

ASSESSING THE SIGNIFICANCE OF JUSTICE IN ETHICS IN INDIA - A CASE STUDY

Abstract

This write-up is devoted to concrete and specific study of Indian economy. An account of the evolving capitalist framework of development is furnished in this chapter. It is this capitalist framework of development within which the wider ambit of governance has functioned in the country. It is also the framework within which the actions of attaining the national goal of economic growth with justice and the pragmatic economic processes involved in undoing injustices has been pursued. The relations among economic governance, capitalist economy and practices of economic justice are explored.

While an account of the capitalist system of Indian economy is collated, the case study is with regard to the matters of the attainment of justice pertaining to public provisioning of food, employment assurances and child protection and welfare in the course of the private and public actions of steering, administering and managing the macroeconomy in India.

Keywords: Food, Employment, Child Welfare, Capitalist Framework, Growth With Justice, India Governance, Economic Justice, Political Economy.

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I. INTRODUCTION

To govern a country is to impart propriety, impartiality and fairness to the populace. The action of treating one another with deserved respect, reverence and veneration and treating one another rather fairly and equitably in the interpersonal interaction is good and righteous conduct. It is both in theory as well as in the practice that the very act of enabling and ensuring fairness in procedures, equity (equality) in the distribution of some valued thing and freedom in beliefs, speech and conducts has always been subsumed in the performance of steering, superintendence and governing of polity, society and economy in a nation.

The steering and administration in a nation serves many purposes and leads to multiple accomplishments. One of its crucial purposes, however, is to render freedom, equity and fairness and offering something valuable and valued to its citizenry. It is the aggregate level of efficient and effective management and administration across a polity, society and economy of countries that do necessarily induce, buttress and facilitate the interpersonal conduct of propriety, uprightness and fairness on a mass scale. It is then imperative to assert at least three concise and relevant observations on the relation of uprightness with governance in the context of India, a country under consideration in the present research project, as elsewhere in the world.

One, justice¹ for the populace is a set of hybrid actions of private individuals of the civil society and public functionaries of the government. Such actions are integral part of the wider canvass of a plethora of similar hybrid actions of private individuals of the civil society and public functionaries of the government, which go in the name of steering, managing and governing of a nation.

Second, the extent and level of attainment of the fair play, propriety and uprightness in the society and economy may be appraised but the route to such endeavor towards assessment do unfailingly pass through and mediated by an extensive analysis of the patterns and outcome of the stewardship and administration in a nation.

Third, this being as such, a conjoint conceptual framework on the relation of the performance of justness for citizenry with the executions of steering and managing the nation in a study on the issue of assessment of the uprightness and fairness is a befitting approach.

The present study is centered at the analysis of socio-economic fairness and uprightness. The interest is in appraising fairness at the societal level. Justice is required by

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¹ Justice is an ancient aspiration of human settlements. Such aspiration may be traced in as remote an edict as the Babylonian Codes of Hammurabi. The Roman jurists and medieval Semitic theologians had their own specific religious doctrines and sermons on the theme of fairness and justice. The idea of justice had its journey from antiquity till the dominance of classical liberal philosophy. Classical liberalism, whose foundation was laid down with the European Enlightenment project, construed justice in terms of '*individual rights*' and '*legal egalitarian values*'. Being distinct from benevolence, charity, prudence, mercy, generosity and compassion, the notion of justice demands something in excess of, and of course, beyond such values and virtues of human beings. Seekers of justice in all ages have meant various things in the name of fairness and justice – commutative justice, retributive (restitution) justice and distributive justice.

those who are starved, hungry and destitute. It is needed by those who are disengaged, workless and unemployed. It is obligatory for those whose children are uncared, unprotected and insecure in the country. The case study is therefore in three areas: food security, employment assurances and child welfare. The economic provisioning, ethical directives and legal sanctions in these fields of the civil society and government bureaucratic interventions are the litmus test of the good, effective and efficient governance in securing the socio-economic justice in food, employment and child care

With regard to methodology, the verbal and semantic arguments are mostly used to ascertain the level of attainment of equity and justice. The arguments are advanced through the use of tabulations of quantitative information as well. The data and information used are mostly from published secondary sources. There is no field survey and visits involved. The content of the thesis is based on the table work of synthesis of theoretical frameworks and systematization of the collated information from secondary sources of data in published literature in India.

The piece of writing is divided into three sections. Beginning with an account of the political economy practice in general in India, the first section is devoted to the case study of governance and ensuing economic justice in the spheres of distribution of benefits and burdens associated with and in matter of food provisioning, employment assurance and child welfare in India. The success and failures of the praxis of political economy in attaining economic justice and fairness in distributing the public goods and welfare and establishing an egalitarian setting in the country is assessed in the second section. The concluding remarks follow at the end.

II. PRACTICES OF POLITICAL ECONOMY

To begin with the economic identity of India, it has been a highly populous nation (harbouring around three times the combined population of six other countries of the South Asian subcontinent) (HDC, 2002, pp. 228-37), with a vast geographical region ((occupying 72.07 percent of the regional space of South Asia) (MHDC, 2010, pp. 152-62). Being presently home to almost 1.3 billion people (World Bank, 2012, p. 42) and spread over 297.3 million hectares of geographical space, it is also densely populated country (one of the most densely populated regions of the world) with the man-land ratio standing at 3.58 (data of the year of 2003). In colonial times during the first half of twentieth century, there were almost 562 princely states that were not directly ruled by the British colonial empire in the Indian Subcontinent. Some territories in the northeastern corner were also not directly administered by the colonial empire. These erstwhile princely estates and territories in the northeast are today part of vast territory of the country. The national economy today consists of a constellation of federating units of regional economies and the economies of more than two dozen states and a couple of union territories in the country.

Governing the large macroeconomy of such a geographically vast and humanly populous country has always been a challenge. In the course of last seven decades, the agrarian economy has become self-sufficient in the production of food grains, and the mercantile economy has been transformed into an industrial economy. The autonomous consumers, producers, savers and investors have been participating in economic activities, and their actions as demanders and suppliers in the free market have contributed to the

growth of national income and produce in the country. The participation of civil society actors in the economic supervision and macromanagement has however been merely half of the story of growth and development.

Broadly speaking, India has been exposed to public policy paradigms and regimes since long. The goal of growth in national income has been primary objectives of economic macromanagement under the aegis of mostly state-led regulations and control since 1950s in the country. The nationalist sentiments have led to adoption of mixed framework of postcolonial economy in India. It was recognised that the colonial policies and actions had destroyed the base of the erstwhile agricultural economy, led to the pauperisation of peasantry and artisanal workers, and discriminated against the traditional cottage, handloom and handicraft industrial sector, and therefore, it was essential for the postcolonial government to set up public sector enterprises.

The postcolonial State has not merely been active in the realms of maintaining law and order, dispensing justice and distributing welfare services, but also in owning and controlling the public sector units of production in the economy. The government has been a robust public actor, and its crucial functions have been orchestration of public actions of planning, programming and drafting public schemes, programs and projects for rural as well as urban economy², in addition to setting up public sector industrial and infrastructure units.

The State capitalism has helped the public sector industrialisation while the private capitalists have been encouraged through monetary, fiscal and direct policies in the country. In a set up of mixed economic system, both private sector as well as public enterprises was allowed to coexist. The government through relaxation of rules and regulations has given the monetary, fiscal and direct encouragement to the private sector enterprises to grow and expand. It has created the base of basic and heavy industries and a web of infrastructure facilities to help the growth in private sector accumulation and the capitalistic enterprises of manufacturing and services in the Indian economy. Within the framework of capitalist market and private enterprises in agriculture, industry and service sectors, there had been establishment of basic and heavy industries. Such foundation has been made possible under the umbrella of public sector. These public sector units still survive despite their numbers shrinking since the onset of liberalisation and globalisation policies beginning from the year of 1991.

The express purpose of political economic interventions has been to maintain and boost the capital accumulation and economic growth, and also determines the distribution of aggregate shares among wages, rent and profits. The aspirations and demands of the landlord,

² There are two distinct strands: the welfare strand and the centralised governments strand. The welfare strand reflected a tendency for national democratic governments to accept a measure of responsibility for 'redistributing incomes in welfares services for the underprivileged'. Each of the two world wars constituted a major turning point in the social engineering strand as well.

The propensity for highly centralised governments was for the purpose of intervening directly in the market system in order to promote national economic power and prosperity on the one hand and stabilise prices and incomes on the other. The weight and range of government's contribution to national economy have increased (Deane, 1989, pp. 145 - 53).

capitalist and worker classes have been balanced through direct economic planning of the public sector and indicative planning of the private sector. The political economy practices as mediated through the systematic actions of the national level Planning Commission and state planning boards in regulating the working of the institutions of market, community and the economic unit of family have ensured the smooth production processes in the country.

A broad view of aggregate data and information does indeed indicate that the aggregate administration, management and stewardship of the economy has been successful in accomplishing the task of allocating the scarce resources among economic sectors and spatial regions. Through the prudent use of a mix of the fiscal, monetary and foreign exchange policies, it has also been triumphant in maintaining the economic stability in the country. It has also been able to make the vastly increased amount of goods and services available to the citizenry.

In boosting the gross domestic product, human development and distribution of the fruits of growth and development among the populace, there have been as much contributions of the government economic policies and programmes as the initiatives of the private sector players in the market and civil society. With the onset of the globalisation, liberalisation and privatisation policies since 1991, the mixed economic framework of national economy has increasingly given way to the evolution of market-driven, private enterprise based capitalist framework proper in the country.

A long era of political economic management, the country however does not still harbour an economy dominated by the manufacturing, industrial and service sector. Demographically large, spatially vast, and still a state-regulated budding capitalist economy with a huge home market, the country continues to be as yet largely an agricultural and rural landscape. India constitutes an economic region that has for long continued to be characterized as primarily an agricultural region of uncertain monsoonal rains, dispersed canal and well irrigation, and heavy use of draft animals for ploughing and carting. The land has always been a vital resource, significant form of property and a measure of social power and status, and its concentration in a few hands has been a historically inherited feature. The small farmers are as yet the largest section of rural population, but operate merely one-third of the agricultural land. The small size of holdings varies from an average of 0.3 hectares to 0.6 hectares.

It is not at all an urbane society (within India, the proportion of city-dwellers in a small state of Goa has been nearly 50 percent while it has been just 10 percent in Himachal Pradesh), as a majority that is nearly 70 percent of the aggregate populace resides in the countryside. With 7638.22 million persons residing in rural areas (constituting 71.68 percent of the aggregate populace) and the agricultural population standing at 5565.92 million persons (constituting 52.24 percent of the aggregate populace) in 2003, its agricultural sector alone employed well about some 60 percent approximately of all labour force in the country. Despite being a developing economy, it however harbours a vast home market in Asia.

A fast rate of economic growth and development has not been the sole objective of the political economic practices in the country. In retrospect, the national slogan of 'growth with justice' has been at the core of the praxis of political economy in five-year planning framework. While primarily focusing on economic growth, the government has nonetheless

often attempted, with fluctuating and varying political will, to bring about a number of agrarian reforms and egalitarian changes in the structure of the macroeconomy. In addition to State-led orchestration of economic growth in general and development of economic sectors within the budding capitalist market framework, it has also been the national goal to establish a socialist framework of society.

Accordingly, the economic policies and programmes of distribution of the common good and the empowerment schemes of social justice have been part of the socio-economic governance³ perspective in the country. The Planning commission was established, and the growth with justice was declared the national objective. Crucial public policy initiatives as motivated by a sort of hybrid morality of welfare and rights has been in the direction of instituting land reforms, credit reforms and marketing reforms in the countryside so as to minimise the deprivations, exclusion and social insecurity. The public regulatory authority has worked to control and curb economic harms, injustices and concentration of economic power in few hands.

In the very beginning, the erstwhile princely states and their exclusive privileges that those enjoyed were dismantled. It was also attempted, though with mixed success, to break the landlordism and zamindari establishment, and redistribute surplus acquired land among the needy and deserving tillers of the soil. The government has been at the forefront of undertaking various direct-interventionist measures as well to reduce and eliminate the concentration of economic power in few hands. Preoccupied with the idea of establishing a socialistic pattern of society, the governance through the institution of political economy have continuously focused on attaining economic justice for the masses by controlling the rise of industrial monopolies and orchestration of land reforms.

It has been the obligation of the Indian democratic welfare government to ensure not only the guarantee of full utilization of non-labour resources in the economy but also provide full employment for the rural and urban labour class. The national and local strategies of private individual and public collective actions of planning, policy and events have been to create the condition of self-sufficiency in food grains in India in terms of availability and enhanced output of many non-agricultural goods and services. There has been activism of the state in passing the welfare legislation and in expanding welfare expenditures. It is but only recently that the realization has dawned that a proactive role is to be assigned to the social policy, in addition to economic policy and planning.

³ The framework of five-year planning exercise have been instituted under the umbrella of the Planning Commission for purpose of not only strategising the fast increase in per capita income and national produce through investments in private and public sector enterprises but also prioritising the distribution of welfare benefits and economic assistance to citizens.

Primarily, the continuous and sustained annual increase in per capita income and national income has however been the driving force of public management of the economy and corresponding regulatory framework of determination of shares of economic classes of renters, profiteers and wage-earners. Principal focus has been on recurring patterns of investment and disinvestment in public sector enterprises (including public utilities of education, health, infrastructure and miscellaneous units), of course with announced and explicitly stated national objectives of macroeconomic and regional 'growth with justice'.

Being a region of democratically elected governments over the last seven decades, the governance structure and process in the country has variously been characterised by the features of sharing the public moralities of creation of public goods, utilities and welfare and the public moralities of restoring the privileges and rights to life, liberty and property for the masses. In the mental landscape of conscious and enlightened (often, indoctrinated as well) individuals and their collective platforms (interest groups, vested pressure groups, professional associations, and political organizations and parties), there have been a plethora of reasons - both economic and political, which have been normative guide to the actions of resistance against the capitalist globalisation in the country. Prime among these has been one related with the deliberations of private as well public agency about the rights to justice – elimination of inequity in access to resources and food, security against violations of effective liberty, avoidance of casualties of the processes of impartiality and fairness in the society.

In the country, the plural and hybrid moralities associated with the national objective of ‘growth with justice’ and the mixed economic actions of free individuals in their private capacities in the civil society as well as public actions of government functionaries during execution and implementation of developmental economic programmes, welfare schemes and redistributive policies and programmes has led to attainment of material growth and development as the beneficial good consequences. Given the structure and pattern of economic and social governance, the aggregate economic inequality has rather been moderate despite the country being home to a considerable number of poor, destitute, malnourished and excluded populations on the globe.

III. PROVISIONS OF FOOD, EMPLOYMENT AND CHILD WELFARE

With regard to the provision of food, employment and child welfare, the private capitalist (as well as the semi-feudal) market exchange networks had functioned for long time. These private exchange networks of market had performed to allocate and distribute these goods and services among the populace in the country. There is a history that spans across centuries. The colonial history had been not been anymore different. The production, supply and distribution of food grains had mostly been handled by the private producers, suppliers and middlemen in community marts and traditional markets during the colonial times as well. There had been vibrant private markets for food grains and food stuffs, and traditional exchange systems for labour service had dealt with it, and these marts in the form of haats and bazaars still survive. There has been a cherished history of the evolution of the private institutions of traditional haats (village marts), bazaars and mandis (wholesale markets) spread over the length and breadth of the country.

It had been the erstwhile feudal system and the budding capitalist enterprises and markets in agriculture, manufacturing and service sectors of the economy that had for long taken care of the generation of labour use, utilization and absorption – the employment of workers – as well. The private sector of the economy had been allocating and socially provisioning the work and gainful employment to the needy individuals. The patron-client relationships at the village and small mofussil town level used to take care of the employment needs of seeking adults. The system survived long, and still private labour markets are active in generating employment for seekers of work in the country.

The India family had been an old institution and basic unit to look after education, health and general welfare of the children. The family has been a strong cohesive unit and institution at the service of child care in the country. There had been millions of private households and families that had been discharging their familial and social obligations of protecting and educating the children and keeping them healthy. In many places, the community organisations were also at the front to provide education and health-care to children. In other words, the production, allocation and distribution of food, employment and child care have traditionally been handled by the family, community and private sector actors in the economy. There had however been a sizeable population to whom the accessibility to food and employment had been quite insurmountable. There had also been a considerable number of households whose capacity to look after the children had been limited. There had been a large majority of children who had no access to education, health-care and social protection in the country.

In colonial times, the recurrent episodes of hungers, food riots and famines were the reminders of the inadequacy of private arrangements. The high infant mortality rates and high illiteracy, including the child labour practices and bonded labour institutions were again the reminders of failures of the erstwhile feudal and budding capitalist private sector of the society and economy. The private sector functioning had been inadequate and insufficient to the needs and requirements of the population, and left a sizeable number of populace as unfed, underfed and malnourished, a considerable number being underemployed and unemployed and a large number of children being vulnerable to illiteracy, diseases and social ills and insecurities in the country.

It was in view of such deficits and failures on the part of the private capitalist sector of the national economy that the (economic) growth with (social) justice has been declared the national goal in the framework of economic planning under the aegis of the postcolonial government in the early 1950s in India. In line with the postcolonial constitutional aspirations and directives, the socio-economic justice through progressive reduction in monopolies, concentration of wealth and income in few hands and demotion of regional unevenness and household inequality in general has been sought to be achieved through the active involvement of the public bureaucracy and the government in the economy.

In the whole gamut of doings, actions and activities of steering, managing and administrating the macroeconomy through plans, programs and schemes that have been executed under the control and regulation of the government as well as that of the civil society organization, those concerned with the provisions of food, employment and child welfare have been exemplary in undoing of injustices and securing of justice for the deprived, excluded and marginalized mass in the country. At the core of such public sector initiatives has been the non-market public provisioning of social benefits for the poor, marginalized, unemployed, excluded women, backward and scheduled castes and tribes, and the social assistance for victims of the natural and man-made disasters and disruptions in the economy.

In the holistic framework of economic administration and macromanagement through the aggregative institution of political economy of growth and development of agricultural, industrial and service sectors of economic activities of citizens in postcolonial India, the public provisioning of food, employment guarantees and child welfare were especially

focused endeavours to reduce the asymmetries, inequalities and injustices to the harmed, disadvantaged and injured sections of Indian population. Under the aegis of the welfare state in a mixed economy framework of governance, these three economic programmes have been exemplar par excellence on the road to orchestrate the distributive justice to citizens in the country. Rather than leaving the helpless and disadvantaged citizens to pursue their preferences and efficiently optimize these while being at the mercy of the market, the government has initiated innumerable actions and doings to secure justices while implementing these programmes through the public bureaucracy.

The political economy of public distribution of food has a colonial origin in India. It began as a response to deal with the widespread scarcity in the wake of the 2nd World War. The British colonial empire evolved a famine Code which ensured that anyone needing food in a famine⁴ area had only to turn up t a work site to get the work. For those unable to work, for example, the old, infirm and disabled, there was dole of some paise (money coins) per day. Subsequently, a ration card system evolved later. The distribution of food by the government as the general entitlement scheme of distribution of rationed food-in-shortages at affordable prices had continued till the year of 1992. In 1960s and 1970s in India, it was a universal system of subsidized food distribution to all needy consumers.

In the early 1970s, the then Prime Minister, Shrimati Indira Gandhi, popularised the national political slogan of “Garibi Hatao” (eradication of poverty). Subsequently, the food distribution system was revamped to align with the poverty eradication programme. The ambition was not only to eliminate mere scarcity of food but also to reduce poverty. The framework of agricultural-food provisioning system in the country was revamped to the effect of making the distribution of food grains effective and rather pervasive through a network of rationing and fair price shops that delivered grains at fixed prices. A national public corporate entity called the Food Corporation of India was also established for the purposes of procurement of grains as well as its distribution though centralized agency.

While the economic policy of revamping the public distribution system (PDS) was launched in 1992 so as to reach the disadvantaged and deprived section of population in hilly, remote and inaccessible areas, a focus on the poor led to launching of the targeted public distribution system (TPDS) in 1997. The system⁴ has been supported by large scale public

⁴ Food as a commodity has a high organic component of the production and consumption processes (Finn, 1994); it involves laws of biology. Food has nutritional value for human beings; it is not like another thing that just meets the want. The production of food is affected by natural conditions of temperature, rainfall and overall climate; it involves a play of nature that is not completely amenable to manipulations by science and technology.

Agricultural-food system is a system of social provisions of raw food, biotech food and industrial food. The social provisioning of food involves necessarily a chain of activities from production to preservation, preparation, packaging, transportation, delivery to the table and a sequence of actions that are in the nature of collective action – a composite of actions of farmers, plant genetists, chemical process engineers, microbiologists, biotechnologists, nutritionist, capitalist, bureaucrats, traders, middlemen commission agents, and consumers. In the chain of activities, constituting collective actions, the provisioning of food is a mixture of the social, the natural (or organic) and the technical (or inorganic). These three are mixed up to such an extent that separating them becomes almost impossible.

procurement and stock holdings by the Food Corporation of India and monopolistic control over import and export of food grains. Based on the self-sufficiency in food grains production, a robust distribution system to feed the hungry and destitute was begun. In post-Independence India, it has been the hallmark of distributive justice under the aegis of the welfare state of the country. It is for such reasons and also positively swayed by the attractiveness of political populism that Tamil Nadu has for long implemented the universal public distribution system (PDS). The Indira canteen (food shop) in Karnataka and Amma canteen (food shop) in Tamil Nadu have been providing the food to the needy at subsidised prices.

Be that as it may. As late as in the year of 2000 that another economic scheme under the name of the Antyoda Anna Yojna was launched. That was a scheme of providing food to the last person in hunger. The announcement was to the effect of reaching at least one crore of the poorest families. It was a supplementary scheme. Under this economic scheme of food delivery, 35 kilograms of food has been provided while under yet another scheme of food distribution called the Annapoorna scheme, additional 10 kilograms of food has been provided to certain categories of population since the year of 2000.

It is in view of such a scenario and consequent upon a decade long litigations in the judicial courts of the country on the issue of food entitlement and its proper distribution, the right to food was considered urgent. Such a claim and entitlement was made a justifiable right through the National Food Security Act in 2013. The litigation was filed and pursued by a section of the nongovernmental organizations, and the legislators took note of the ongoing judicial proceedings in the Supreme Court of the country. In the pioneering state of Chhattisgarh, the food security act was already passed by the state assembly in 2012 only. This legislation of the year of 2013 however has led to the government beginning a food security economic scheme of providing a minimum amount of food items across the length and breadth of the country.

Under the national food security scheme, at least 5 kilograms of food-grains (rice, wheat and coarse grains) per person per month has been the uniform entitlement for two-third of the aggregate population of the country. This has been in addition to Antyodya Anna Yojna (AAY) beneficiaries and Annapoorna Scheme beneficiaries getting the sum total of 35 kilograms of food grains. As the economic scheme implemented through the bureaucracy has progressed, it was claimed that almost up to 75 percent of the rural population and up to 50 percent of the urban population have been entitled to receive subsidized food grains under targeted public distribution system (TPDS) and antyodya anna yojna (AAY) (food scheme for the last person in the line). The total population covered stood at roughly 820 million people – a huge chunk of the population of the country. With regard to governance, the scheme has been implemented through the mid-day meal scheme (providing cooked food plate to school enrolled children by the government) and the universal programme of the integrated child development services. The public distribution system of food has almost reached to nearly two-third of the population.

It is matter of investigation as to how the actors, entities and phenomena interact with each other (Murdoch, 1994). The political economy of social provisioning of agricultural-food is distinct from the political economy of agriculture. No other areas of hybrid actions of human beings are a better exemplar as the governance of agricultural-food social provisioning system in the region.

The pregnant women, lactating mothers and certain categories of children have also been entitled for daily free food cereals. For the pregnant and lactating women, a special provision has been made to entitle and enable them to receive free-of-cost nutritious meals. These are provided through the widespread network of Angadwadi (courtyard shelter) centres. The pregnant and lactating women were moreover entitled to receive cash maternity benefit of not less than rupees 6000 to partly compensate for the wage loss during the period of pregnancy and also to supplement nutrition. As for the children less than 14 years of age, they are entitled to receive free meals in the schools under the mid-day meal scheme. The government of India had launched the mid-day meal scheme in 1995. It was however first launched in Tamil Nadu in the early 1960s. The scheme provided the cooked lunch to the children, and it serves at present nearly 120 million children in over 1.27 million schools and education guarantee scheme centres in the country. Under the orders of the Supreme Court of India, the scheme has been implemented in all the states in the country. The scheme is covered by the national food security act of 2013.

With regard to the supervision and oversight of food distributing, the Angadwari (courtyard shelter) centres is a rural child care centre. It performs a very crucial role. It was started as part of the integrated child development service program by the government in 1975. The purpose was to combat hunger and malnutrition of children. In 2021, there were 13 lakhs and 87 thousand centres in the country. There were in total 13 lakhs 2 thousand and 617 workers associated with it in the country. These centres are also involved in discharging functions related with supplementary nutrition, nonformal preschool education, nutrition and health education, immunization, health check up and also referral service.

Within the political economy framework of governance, another endeavour to ensure the obtaining of the growth with justice has been through the provision of assured income and employment to the deserving and needy section of population. The political thinking about providing an assured employment to rural masses began in 1960s in the country with the launching of the rural manpower programme. The attempts passed through various experiments, for example, the Jawahar rojgar yojna (JRY) in 1989, the employment assurance scheme (EAS) in 1993, and the food for work programme (FWP) in 2001. The examples of other experimental schemes have been the rural manpower programme, the crash scheme for rural employment, the pilot intensive rural employment programme, the drought prone area programme, the marginal farmers and agricultural labourers scheme, the food for work programme, the national rural employment programme, and the rural landless employment guarantee programme.

In 1989, the government integrated national rural employment programme (NREP) and rural landless employment guarantee programme (RLEGP) into a new scheme called the Jawahar rozgar yojana (JRY) so as to converge employment generation, infrastructure development and food security in rural areas. In 1993, the employment assurance scheme was initiated. Later, the employment assurance scheme (EAS) was merged with sampoon gram rojgar yojna (SGRY) in 2001. In 1999 the Jawahar rojgar yojna (JRY) was revamped and the renamed to Jawahar grameen rozgar yojana (JGRY) with a similar objective. In 2001 the government introduced food for work programme similar to the one that was initiated in 1977. With all these ad-hoc and piecemeal populist socio-economic schemes being experimented since mid-1960s in the country, the time came for legislation to ensure right to

employment. Once the National Rural Employment Act (NREGA) was legislated, the two were merged in 2006.

The legal right to employment was created through the national rural employment Act in the parliament in 2005. Under the legislative act, the economic scheme was named Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment (MG-NREG) (prefixed with MG in 2009), and it assured employment for 100 days in a year to the willing adult member of a family in rural areas of the country. In accordance to Article 21 of fundamental rights and article 41 of the directive principles of state policy, the right to livelihood and work was guaranteed by the scheme.

The Mahatma Gandhi national rural employment is a centrally funded scheme, which is administered at the state level. While the state governments have considerable notional autonomy in terms of developing infrastructure, they do invariably depend on the central government for funds to keep their programs afloat. Beginning with 200 rural districts in yesteryears, the scheme is operative today in 691 districts of the country, whereby job is provided to the seekers within 15 days and within 5 kilometres of the village of the job. The objective was to protect rural poor from vulnerabilities by providing them demand based employment. On the statutory minimum wages, paid through a bank or a Post office within a fortnight, a person is assured of unskilled manual work on a public work related sites through the Gram Panchayat (which issues a job card to adult member of the deserving family) (Shah, 2012).

Within the mixed economy framework of capitalist development, the children were declared the future of the nation. The fate and destiny of the country was clubbed with the welfare of children. The postcolonial welfare state has continuously chalked out a social policy, at the centre of which has been the concern to enhance the welfare and protection of children in the Indian society. The noticeable activism began in mid-1970s. Under the national policy for children, a universal centrally sponsored scheme was launched, and it was named the integrated child development services (ICDS). It was in the beginning launched as an economic project in 33 blocks in 1975. It was gradually expended to 5652 projects altogether, but it was discontinued in 1978 due to circumstances beyond control. It was re-launched in 2002 during the announcement of the tenth five-year economic plan in the country. Since 2008, the new child growth standards propounded by the World Health Organization have been adopted. A common mother and child protection card (MCPC) is used for both integrated child development services (ICDS) and national rural health mission (NRHM) programme.

The integrated child development services were designed as a delivery of a package of services to children, pregnant and lactating women and adolescent girls, and the express objective was to break the inter-generational cycle of malnutrition, morbidity and mortality among the beneficiaries – children, girls and women. In the year off 2012, the financial allocations to integrated child development services were increased, and befitting restructuring of this scheme was organised to extend its reach and strength. The international charitable organisations were also involved in the supply chain. The United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) has ever provided the essential supplies.

Under the umbrella of integrated child development services, the children under 6 years of age are provided nutritional meals of 500 kilo calories per day from the age of 6 months, nonformal preschool education, primary health care, immunization, health check-up and referral services through the network of Anganwadi workers in both rural and urban areas. The frontline Anganwadi workers (AWWs), auxiliary nurse midwife (ANNs) and accredited social health activists (ASHA) are involved in the cooperative venture since 2006. The services are provided equally to both male and female child. Most importantly, the expecting and lactating mothers are also covered.

At present, the integrated child development services are running across 36 states and union territories. With regard to distribution of services under MG-NREG as well as ICDS, the gram Panchayat in rural areas has significant roles to play. The Panchayat and urban bodies play a crucial role in welfare services distribution. The Panchayat⁵ are presently centrally funded, which is to say the central government is responsible for providing resources to meet development requirements in rural areas.

IV. ACCOUNT OF CAPITALIST GROWTH AND ECONOMIC JUSTICE

It was the erstwhile British colonialism in India that has been instrumental in founding the capitalist framework of economy in the erstwhile feudal and semi-feudal economy of the country. Such a foundation was laid in a country which was then principally an agrarian and rural landscape in south Asia. It was the British colonial rule⁶ of the past that

⁵ Way back in 1992 that it was through the 73rd Amendment Act, the Panchayati Raj institution came into existence through a constitutional amendment and established elected local governments at the village level with express intention to develop local participation in governance. More recently since 2007, the Ministry of Panchayati Raj has operated a so-called Backward Regions Grant Fund (BRGF), under which the government provides financial resources for development schemes in “backward” districts whose needs are not being met through existing inflows. The BRGF program is implemented through the Panchayati Raj Institutions and the municipalities.

In the northeastern region of the country, there are the Autonomous District Councils (ADCs) created under the sixth schedule of the Indian constitution for the administration of scheduled areas in the states of Assam, Mizoram, Tripura and Meghalaya, and for the promotion the welfare of the scheduled tribes. The ADCs are funded by the central government, with funds drawn from the consolidated national budget. In June 2011, the ADCs in Meghalaya opposed the suggestion by a central government inter-ministerial team that grassroots elections be tied to ADC fund disbursement.

⁶ The British colonial system of rule began since 1765 in India and 1815 in Sri Lanka. Nepal came under British influence in 1815, while Maldives was a British protectorate since 1887 and Bhutan was a British protectorate since 1910.

On the basis of scholastic and historical arguments put forth by the Evangelists (English and European Christian missionaries) and the advocates of utilitarianism, Indian subcontinent has been subjected to strong influence of British ideas, colonial policy paradigm and establishment of corresponding institutions of utilitarian values (Veron, 2008, p. 21). Speaking about the nineteenth century British colonialism in Indian sub-continent, the official catch words were: improvements, knowledge and welfare through appropriate forms of government, taxation and administration of justice.

These were the principal categories, through which Jeremy Bentham (1789) and James S Mill (1817) as the champions and advocates of the classical English utilitarianism analysed and advised the rulers in India. The colonial administrators and bureaucrats found, supposedly to their dismay, the absence of the notions and concepts of private property, money and capital and also the absence of a number of so-called ‘civilised’ institutions in the south Asian countryside (Mill, 1817).

provided the foundation for economic growth through the policies of encouragement to private economic sector expansion in the framework of traditional social structure of India. It laid down the skeleton of landlordism in agriculture through encouragement to the concentration of land in a few hands and industrialization through private sector of economic activities in producing the raw materials. The production of tea and coffee, plantation industries and cotton industries had been encouraged by laying down the extensive network of railways.

Beginning with rudimentary skeleton of capitalist structure of national economy during the British colonial time, the postcolonial economic story has however been one of mixed economic framework of growth and development in the country. The public sector units of production of quite a number of goods and services were established side by side with the existing private sector enterprises. Most of the public outlays and government investments were made in establishing and developing mega projects of economic infrastructure. In retrospect, it is arguable that most national regimes around the world became more self-contained in the 1950s and 1960s, and India was no exception (Robb, 1988; Ludden, 2005). Being the largest country in south Asia (both in population and geographical area), India has been a fast growing and budding capitalist economy. The framework of capitalist enterprises, the system of private sector units of production and the market exchanges have again been strengthened since the onset of policies of liberalisation and globalisation of the national economy in 1991.

In the framework of mixed economy, it is worth a memory that the country did not however witness a pure capitalist economy as driven by the forces of the free market and the market alone. While the private capital, enterprises and industries have been encouraged through fiscal and monetary policies of the government, the public capital, enterprises and industries have also been established with the government allocations (financed by taxes, revenues and public borrowings). The private capital-based and private investment-led enterprises have coexisted with the public sector of manufacturing units and public utility services.

The Indian modern state from its very inception has been directly strengthening the base and size of the public industrial and service sector enterprises, while also facilitating aggregate private capitalist accumulation with the aid of gigantic structures of bureaucracy and national economic planning under the aegis of the Planning Commission of India. In other words, the Indian capitalist economy has long been characterised with the coexistence of both private and public sectors of consumption, production and investment in the mixed framework.

The British colonial-imperialist public policy regime was thus subsequently devoted to the project of creation of modern knowledge about agriculture and land, and accordingly, the indigenous farmers and planters were compulsively exposed and made to hobnob with the imported scientists and experts. There has been a priority accorded to multiple set of actions towards accelerating the economic growth.

According to David Ludden (2005), a national development regime had already emerged inside British colonial Indian subcontinent in early twentieth century, specifically by 1920s in the backdrop of beginning of the modern age of vast labour migration to major sites of capital investment by 1880s (Ludden, 2005, pp.4043-46).

In the political economy perspective, it has not merely been the mega-institution of the state and the government as one of its predominant organ alone that has ever governed but also the economic classes of civil society has been active participant in governance in India. In addition to free markets being allowed to function, there has been direct economic planning by the government for the public sector and indicative planning for the private sector. Such coexistence of private and public economic actors and enterprises was made possible by a specific administration and oversight pattern. This stewardship pattern was dominated by the spirit of capturing the commanding heights of the economy. And, the spirit gained momentum with the coining of the slogan of establishing a socialistic pattern of Indian society in early 1950s and throughout 1960s and 1970s.

A politically independent India was not left to the working of the autonomous forces of economy and the free-market alone but rather controlled and regulated through perspective and five-year economic planning exercises of the state. While the framework of five-year economic planning was laid down to directly plan the growth of public enterprises with public money, the same framework was used to signal the indicative plans for the growth of private enterprises in the country.

A robust public sector industrialization programme began immediately after the political independence from the British colonial empire. The orchestration of the modern large-scale industrialization and import-substitution events, along with encouragement to private sector enterprises in goods and services, through the decades since fifties and sixties of the last century have created the outcomes of fast and high pace of economic growth and social development. There has of late been the phenomenon of expansion of land under crop and under irrigation over the years.

In the country, the Green Revolution⁷ technology has been experimented on a wide scale. In the dual economy models of Arthur Lewis and others of 1950s, agriculture was supposed to perform the role of contributing ‘men and nourishment to the burgeoning industrial society’. It is through performing the economic function of encouraging a mix of private and public capital accumulation and the mobilisation of aggregate savings that it has been successful in reproducing the mixed and hybrid economic system.

The political economy of development has been focused on the path of rapid increase in per capita income and national income through heavy industrialization and a mixed framework of private-public economy of capitalist development since 1950s. This has been the hallmark of political economy practices in India. In the mixed economic framework of the national economy, both private and public sectors have contributed to expanding the mass of agricultural, manufacturing and services production, growth in national income and national

⁷ Green Revolution technologies have been adopted in India in the 1960s. Such a technological change and transformation was but not very useful. The World Bank economist, Wolf Ladejinsky, who carried forward the General MacArthur’s programme of land reforms forward in South-east Asian countries as well as south Asian countries, was alarmed by what he called giving ‘*biology priority over sociology*’ (a priority of technology farming without institutional reforms and preparation) (quoted in L J Walinsky, 1977). Moreover, the application of new technologies tragically remained confined to a few crops and a few geographical areas within the region.

prosperity. The country has often attained the fast rate of economic growth and development over the years down the line of seven decades.

In general, while there have been a myriad of the possible forms and types of private actions in all the sectors and geographical pockets of the economy, what has gone in the name of public actions in the name of public interests has however been narrow, restricted and limited in size and scope in the country. The public actions have been by far quite few only, and that too mostly bound up with the ever-evolving nature of welfare state and the government. In the mixed economic framework dominated by the private capital and free market, the trickle-down mechanism and its effect where the fruits of fast economic growth in the national income and per capita income of the country percolate down to the last mile of the geographical terrain and to the last people in the row has not worked. The engine of growth has worked but the distribution has faltered.

The aggregate growth though agricultural change, industrialization and service sector growth has not fully trickled-down. Whatever has been the autonomous, market-driven forces and mechanism of the trickle-down effects of economic development and welfare programmes in operation, these have not been in the direction of reducing poverty, food insecurity and inequality in the country. The frustrating fact of failure of the trickle-down phenomenon has in turn led to suggestions of adoption of a strategy of ‘redistribution through growth’ throughout 1960s and 1970s. A saddened Dudley Seers (1969) coined the oxymoron ‘growth without development’ – a characterization so apt for India.

In view of such facts, the Indian government has been directly concerned, with equity and justice in addition to the indirect preoccupation with the belief of growth distributing itself rather evenly among the populace. It is within this mixed economic framework of coexistence of the private and public sector of agricultural, industrial and service sector enterprises and production units on the path of capitalist growth and development that the economic planners have set the national objective of ‘growth with justice’ in India.

The Indian economic planning and populist political governance have ever championed the cause of economic justice through slogan of ‘growth with justice’, in addition to the belief in the automatic mechanism of ‘trickle-down effect’ of growth. The bureaucratic organizations of central and state ministries and district administrations have all been geared towards the attainment of national objectives of social and economic justice under the dictates of populism of ruling politicians – a pattern of economic governance.

There have been direct, visible and concerted attempts through affirmative action to institute a sort of transitional justice to undo the harms and injuries caused by concentration of land and resources in the hands of large estate, landlord farms, business firms and princely states. The industrial, agricultural and service sector policies have been designed with the strategy to obtain growth with justice and these policies have ever attempted variously to reduce poverty and food insecurity. The centrally sponsored programmes of distributing the direct benefits of food and income, employment and resources, and education, health and protection of children have contributed in reducing economic exploitation of the dispossessed, disadvantaged and destitute.

Such state activism in the country has certainly been in contrast to the theoretical prescriptions of the doctrinaire mainstream economics. To recall, much of mainstream thinking in economics have been concerned with abstract theorization in the name of scientific enterprise⁸, and such abstract conceptual theorization exercises have been a laggard in taking up the concept of theory-centric justice. It is tragic that the idea and value of economic justice has never been a principal category of the mainstream neoclassical economic thought inspired curricula in the academia and practices of the bureaucracy (which has been trained in such academia).

It is worth a memory that while Adam Smith and J S Mill had opined their views on the theme of justice, such opinions were advanced in the capacity of being moral philosophers⁹ and not as political economists. Throughout the classical to neoclassical to Keynesian phases of growth of mainstream economics, it has conveniently been presumed to be a dictum: where there is (economic) efficiency¹⁰, there is justice. What has been theorized debated and taught in the academies is: Pareto optimality¹¹ in consumption and production sphere is consistent with freedom, equality in exchange and justice. The dictum has been: strive for optimality to obtain, justice is ensured as equal exchanges against the equal. An exclusive and separate economic theorization of justice was never deemed fit. Whatever emancipator force was there with the construction of social welfare theory, it championed the

⁸ T W Hutchison (1977) had this to remark:

Methodological questions in economics have often been discussed in terms that are too abstract and too exclusively normative Economic models of smoothly and ideally self-equilibrating processes are remote from the processes of the real economic world Moreover, generalizations, normative or positive, are inevitably highly abstract, or stylized, when they relate to 'science' and 'scientific method' in general, or to 'the social sciences' generally, or even to economics as a whole, which comprises theories and arguments of very varying epistemological types and calibres (Hutchison, 1977, pp. 34-5).

⁹ Adam Smith (1759) wrote that “justice is, upon most occasions but a negative virtue, and only hinders us from hurting our neighbour”. In this sense, justice requires the claims of forbearance from invasive action by others - a sense of negative justice. Justice is an event and a process orchestrated and driven by human values of preservation of each individual in his/her own perfect rights without injury to his/her person, reputation and estate. It is the medieval legal conception of justice.

¹⁰ The autonomy of individual person with antecedent rights to property and exchange (libertarian ideal citizen) and with baggage of no interference, no harms and no injuries in interactions with other persons and institutions (liberal ideal society) is a postulate with which Economics begins to analyse the efficiency in the allocation of resources and distribution of goods (welfare). With such assumptions and postulates, the claim is that attainment of efficiency is synonymous with the attainment of justice.

¹¹ Vilfredo Pareto (1971) remarked that it is a gross mistake to accuse a person who studies ‘economic actions – or homo oeconomicus – of neglecting, or even of scorning moral, religious, etc., actions – that is the homo ethicus, the homo religious, etc.’ (Pareto, 1971, p.13). Political economy cannot be accused of not taking morality into account. It’s but a fact that the study of political economy is separate from that of morality, but it is not to assert that the former matters more than the latter.

consequentialist utilitarianism that could neither accommodate the moral force of “rights” nor offer a plausible conception of “justice”¹².

Setting aside the theoretical prescriptions of the doctrinaire mainstream economics, the government has been keenly interested in following the growth with justice strategy of political economic management of the macroeconomy. The hybrid and mixed economic and social reforms under the political economy framework has been with explicit intent to bring equality in income, asset and wealth in India. There have been vigorous attempts at chalking out the economic plans and framing the economic policies of investment, value-addition and capital accumulation. These endeavours have led in turn to nearly sustained increase in national production of material goods and services under the aegis of both private as well as public enterprises. There has also been the framing of social policies of seed, fertilizer and food distribution, income assistance, guarantee of jobs, subsidized provisions of education and health to the deserving ones. While growth with justice has been the stated national objective since 1950s, public bureaucratized and planned actions has been comparatively tilted and disproportionately oriented towards increasing the productivity and production at a fast pace rather than instituting transitional and distributive justice¹³ with sincere and concerted efforts as a priority.

Governing through political economy has often faltered over decades. It is clear that something has been wrong somewhere with our economy. Something has been wrong with the governance through the institution, processes and working of the political economy. In India, global capitalism has been slow in establishing its hegemony, but the monopoly capitalism, though slow, has however been notorious in enhancing injustices. The individual instances of economic justice and elimination of injustices over seven decades in the country has been sporadic, sparse and thin in the impact and coverage of Indian populace and geography. The wealth of the few billionaires has been disconnected from the misery and wretchedness of the many. When a handful of people thrive, whole industries implore and

¹² To quote another observation:

Utilitarianism is criticized by egalitarians for ignoring the boundaries between individuals, for it cares only about total utility and not at all about how that utility is distributed among individuals (Roemer, 1996, pp. 160-2).

¹³ Arthur Lewis ushered in a tradition in development economics, and published paper in the Manchester School in 1954 and further developed his views on unlimited supply of labour being a source of economic development in developing labour surplus economies in the same journal in 1958. It was a supply-side approach in which Lewis drew an optimistic picture of a steady process of expansion of the organized economic sector, constrained only by the eventual rise in wages. Much of that optimism was questioned frequently. In 1972, he reflected back on his own thesis on unlimited supply of labour and economic development. In 1979, he revisited his thesis on the dual economy model in the Manchester School journal again to remark:

A number of writers have expressed surprise and disillusionment that the rapid expansion of modern sectors that has concurred in LDCs over the past two decades has not ‘trickled-down’ to bring equal opportunity to the traditional sectors..... Actually, there is no reason to expect the traditional always to benefit from expansion of the modern. There are forces working for benefit and forces working for loss; the net result will vary from case to case.....Expansion of the modern sector may benefit the traditional in four ways, each of which has its loss counterpart: through provision of employment, through sharing physical facilities, through modernization of ideas and institutions, and through trade (Lewis, 1979, pp. 211-29).

millions of people suffer. Much has been achieved but more are as yet remaining to be obtained on the path towards the actions of justice and fairness.

In addition to poverty and pretty low income for a significant section of the population, a large number of populations have not been brought to the provisions of education, health and longevity of life till date¹⁴. While India was identified with 0.554 HDI in 2013, its multidimensional poverty index was 0.018 in 2009. The inequality¹⁵ has increased along with poverty. In 2010, the human development index value was 0.519 and the same was 0.554 in 2013. The inequality adjusted HDI in 2012 was 0.392.

Table 1: Dimensions of Poverty in India: 2005

Particulars with Years of Observation in Parentheses	Figures
Multi-dimensional Poverty Index	0.283
Population in Multi-dimensional Poverty (Percentage)	53.7
Population in Multidimensional Poverty (In Thousands)	612203
Intensity of Deprivation (Percentage)	52.7
Population Vulnerable To Poverty (In Percentage)	16.4
Population in Severe Poverty (In Percentage)	28.6

Source: UNDP-HDR, 2013, pp. 145-74; MHDC, 2010, pp. 152-62; HDC-2002, pp. 228-37

The multidimensional poverty index was 0.283 in the year of 2005, while the headcount poverty percentage stood at 41.6 in 2005 (UNDP-HDI, 2013, pp.17-8; ADB, 2007; UNDP, 2009; UNDP, 2013; Arjan de Haan, 2010; Human Development in South Asia, 2010-2011). There were almost 53 percent of the population who were under the multidimensional poverty, and their absolute number comprised 6122 lakhs. The population in severe poverty stood at 28.6 in 2005 (refer to table – 1).

¹⁴ To Quote:

Programmes for promoting education and skill development, expansion of micro-credit, a variety of employment generation programmes and safety net programmes based on transfer payments along with subsidies targeted to particular excluded groups remain common to all South Asian countries In all of South Asia’s anti-poverty strategies, the divide between a privileged class of property-owners and providers of wage employment and those who depend on them for employment has been accepted as an immutable feature of society The inherited structural arrangements left unaddressed in the policy agendas of South Asia (Sobhan, 2010, pp. 42-44).

¹⁵ To quote an observation:

Gini coefficients of the most recent available years ranged between 0.28 and 0.40 in South Asian countriesThe conclusion based on international benchmarking needs to be assessed with several caveats in mind, however. The first is the already mentioned distinction between inequality in consumption per capita and inequality in income per capita. Not many household surveys in South Asia collect accurate data on both, which would allow a direct comparison of measures of inequality based on the two variables. A second caveat is that household surveys may not capture well the income or the consumption of the richest members of society (Rama, et al., 2015, p. 71).

The World Bank is now convinced that poverty and inequality¹⁶ feed each other. The empirical data on the per capita national income and the income share ratio estimate as well as the estimation of Gini's coefficient in recent years have confirmed it. In many case, most of the anti-poverty policies have helped the rich and middle-income groups more than they have helped the poor, and these had been so even in cases of no graft, corruption, diversion or stupidity in their execution.

Table 2: Gross Domestic Product and Gini Coefficient in India: 1991-2007 (In Dollars and Percentage)

Particulars with Years of Observation in Parentheses	Figures
Total GDP (billion US Dollars) (2009)	1377
GDP Per Capita (PPP Constant 2005 International Dollars) (2009)	2993
GNI Per Capita (US Dollar) (2009)	1220
Income Share: Ratio of Highest 20 Percent to Lowest 20 Percent (2003-2007)	5.6
Gini Coefficient (2002-2005)	0.362

Source: UNDP-HDR, 2013, pp. 145-74; MHDC, 2010-2011, pp. 155-62; HDC, 2002, pp. 216-22; ADB, 2007; UNDP, 2009; Arjan de Haan, 2010

Poverty is often conceived as not merely a phenomenon of income poverty or consumption deprivation but also shortages of assets. More significantly, it is conceived as structural injustice and exclusion that is sustained in the ethos of inequalities of opportunities and unjust social order. Principal problem is but the inequality. The inequality has continuously been increasing, though it has been moderate in the first decade of the twenty-first century. In 2009, the per capita income was 1,220 dollars in the country. The income share as a ratio of the highest 20 percent to lowest 20 percent of the population was 5.6, and the Gini-coefficient stood at 0.362 (refer to table – 2). Of late, the inequality has widened, a number of billionaires have been located in the country, and one of the richest persons of the world has been an Indian.

With regard to the supply and accessibility to food, the public distribution system, originating as it was during the colonial past has been in a shocking shape. The per capita annual availability of rice in India has reached the lowest 64 kilograms in 2008. The requirement per year per person has however been 84 kilograms. While the availability being

¹⁶ The monetary measures have been underestimating these. An astute observer remarks:

Standard monetary indicators underestimate the true extent of inequality in South Asia. The numbers suggest that countries in South Asia are much less unequal than China, Mexico, or South Africa Inequalities in human development outcomes such as infant mortality, under-five child mortality, or educational attainment are wide and make the extent of inequality in most countries of South Asia look similar to that of other developing countries. Several countries in the region are among the most unequal for which comparable data are available Beyond subjective assessments, any thorough assessment of the dynamics of inequality in the region, and the policies to address it, needs to focus on opportunity, mobility, and support¹⁶ (Rama, et al., 2015, p. 93).

short of food requirements and access to rationed food being short of availability and requirement, the grave problem has been the lack of consensus on identifying the below-Poverty-Line people at the state level. In India, there have been leakages in the public distribution system, and the beneficiaries have been the non-target population.

Table 3: Population and Labor in India: 2005-2011

Particulars with Years of Observation in Parentheses	Figures
Population living on degraded land (in percentage) (2010)	10.0
Employment to population ratio (percentage) (ages 25 and older) (2011)	61.0
Youth unemployment (percentage) (ages 15-24) (2005-2011)	11.5

Source: UNDP-HDR, 2013, pp. 145-74; MHDC, 2010-2011, pp. 155-62; HDC, 2002, pp. 216-22

The country had begun to make assured employment as a matter of right as well. The social audit of the national rural employment guarantee scheme conducted from 2008 to 2009 onward by the Centre for Equity Studies, the National Institute of Rural Development and the Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan, among other organizations, has identified and brought to the notice of the government irregularities in the implementation of the program, and suggested measures for their correction. The right to food bill similarly drew responses (in January 2011) from civil society groups, which asked that the bill be amended to focus on reducing hunger and poverty, and to give a role to the Panchayati Raj institutions in achieving the Bill's ends. The power of noneconomic interest associations to make reasonable policy proposals is compromised not by their (enormous) number, but by their varying strength and independence.

What plagues the national rural employment guarantee scheme and programme in the field of providing assured guarantee of employment in rural areas of the country is low volume of jobs. Generating 30 billion person days of work, the employment guarantee scheme has provided at least 3 percent of total rural employment today. The problems have been as such that all those who have enrolled for work could not get it, wage payments have been delayed in many cases, and there has been a political-ideological climate against such a workfare programme at the central and state level of bureaucratic thinking. To quote:

MGNREGA marks a radical departure from the earlier wage employment programmes in terms of its legal and demand-driven framework. However, there is no denying the fact that there have been many problems in infusing the system with the new culture of demand-driven, rights-based, decentralised decision-making (Shah, 2012, p. 54)

Given such problems and weaknesses in the programme, the tragedy has been to the effect that the employment to population ratio has been 61.0, and the youth unemployment rate at 11.5 in the year of 2011 – even after six years of the programme in action (refer to table – 3).

Setting aside the injustice of poverty and unemployment, there has been the harms and injuries caused by food insecurity for a considerable number of populace. Such insecurity has been there despite attainment of self-sufficiency in food production in late

1960s. In addition to food shortages and food insecurity for large mass of populations, India had been notorious for inadequate feeding and caring practices for young children.

Indian farm-producers have little access to improved technologies mainly due to (i) lack of knowledge, (ii) weak input delivery system, (iii) lack of appropriate technology suiting the resource endowments of producers, (iv) lack of credit, and (v) high risk and absence of insurance management. It is for these reasons that a majority of the producers in these regions are resource-poor and poverty-ridden, and therefore, technologies, policies and institutional support need to be tuned to their socio-economic profile.

India shares almost close to twelve percent of the total arable land in the world, and the arable land constitutes nearly fifty seven percent of the geographical area of the country itself. It has approximately 169 million hectares of arable land, and the average size of holdings is approximately 1.4 hectares. It is still a rural regional space pervaded by the mass of small peasantry. Round the mid-nineties of last century, almost 62 percent of the holdings used to be of marginal size of less than one hectare and such holdings were operated over merely 17 percent of all holdings area. It was believed that major investments in agriculture had to be ruled out because it would have stimulated population growth.

Given such facts and figures pertaining to agricultural sector of the economy, there were almost 86.0 million children afflicted by malnutrition in south Asia alone in 1995. In total, there were in total 294 million undernourished persons in 1996-98, representing nearly 23 percent of all population of south Asia. At the turn of the century, the average life expectancy was at 63 years – lowest in the entire world. There were 95 infants out of 1000 who used to die before reaching the age of five, and nearly half of the children under the age of five were chronically malnourished. The region was host to the highest proportion of stunted, underweight and wasted children in the entire world (MHDC, 2002). The malnutrition was prominent amongst the vulnerable groups of infants, pre-school children; pregnant and lactating mothers.

In the year 2000, almost 79 million children used to suffer from malnutrition. The number of undernourished persons was 294 millions in 1996-98 which increased to 331 million in 2005-07. The percentage of undernourished persons in population stood at 22.0 during 2005-07. There was one-percentage decline in the undernourished persons in population which was 23.0 during 1996-98. The average percentage of underweight children (under the age of five) was 45.0 during 1995-2000 which has decreased only slightly in the first decade of the millennium.

A large chunk of poor populace and children suffering from the malnutrition have been concentrated in India. Almost 300 million were chronically malnourished in South Asia, and India had one of the highest child malnutrition rates in the world in the year of 2010. Roughly, almost 42 percent of Indian children under age five suffered from malnutrition. Child malnutrition, measured by comparing a child's weight with that of other children of similar age, reflects a shortfall in food energy, poor feeding practices by mothers, and lack of essential nutrients in the diet. Malnutrition in children often begins at birth, when poorly nourished mothers give birth to underweight babies. Malnourished children develop more slowly, enter school later, and perform less well (MHDC-HDSA, 2012) (Rama, et al., 2015, p. 3).

Table 4: Status of Underweight Children and Malnourishment in India: 1960-2007

Particulars with Years of Observation in Parentheses	Figures
Underweight Children (Percentage under Five) (1995-2000)	47.0
Child Malnourished (Weight for Age) (Percentage of Children Under Five) (2006-08)	43.5
Undernourished People (Number in Millions) (2005-07)	237.7
Undernourished People as Percentage of Population (2005-07)	21.0

Source: MHDC, 2010, pp. 152-62; HDC, 2002, pp. 228-37

Table 5: Status of Malnutrition and Undernourishment in India, 1975-1998

Number of Under-nourished Persons (in Millions)	Percentage Share of Under-nourished in Population	Number of Children under Malnutrition (in Millions)		
		1975	1985	1995
1996-98	1996-98	1975	1985	1995
294	23	90.6 (67.7)	100.1 (61.1)	86.0 (49.1)

Source: World Bank (world Development Report, 2008), 2007; FAO (The State of Food Insecurity in the World), 2000; Smith and Habbad (IFPRI Discussion Paper- 30), 2000

There has been almost 21 percent of the population suffering from the undernourishment, whose absolute number was 237 millions in 2007. Nearly 43 percent of children suffered from malnourishment, and percentage of children who were underweight stood at 47 (refer to table – 4). Undoubtedly, there has been perceptible improvement in comparison to the situations prevailing in the mid-1970s and mid-1990s (refer to table - 5). There are as yet further attempts required to improve the status of children in the country.

India continues to be home to one third of the world's underweight children and the situation has further worsened since 2007, with the prices of food grain, pulses and vegetables hitting the roof. In 2012, the life expectancy at birth was 65.8, while the infant mortality rate per one thousand of live births was 50.0 in 2009. By 2010, there were almost 42 percent of children who were underweight in the country. The maternal mortality rate per one lakh of live births was 230 in 2008. The prevalence of anaemia disease in pregnant women was almost 88.0 percent in 1999 (refer to table - 6).

Table 6: Particulars of Life Expectancy, Mortality, Underweight Children and DTP Immunization Coverage in India: 2000-2010

Particulars with Years of Observation in Parentheses	Figures
Life Expectancy at Birth (2012)	65.8
Infant Mortality Rate (Per 1000 Live Births) (2009)	50.0
Under Five Mortality Rate (Per 1000 Live Births) (2000)	96

Underweight Children (Moderate and Severe) (Percentage of Children under Age Five) (2006-2010)	42.5
Maternal Mortality Ratio (Per 100000 Live Births) (2008)	230
DTP Immunization Coverage (Percentage of One Year Old) (2010)	83
Prevalence of Anaemia in Pregnant Women (Percentage) (1985-1999)	88.0

Source: MHDC, 2010, pp. 152-62; HDC, 2002, pp. 228-37

Poverty has increased over the years. These poor are mostly deprived of the power needed to interact on equal terms with the other, generally larger and stronger market intermediaries because of the constraints of lack of information about markets, lack of business and negotiating experience and lack of a collective organisation¹⁷. In addition, illiteracy has not been wiped out; low mortality, high longevity and recent hygiene have not been achieved; employment guarantees in decent work avenues are yet short of requirement; inequalities in wealth and income have rather magnified and increased in India. Overall human development index has been low. In India towards the close of twentieth century, the percentage of population suffering from multidimensional poverty was as high as 53. The intensity of deprivation in percentage terms was above 50 in India. The percentage of population in severe poverty was in the range of 28 in India during 2005-09.

Table 7: Agriculture and Cereals in India: 2005-2011

Particulars With Years of Observation in Parentheses	Figures
Agriculture Value Added (Percent Of GDP) (2009)	17.8
Agricultural Productivity (Value Added Per Worker in 1995 Dollars) (1998-2000)	397
Annual Per Capita Supply Of Cereal (Kilograms) (1999)	155.6
Cereal Yield (In Kilograms Per Hectare (1980)	1350
Cereal Production (10000 Metric Tons) (2009)	24677
Cereal Exports (1000 Metric Tons) (2008)	6499
Food Export As Percentage Of Merchandise Export (2009)	8.0
Cereal Imports (1000 Metric Tons) (2008)	22
Food Import As Percentage Of Merchandise Import (2009)	4.0
Total Availability Of Cereals (1000 Metric Tons) (1999)	173557

Source: UNDP-HDR, 2013, pp. 145-74; MHDC, 2010-2011, pp. 155-62; HDC, 2002, pp. 216-22

¹⁷ To quote a perceptive remark:

South Asian households are periodically exposed both to individual shocks and to economy-wide shocks, such as natural disasters, food price spikes, and armed conflict. The region's frequent exposure to shocks relates to geographic, historical, and socioeconomic factors. South Asia has a high population density; 23.8 percent of world's population lives on 3.6 percent of the world's land—and approximately 68 percent of the region's population lives in poverty. South Asia's economy is strongly oriented toward agriculture, which makes countries more vulnerable to natural disasters and weather-related shocks. Indeed, roughly 70 percent of the South Asian population lives in rural areas and about half rely on agriculture for its livelihood. In addition, the region experiences frequent conflicts, including guerrilla warfare, riots, and antigovernment demonstrations (Rama, et al., 2015, p. 153).

The macromanagement through political economy approach towards distribution of food under the aegis of the welfare state in India has been possible technically because the country has been self-sufficient in agricultural production. The annual per capita supply of the cereals was nearly 155 kilograms in 1999. The total availability of cereals in 1999 was almost 173557 thousand metric tonnes in the country. The country was able to produce almost 24677 thousand metric tons of the cereals to feed the population, and also export a good amount of that production. In 2009, the value added in agriculture was about 18 percent of the gross domestic product in the country (refer to table – 7).

The central government controls the quantity and quality of all public services, including that of the provisioning and distribution of subsidised food, by running more than two dozen central programs, with funds dependent on the acquisition of matching funds by the states and on performance. So far as governance with accountability and transparency is concerned, the monitoring of effective implementation has been a weak point, however. There have been reports of malfunctioning of the public distribution system. There have been a large number of bogus ration shops, and a considerable amount of grains were diverted.

The problems have been alarming. Due to wrong targeting, it has led to large inclusion of the undeserved beneficiaries and the deserved ones have been excluded among the Indian population. The bureaucratic identification methods have suffered from both technical faults as well as social corruption. There had been instances of huge buffer stocks in the granaries of the Food Corporation of India, and the country witnessed hunger and a considerably number of children remained malnourished. The food deprivation and insecurity persisted on a mass scale.

V. CONCLUDING REMARKS

The public economic policies, programmes and schemes of equity and justice have been trapped in the selfish, greedy and non-altruist sway of the capitalist markets and enterprises in the country. The motivating force of self-interest for the resource-less population to survive by earning a wage, a salary or a mixed income or the self-interest of the owners of the resources to accumulate by pocketing the rent, interest and profit has been the driving force. Barring a few instances of altruism, other-regarding conduct and a concern for justice for others on the part of a limited number of economic agents, civil society organizations, and enlightened bureaucrats; most of the individual citizens have not been specific votaries of economic justice.

In liberalized and globalised setting of Indian mixed capitalist economy, the economic agents have been more content with the 'equivalent transacting for the equivalent' norm of the market than being the claimant for the principle that asymmetries and inequalities in the initial conditions be eliminated. The individual economic preferences and decisions and public economic and financial behaviour has many a time come under the strains of individual selfish reasoning and cut-throat deliberations, and also got negatively affected by society-wide ethos of obscurantist programming, ad-hoc-ism in public policies, and sweeping implementation failures, however. The spirit of toleration of the fact of growing number of the millionaires and billionaires in the country on the one hand and the general callousness and indifference to the fact of wretchedness, poverty, miseries and deprivations among the million population on the other are grim reminders that the conduct

of a considerable number of people have not been transformed towards one of championing the cause of equity and justice on a mass scale.

In India, the economic governance through economic policies, programmes and schemes of government has led to the scenario of poverty decreasing but economic inequality increasing. On the attainment of economic justice as measured by the index of economic freedom and opportunities, the verdict has been mixed. The observable outcomes with regard to regulating the concentration of economic power in few hands, the rise of monopolies and oligopolies and the economic power of dominant classes in agriculture and service sectors are also mixed, and a bit disappointing. A major chunk of growth in goods and services has been pocketed by a minority of population. The concentration of assets and wealth in few hands has increased many folds. Very little has been left over for the class of poor. There has been a travesty of economic justice in the country.

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