income virtually stagnated in India before independence when developed countries' income grew several-fold due to industrial and technological revolution. In India, a large mass of its population was living in abysmal conditions. The national government formed after independence accorded priority to 'economic growth with social justice' and mixed economy model with a major role for the state in industrialisation along with import substitution policy was adopted. While this state-led growth laid the foundation for industrialisation and technological change and created a pool of technical and scientific manpower, national income growth remained moderate at about 3-4 per cent per annum for several decades prior to 1980s. Outward oriented Asian countries grew much faster during this period by taking advantage of post-war expansion in international trade and investment flows. India moderately relaxed controls on industry in the 1980s and consequently, India witnessed a higher economic growth. However, in the later part of 1980s, India witnessed unsustainable levels of fiscal and current account deficits

Finally, in the wake of a balance of payments crisis in 1991, Indian policymakers initiated wide ranging economic reforms to facilitate shift towards market driven growth from state-led growth. These reforms were initiated to enlarge the scope for private sector by removing the controls on industry and privatising the public enterprises. India had also shifted to floating exchange rate management, removed controls on trade and substantially reduced tariff rates. Banking sector reforms were undertaken to conform Indian banks to International Prudential Standards. These reforms were meant to impart greater competition in the economy. Economic reforms placed India on a higher growth. Studies show that private corporate led growth was associated with rent seeking behavior. In the process of privatisation of public sector assets and transfer of natural resources public sector assets were underpriced (Walton, 2012). Banerjee and Piketty (2003), estimates of inequality based on income tax returns, observed growing inequality in the 1990s and the share of the top percentile increased substantially with it. The inequality continued to grow substantially year after year surpassing the levels of colonial era.

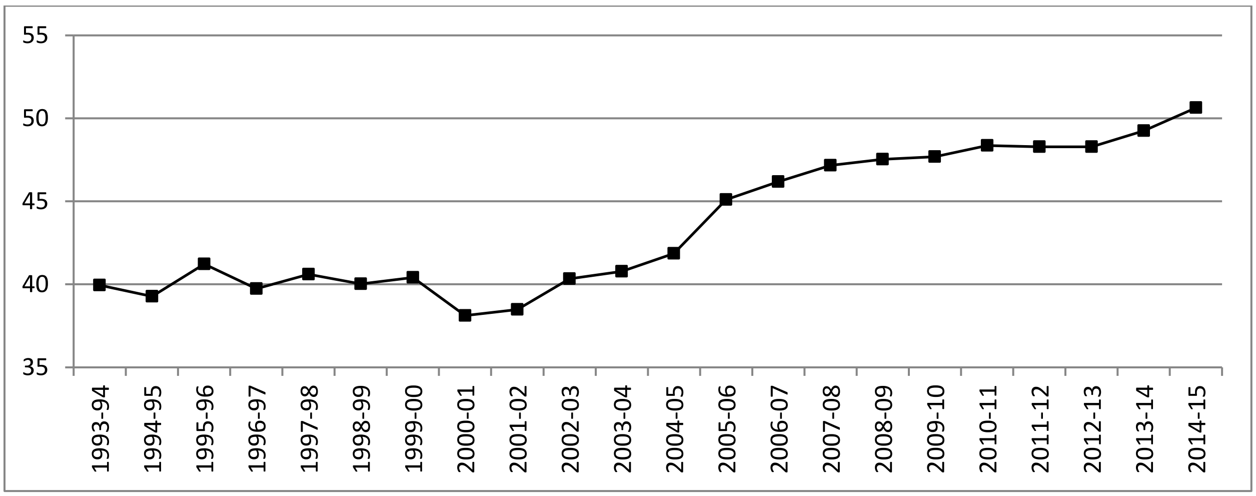
Inter-state Variations in Per capita Gross State Domestic Product (GSDP)

There are substantial inter-state variations in per capita GSDP. Throughout the Post-reform period, the per capita GSDP of Bihar was less than a quarter of that of Maharashtra. Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Assam, Madhya Pradesh, Odisha, Jharkhand, and Jammu & Kashmir, in that order were at the bottom of the ranking on per capita GSDP in 2014-15 (Radhakrishna, 2017). These states lacked proper infrastructure, skilled manpower, efficient pubic delivery systems and proper institutions which might have acted as barriers in attracting private and foreign investment.

Though the central transfers to these states through devolution as recommended by the Finance Commissions were significant, their per capita plan expenditure was low because of their own weak resource position. Maharashtra, Haryana, Tamil Nadu, Uttarakhand, Gujarat, and Kerala were at the top of the ranking in 2014-15 (*ibid*). It should be noted that Uttarakhand significantly improved its ranking on per capita GSDP between 1993-94 and 2014-15, while Punjab and Jammu & Kasmir slipped on the per capita GSDP ranking (*ibid*). The ranking of the other states remained more or less unchanged.

Inter-state disparities became accentuated in the Post-reform period. The weighted CV (coefficient of variation) of per capita GSDP increased from 40 per cent in 1993-94 to 51 per cent in 2014-15 (Figure 1). Notably, in the three high growth years (i.e. 2005-06 to 2007-08), the inter-state income disparities worsened as revealed by the CV. Since 2007-08, the CV increased at a slower rate. This could be due to acceleration in the growth rate of some of the economically weaker states such as Bihar, Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh and Madhya Pradesh.

Figure 1: Trends in Weighted Coefficient of Variation (%) in GSDP per capita across Indian States (2004-05 prices)



Source: Radhakrishna (2017)

Well-being and Inequality

The accelerated growth in the economic reform period had a significant positive impact on well-being (Radhakrishna, 2016). The growth rate of MPCE (monthly per person expenditure) both in rural and urban areas almost doubled during 1983-1997 and 1993-94–2011-12. All expenditure groups both in rural and urban areas gained in the post-reform period. However, the gain was modest for the bottom expenditure group and, in comparison, was very striking for the top expenditure group. It is evident that the growth in the post-reform period was pro-rich, and rural top and urban middle and top groups gained the most.

The rural inequality trend during 1983-1997 was negative and turned into positive during 1993-94–2011-12 (*ibid*). Urban inequality registered a significant positive trend in both the periods, and its growth rate was markedly higher during 1993-94–2011-12. It is also worth noting that the rural-urban gap in MPCE progressively widened during 1993-94–2011-12. Urban MPCE which was about 40 per cent higher than rural MPCE in 1993-94 rose to 60 per cent higher in 2011-12. Quite clearly, the worsening of intra rural/urban inequality and widening rural-urban disparity should be a cause of concern for India from the perspective of enhancing overall economic welfare.

Poverty

The incidence of poverty declined slowly by 0.74 percentage points per annum and the absolute number of poor declined merely by one million during 1983–1993-94 (*ibid*). It declined significantly in the post-reform period of 1993-94 to 2011-12 by 2.18 percentage points per annum and by 38 million poor during the entire period, leaving an unacceptably high number of 270 million poor (217 million in rural and 53 million in urban areas). High growth is only a necessary condition for the elimination of the large mass of poor in a short to intermediate period, but it should be pro-poor. It is also important to recognize that the poor are concentrated in rural areas. Throughout the period, about 80 per cent of the poor continued to be in rural India. Clearly, the performance of India in the reduction of poverty essentially depends on the performance of rural areas in poverty alleviation, which in turn depends on total factor productivity in agriculture, expansion of the rural non-farm sector and improvement of rural wages.

There are substantial inter-state variations in the performance on poverty reduction (*ibid*). Among major States, Kerala, Himachal Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Punjab, Haryana, and Uttarakhand performed better. They also had a lower incidence of poverty in 2011-12. States with the highest incidence of poverty in 1993-94 viz., Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, Jharkhand, Uttar Pradesh and Assam had witnessed the slowest reduction of poverty during the post-reform period. It is evident that poverty was increasingly concentrated in Jharkhand, Bihar, Odisha, Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh. While 41 per cent of India's poor (rural+urban) lived in these economically weaker states in 1993-94, this proportion increased to 57 per cent in 2011-12. Their share among the poor was more than their share in the population (39% in 2011-12). The economically weaker must confront low growth and low reduction of poverty in the future. For making a decisive impact on poverty, these states must sustain high inclusive growth which necessitates putting in place proper pro-poor institutions and improving the efficiency of public delivery systems.

Cross classification of 20 major states by growth of per capita GSDP and poverty reduction shows that the rate of poverty reduction is positively associated with the rate of growth of GSDP per capita (Table 1). It shows that 11 of the 20 states fall on the diagonal cells. The positive outliers on poverty reduction viz., Punjab, Himachal Pradesh, Kerala, Rajasthan, and Jammu &

Kashmir performed better in poverty reduction compared to their growth. The negative outliers namely Gujarat, Karnataka, and Chhattisgarh had worse performance in poverty reduction compared to their growth.

A simulation exercise carried out by Radhakrishna et al., (2013) by assuming that the MPCE of States grows at a uniform All India rate across and between rural and urban areas, indicated that it would contribute to a decline of poverty. The exercise showed that poorer states gained the most in poverty reduction while higher income states lost. The reduction in the incidence of poverty due to an additional rupee in poorer states would be higher than in developed states. This could be attributed to lower expenditure inequalities in poorer states. It clearly demonstrates that regional balance with accelerated growth would hasten the process of poverty reduction

Table 1: Classification of States by Growth and Performance of Poverty Reduction (1993-94–2011-12)

GSDP Per Capita Growth Rate (1993-94—2011-12)	Performance in Poverty Reduction (1993-94–2011-12)			
	Best	Better	Moderate	Worst
Best	Tamil Nadu	Haryana, Uttarakhand	Gujarat	
Better	Andhra Pradesh, Himachal Pradesh, Kerala	Maharashtra	Karnataka	
Moderate		Rajasthan	Bihar, West Bengal, Odisha	Chhattisgarh
Worst	Punjab	Jammu & Kashmir		Assam, Uttar Pradesh, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh

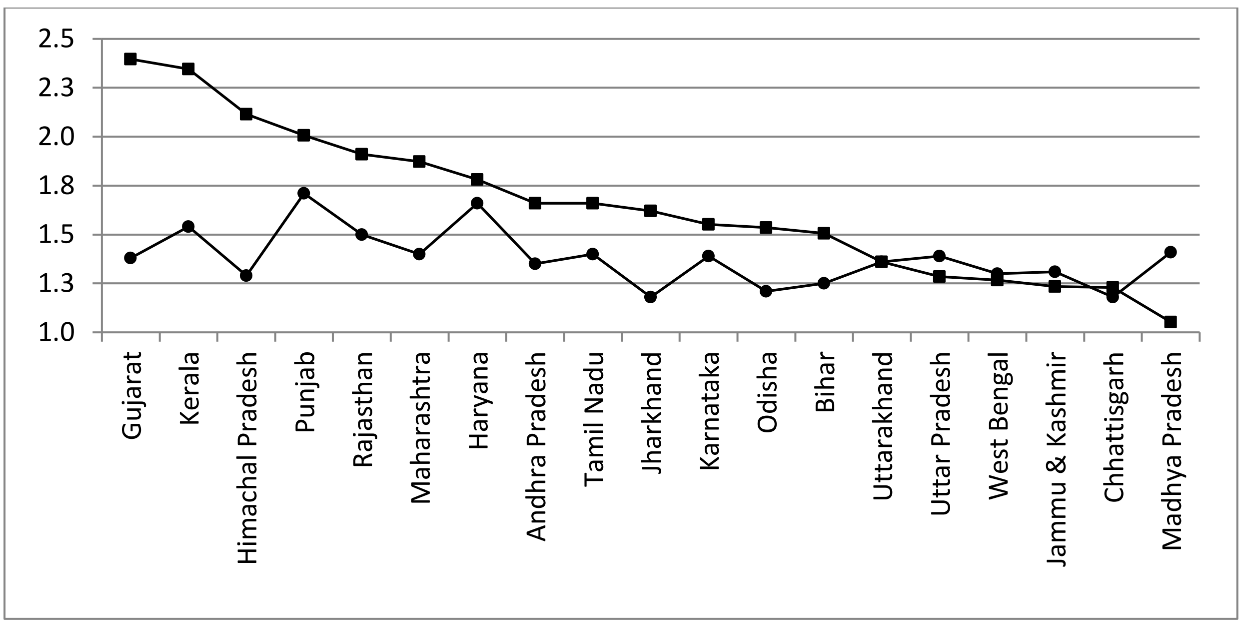
Source: Radhakrishna (2016)

Poverty among Social Groups

In 2011-12, ST (scheduled tribe) households accounted for 17.4 per cent of the poor whereas they constituted 8.9 per cent of the population; SC (schedule caste) households accounted for 25.4 per cent of the poor as compared to 19.0 per cent of their share in population; and OBC (other backward caste) households accounted 41.4 per cent of the poor against 44.1 of their share in population (Radhakrishna, 2016). The share of STs among the poor was higher than that of SCs and other social groups in Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, Odisha, Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat, and Rajasthan. SC households accounted for a bulk of the poor in some states. In 2011-12, they accounted for 73 per cent of the poor in Punjab, about 50 per cent in Haryana and about 45 per cent in Himachal Pradesh—much higher than their shares in population.

The relative poverty ratio, defined as the ratio of poverty incidence among SCs and STs together to the incidence of poverty of the total population, was more than one (norm) for all Indian states (Figure 2). The ratio in 2011-12 was the highest in Gujarat (2.4), closely followed by Kerala (2.3) and close to 2.0 in Himachal Pradesh, Punjab, Rajasthan and Maharashtra respectively. These are the most developed states of India. It is worth noting that the relative poverty ratio was increased during 1993-94 and 2011-12 in several states, particularly in the developed states (Figure 2). Relative poverty was high in developed states (Gujarat and Maharashtra) and in states where the incidence of poverty was low (Kerala, Himachal Pradesh, etc.). It can be inferred with growth and reduction in incidence of poverty; poverty is getting concentrated among scheduled communities (SC&ST). These dependencies may lead to social disharmony.

Figure 2: The Relative Poverty of SCs&STs with that of other Social Groups across Indian States



Source: Radhakrishna and Ravi (2017)

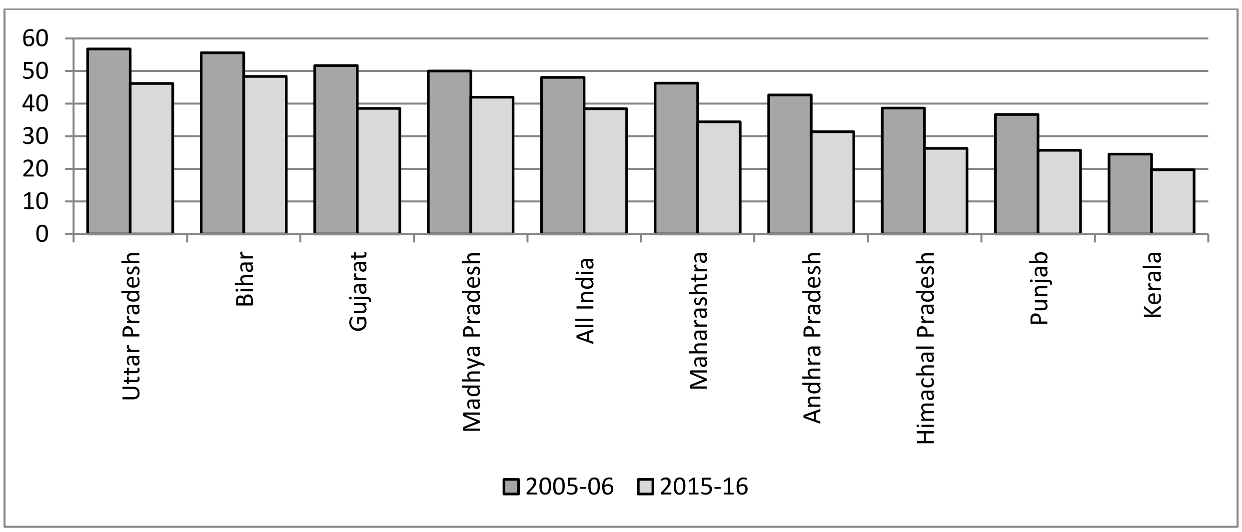
Child Malnutrition

Child malnutrition has serious consequences for overall child development and acts as a serious constraint preventing children from reaching their development potential, social interaction and earning capability in adulthood. In a broader context, it has long-run adverse consequences on economic growth. A large number of children suffer from malnutrition. About a third of new born children were underweight; nearly 40 per cent of India's children were stunted and a significant proportion of children were engaged in different types of work, sometimes hazardous. India accounted for 40 per cent of low birth weight children born in developing countries

(UNICEF and WHO, 2004). Low birth weight increases the risk of neonatal mortality and childhood malnutrition.

The states show substantial variations in the incidence of child malnutrition across the states of India (Figure 3), (Radhakrishna and Ravi, 2017). In 2015-16, the percentage of stunted children under age five in the major states varied from 20 per cent in Kerala, 26 per cent in Punjab and Himachal Pradesh to close to 48 per cent in Bihar. The nutritional status of children in Kerala and Tamil Nadu were better than that in higher-income states such as Maharashtra and Gujarat (*ibid*). The better performance of Kerala and Tamil Nadu could be attributable to the public interventions in nutrition and health sectors. Northeastern states, other than Assam, have better nutritional outcomes, and some of them have even outperformed Kerala (*ibid*). Access to forest food, good natural environment, gender equality, etc. could be some of the factors that contributed to their better performance in terms of nutritional outcomes. Despite low per capita GSDP, these states also have good human development indicators. The inter-state variations in malnutrition were similar for the three types of malnutrition indicators viz., weight-for age (underweight), height-for-age (stunting) and weight-for-height (wasting).

Figure 3: Incidence of Stunting (%) among Children (<5 yrs.) in Selected States of India: 2005-06 & 2015-16



Source: NFHS-3 and NFHS-4

Education

The literacy rate in India improved from 52 per cent in 1991 to 74 per cent in 2011 and the gap between male and female literacy rates has been on the decline since 1981. However, it is worth noting that India lags behind the other BRICS countries in terms of literacy rates. The adult literacy rate in India was lower than that of Brazil, China, Russia and South Africa (World Bank, 2020). Further, India also lags in mean years of schooling. Thus, there is a huge challenge to bridge the gap.

School Education

The near universal enrolment of children of school-going age has been achieved and the rural-urban difference and gender gap have been narrowing. *Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan* and Right to Education Act have resulted improvements in educational performance. Schemes such as ‘mid-day meal’ and targeting eight years of compulsory education have increased enrolments and reduced drop-out rates. The Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) in primary education had increased from 83.8 in 1990-91 to about 100 in 2014-15 and GER in upper primary education also increased from 66.7 to 91.2 during the same period. However, lack of quality education at primary and secondary levels, especially in government schools, is the basic malady that persists in India today.

Though vocationalisation of education was enunciated in the National Policy of Education (1986) and the Central Government has been giving grants to states for implementing the programme, vocational training has not been included in the higher secondary curriculum. The rate of vocational training barely increased between 2004-05 and 2011-12. This showed impact by reflecting in low levels of skills among the Indian manpower.

Higher Education

The gross enrolment rate (GER) showed significant improvement, i.e., from 19 per cent in 2010-11 to 26.3 per cent most recently. The gender gap has also narrowed down over time. Yet, GER is lower than that in some of the BRICS countries, except in South Africa (ibid). Further, India’s GER is incomparable to Western Countries (US: 89, Canada: 88).

There has been a rapid increase in the privatization of higher education in India. State universities are passing through a period of stunted growth and uncertain future. The void created by them is being filled by the private deemed to be universities, and more recently, by private universities. The new private providers mostly come from profit institutions and are not like previous non-profit and charitable private institutions. The profit motive may result in educational inequality which in turn contribute to income and wealth inequality.

The quality of education imparted and research produced in Indian universities are far below the standards in developed countries and in some developing countries like China as well. None of the Indian universities including Indian Institute of Science and IITs, figured among the top 100 universities’ list of the Times Higher Education World University Rankings 2018; two universities of China could find a place among the top 25 universities. It is reported that in 2010, India’s share in the world’s scientific output was 3.5 per cent while that of China was 11.7 per cent.

The Indian Government at various points expressed the intention of spending 6 per cent of the GNP (Centre + States) on the education sector. However, the Centre and States' share on spending was 3.0 per cent in 2018-19 [Govt. of India's Economic Survey 2018-19 (Volume 2)]. Public spending on R&D in India was 0.6 per cent of the GDP during 2010-20 while that of China was 2.1 per cent (World Bank, 2020).

6. India's Ranking on Well-being among Countries

Ranking on Happiness Index

The UN Sustainable Development Solutions Network, a Global Initiative of the United Nations, brings out the World Happiness Report which enables international comparability of well-being across countries In this framework, well-being has three distinct components: i) life evaluation i.e. the cognitive judgment by a person about their life as a whole, ii) positive effect i.e. the experience of positive feeling and emotions by a person at a particular point of time, and iii) negative effect i.e. the experience of negative feelings and emotions by a person at a particular point of time. According to Jeffery Sachs, "The World Happiness Report has proven to be an indispensable tool for policy makers looking to better understand what makes people happy. Time and again we see the reasons for well-being included good social support networks, honest governments, safe environments, and healthy lives". Studies show that besides GDP per capita, unemployment and inequality, social support, healthy life-expectancy, generosity, trusting each other, perceptions about corruption, etc., influence a country's happiness. Employment facilitates supporting family, philanthropy and education also contribute to happiness. Positive effect of employment on happiness would be stronger if it is complemented by job security and other benefits.

Table 2 presents the ranking of selected countries on happiness index (culled out from the World Happiness Reports). Finland was the happiest country, according to the recent World Happiness Reports (2018, 2019, 2020), followed by Denmark, Norway, Iceland, Netherlands, Switzerland and Sweden. The ranking of the above social democratic countries on the happiness index (Table 2) was better than their ranking on GDP per capita (Table 4). These are social democracies and have better social support systems. War stricken countries such as Afghanistan were the unhappiest countries.

How does India perform on the international ranking of happiness? Table 2 shows India's performance leaves much to be desired. Its rank slipped over time: ranked 111 out of 156 countries in 2010-12, slipped to 118 out of 157 counties in 2013-15and further to 140 out of 156 countries in 2016-18. Its performance was worse among BRICS countries in 2016-18 (Brazil 32; Russia 68; China 93; South Africa 106). What is more, it ranked below its neighboring countries (Pakistan 67; Nepal 100; Bangladesh 125; Sri Lanka 130). It is worth mentioning that though Bangladesh and Pakistan whose GDP per capita was lower than that of India, fared better than that of India on happiness ranking. They had better social support than that of India (World Happiness Report, 2019).

Table 2: Ranking of Selected Countries on World Happiness Index

Sl. No	Country Name	Happiness Index			
		2010-12		2017-19	
		Value	Rank	Value	Rank
1	Finland	7.389	7	7.809	1
2	Denmark	7.693	1	7.646	2
3	Switzerland	7.650	3	7.646	2
4	Iceland	7.355	9	7.504	4
5	Norway	7.655	2	7.488	5
6	Netherlands	7.512	4	7.449	6
7	Sweden	7.480	5	7.353	7
8	Canada	7.477	6	7.232	11
9	Australia	7.350	10	7.223	12
10	United Kingdom	6.882	22	7.165	13
11	United States	7.082	17	6.940	18
12	Singapore	6.546	30	6.377	31
13	Brazil	6.849	24	6.376	32
14	Thailand	6.371	36	5.999	54
15	Japan	6.064	43	5.871	62
16	Pakistan	5.292	81	5.693	66
17	Russian Federation	5.464	68	5.546	73
18	Malaysia	5.760	56	5.384	82
19	Indonesia	5.348	76	5.286	84
20	China	4.978	93	5.124	94
21	Bangladesh	4.804	108	4.833	107
22	South Africa	4.963	96	4.814	109
23	Sri Lanka	4.151	137	4.308	132
24	India	4.772	111	3.573	144
25	Afghanistan	4.040	143	2.567	153

Note: The Happiness Index ranges between zero and 10 points. Number of countries considered in 2010-12 is 156 and in 2017-19 are 153. Finland achieved the highest score in the happiness index with 7.809 points out of 10 and ranked 1 and the country Afghanistan with 2.567 points ranked the lowest at 153 in 2017-19. The highest and lowest ranked countries in 2010-12 respectively were Denmark (7.693) and Togo (2.936).

Source: World Happiness Report, 2020

Ranking on Social Progress Index

Social Progress Index (SPI) measures the extent to which countries support social and environmental needs of their citizens. The index consists of three distinct dimensions of a society: i) basic human needs (adequate nutrition and medical care, water and sanitation, shelter, and personal safety); ii) foundations of well-being (basic education, access to information and communications, healthcare, and environmental sustainability); and iii) opportunity (personal rights, personal freedom and choice, access to higher education, and environment tolerance and inclusion). Each of these dimensions is disaggregated into four components and each component covers three to six indicators. Many variables have been considered for each indicator and a methodology has been suggested for aggregation.

Table 3 presents rankings of the selected countries based on SPI. By and large, both Happiness Index (HPI) and SPI produce similar ranking for the selected countries (Tables 2&3). India fared badly compared to Malaysia, Sri Lanka, Indonesia and other BRICS countries on SPI. Sri Lanka though ranked higher than Bangladesh and Pakistan on Per capita GDP and SPI, performed worse on HPI (Table 2). Education and health are the two major factors and basic human needs influencing social progress. India lags behind, on social development among the developing countries. Most of the health and education indicators were worse than those in China and Sri Lanka (UNDP, 2010). For instance, infant mortality rate in India was three times more than that in China and four times more than that in Sri Lanka, maternal mortality rate was about 10 times more than that in China and Sri Lanka. Life expectancy at birth at was about 10 years less than that in China and Sri Lanka. Mean years of schooling of adults was merely a half of that in China and Sri Lanka (*ibid*). What is worse, India fared badly on health and education indicators even compared to some of the less developed countries. For instance, Bangladesh with per capita income less than that of India improved its position on some of the development indicators and reported better outcomes than India. It had higher life expectancy at birth, higher mean years of schooling and lower gender inequality (*ibid*).

Table 3: Social Progress Index

Sl. No	Country Name	Social Progress Index			
		2014		2019	
		Value	Rank	Value	Rank
1	Norway	88.57	3	90.95	1
2	Denmark	88.68	1	90.09	2
3	Switzerland	87.83	8	89.89	3
4	Finland	88.67	2	89.56	4
5	Sweden	88.25	4	89.45	5
6	Iceland	88.02	6	89.29	6
7	Canada	86.97	13	88.81	9
8	Japan	86.04	16	88.34	10
9	Netherlands	88.21	5	88.31	11
10	Australia	87.07	11	88.02	12
11	United Kingdom	87.42	9	87.98	13
12	United States	84.74	19	83.62	26
13	Singapore	81.59	27	83.23	27
14	Malaysia	70.33	50	74.17	46
15	Brazil	73.59	44	72.87	49
16	Russian Federation	67.73	62	69.71	62
17	Sri Lanka	64.58	77	69.09	65
18	Thailand	67.66	63	67.47	72
19	South Africa	64.65	76	67.44	73
20	Indonesia	61.87	88	65.52	85
21	China	61.58	92	64.54	89
22	India	55.20	103	59.10	102
23	Bangladesh	50.83	109	54.11	108
24	Pakistan	45.52	123	48.20	125
25	Afghanistan	35.20	144	38.60	143

Note: Social Progress Index is measured in percentages and the ranks are assigned for 149 countries in 2014 and 2019. Norway (90.95) and South Sudan (24.24) are highest and lowest in ranking respectively in 2019. Denmark (88.86) and South Sudan (25.10) were highest and lowest in ranking respectively in 2014.

Source: Social Progress Report, 2020

Table 4: Global Per Capita GDP

Sl. No	Country Name	GDP Per Capita			
		2002		2019	
		in PPP $	rank	in PPP $	Rank
1	Singapore	55539	8	97341	2
2	Switzerland	58649	6	68628	5
3	Norway	57526	7	63633	7
4	United States	50641	11	62683	8
5	Denmark	49322	12	57184	10
6	Netherlands	48184	13	57141	11
7	Iceland	41722	21	55874	13
8	Sweden	42508	19	53205	15
9	Australia	39936	24	49756	18
10	Canada	38369	26	49031	19
11	Finland	41440	22	48621	20
12	United Kingdom	39855	25	46699	22
13	Japan	35536	29	41429	29
14	Malaysia	16159	51	28351	48
15	Russian Federation	16225	50	27044	51
16	Thailand	10594	76	18463	66
17	China	4024	122	16117	73
18	Brazil	11797	70	14652	81
19	Sri Lanka	5999	102	13078	86
20	South Africa	10469	77	12482	91
21	Indonesia	5996	103	11812	95
22	India	2707	142	6754	117
23	Bangladesh	2037	151	4754	129
24	Pakistan	3279	129	4690	130
25	Afghanistan	1273	167	2202	157

Note: GDP estimates are at purchasing power parity ($), and the ranks are assigned for 178 countries in 2002 and 172 countries in 2019.

Source: World Bank, 2020

Ranking on Global Hunger Index

Global Hunger Index (GHI) is an aggregate index computed by giving equal weight age to four sub-indices viz.,1) the proportion of undernourished in the population, 2) proportion of children under age five suffering from wasting,3) the proportion of children under age five suffering from stunting and 4)the mortality rate of children under the age of five. The 2019 Global Hunger Report covers 117 countries including India.

India's performance in reducing hunger leaves much to be desired. Its rank on GHI was lower than BRICS and neighboring countries. It ranked 102 whereas Brazil (18), Russia (22), China (25), South Africa (59). It is also behind Sri Lanka (66) and Pakistan (94) (Table 5). The pattern of ranking is like that of Happiness Ranking. India must address huge hunger gap to reach UN sustainable goal of zero hunger by 2030.

Table 5: Global Hunger Index

Sl. No	Country Name	Global Hunger Index (GHI)			
		2000		2019	
		Index	Rank	Index	Rank
1	Brazil	12.0	27	5.3	18
2	Russian Federation	10.3	21	5.8	22
3	China	15.8	39	6.5	25
4	Thailand	18.3	45	9.7	45
5	Malaysia	15.5	37	13.1	57
6	South Africa	19.2	49	14.0	59
7	Sri Lanka	22.4	57	17.1	66
8	Indonesia	25.8	60	20.1	70
9	Bangladesh	36.1	76	25.8	88
10	Pakistan	38.3	82	28.5	94
11	India	38.8	83	30.3	102
12	Afghanistan	52.1	107	33.8	108

Note: The GHI ranks countries on a 100-point scale, with 0 being the best score (no hunger) and 100 being the worst. Values less than 10.0 reflect low hunger; values from 10.0 to 19.9 reflect moderate hunger; values from 20.0 to 34.9 indicate serious hunger; values from 35.0 to 49.9 are alarming; and values of 50.0 or more are extremely alarming. Number of countries considered for ranking in 2000 is 113 and 117 in 2019.

Source: Global Hunger Report, 2019

7. Meeting Challenges of Achieving Peaceful and Harmonious Society

Promoting quality education

Education is the key component and major determinant of human resource development. It enables social transformation and economic prosperity at the individual and national levels. Education is both a constituent and an instrument for socially harmonious society. "Universal primary education" is one of the eight UN Millennium Development Goals (MDGs); and “quality education” is the fourth among the seventeen Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) adopted by the UN in 2015–successor to the MDGs. The SDG for education aims to (i) provide equal access to affordable vocational training, (ii) eliminate gender disparities, and (iii) achieve universal access to quality higher education. India has been an enthusiastic signatory to these UN efforts to achieve the concerted socio-economic improvements.

It is widely recognized that the progress of a country depends on the quality of its manpower in terms of knowledge, skills, competencies and related attributes. Skill development and knowledge enhancement of the workforce are vital for promoting economic growth. Education has positive externalities as well. Workers using new technology can impart the same to other workers around them. Equal educational opportunities can neutralize the adverse consequences of family circumstances and help in reducing inequalities (OECD, 2012). Policies focusing on equity in education can promote inter-generational improvement in earnings and reduce income inequalities.

The relationship between educational inequality and economic equality is interactive and mutually reinforcing. Persons from wealthier sections of the society of India have access to better schools and higher educational institutions, while those from the deprived sections settle with lower quality of education. In the process, the system contributes to widening of educational inequality. The outcome of this process is the preponderance of poorly educated persons in low paying jobs and better educated persons in high paying jobs. disparity between blue and white collar workers increased sharply The existing educational system is one of the major institutions perpetuating inequality.

It is worth mentioning that Finland whose performance in education is commendable has shifted from a highly centralized to a more localized system in which highly trained teachers design curriculum at the national standard. Finnish schools are generally smaller (fewer than 300 pupils) with relatively small class sizes (in the 20s), and are uniformly well equipped. About 90 percent of school going age children completes upper secondary school. Two-thirds of the graduates enroll in universities or professionally oriented polytechnic schools. More than 50 percent of the Finnish adult population participates in adult education programs. Ninety-eight percent of the cost of education at all levels is covered by government rather than by private sources. The notion of caring students educationally and personally is a central principle in the schools. India should learn lessons from the achievement of Finland.

Reducing disparities of growth and participation

Bhaduri (2016) argued that incentivising the corporate sector by successive governments, irrespective of their ideology, by giving land and other natural resources at subsidised rates and by forcefully displacing the poor from their livelihoods had led to political corruption and distanced the citizens from the elected representatives. If inequality exceeds a tripping point, it will lead to social disharmony and an economy of exclusion.

Another factor contributing to social disharmony is aggravation of regional disparities in the post reform period. States with the highest incidence of poverty, viz., Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, Jharkhand, Uttar Pradesh and Assam had witnessed lower growth and slowest reduction of poverty in the post-reform period. It is evident that poverty was increasingly becoming concentrated in Jharkhand, Bihar, Odisha, Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh. It is leading to forced migration to cities of fast growing states for livelihood. They are engaged in low paying activities and reside in slums. Their children are engaged as workers in hazardous activities for making small earnings. They suffer from malnutrition and lack of education. As a consequence, they suffer from low productivity in adulthood. Poverty induces some of them to indulge in crime. Hence, regional balance is also *sine qua non* for a peaceful and harmonious society.

For achieving peaceful and harmonious society, public policies should influence both the process of income generation as well as distribution of growth by enabling growth to occur in labour intensive sectors and in economically weaker regions. The growth of allied agriculture and rural-non-farm activities is essential for long term poverty reduction. Producer collectives such as producer companies and a cluster-based approach for small scale enterprises, hold the promise. It would strengthen the livelihood base of small farmers and self-employed persons in non-agriculture. Good public support is essential for these initiatives.

Pro-poor Strategy

It is imperative that efforts are made to empower the poor people so that they participate in the development process. Empowering the poor requires public investment in health, education and social protection. Healthier, educated and skilled persons can take advantage of employment and investment opportunities created by small and medium enterprises. Kerala's *Kudumbashree* and the SHG model of Andhra Pradesh are good models for empowering the poor and strengthening the livelihood base of vulnerable groups. The National Livelihood Mission's efforts to promote SHG Federations in States may yield desirable outcomes in empowering the poor. A favourable investment climate, empowerment and decent work are *sine qua non* for the happy and harmonious lives in the society.

Many reforms such as radical land reforms, debureaucratisation and decentralised development figured in Indian Plans, they did not make much headway. However, there are some positive developments due to the electoral process such as the implementation of nationwide rights based programmes such as Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee (MGNREGA), Right to Education Act Panchayat Extension to Scheduled Areas Act (PESA) and FRA Forest Rights Act (FRA) and Food Security Act.; income improvement programmes such as National Rural Livelihood Mission. National Rural Health Mission that failed has to be put on track. Covid-19 Pandemic exposed the vulnerabilities of the system. If these programmes are properly implemented through social mobilization they may lead to a more socially just society.

8. Concluding Observations

In the Post-reform period, Indian policy makers became growth fetishists. While growth is necessary for well-being, it should be complemented by decent employment generation and strong social support. India is among countries at the bottom of the international rankings on well-being. It has to learn lessons for catching-up from Scandinavian countries and other BRICKS countries. Particularly, it has to draw lessons from Bangladesh who performed better than India on happiness and reducing hunger, despite a lower per capita GNP. A daunting but not impossible task is to catch up with its neighbor China which is far ahead of India on well-being indices and per capita income. The experience of countries which achieved substantial progress on well-being is the ones which have achieved rapid growth with equity. Needless to say, public policies should influence both the process of income generation as well as distribution.

[Sections 2-4 are drawn from Radhakrishna and Sastry (1979); and Radhakrishna et al., (2004)]

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