

Welfare/Redistributive Politics: Insights into Comparative Politics and Economic Development in India

SHEHANAS PAZHOOR

FLAME University

Why does a state like Kerala's development measures match with that of the OECD countries, but states like UP and Bihar from the same country perform poorly in various developmental indices? It clearly shows that the diversity and variations that India possesses in the cultural realm is analogous with the differences in the welfare and developmental performances of each Indian state. It is natural to reach a conclusion for the above if one decides to go by the stipulation that in a federal system, state governments have the autonomy to decide on the policy practices and welfare and development initiatives. But the argument remains scanty. While having a unitary system in place, why different states perform differently in development indices is a question that evokes multiple parameters to be analysed. Though it might appear as a developmental question, political ideology is an important indicator that determines the nature of redistributive politics in India. Moreover history, social structures including the dynamics of caste politics and power, the degree of regionalism expressed in terms of sub nationalism, nature of leadership in the state, political and economic interference of the propertied class and their bargaining power etc. decides the level of welfare politics and differential achievements across the country. The paper thus analyses these indicators in detail with examples of Indian states through the theoretical framework of comparative politics. The paper also examines the policy impacts and implications of the same with a reference to the current political context and future prospects as well.

Keywords welfare, subnationalism, India, development, states, redistribution

Welfare is an essential function of any state. The concept of welfare state became popular in the post-World War II era in which the adoption of Keynesian economic principles steered economic growth in many of the capitalist democracies. (Quadagno, 1987). Welfare state is a form of government in which the state actively promotes and protects the economic growth and social welfare of the citizens through redistribution mechanisms and social welfare schemes. T H Marshall (1950) identifies the modern welfare state as a combination of democracy, welfare, and capitalism. The idea of a welfare state has started being pursued as an important way in sustaining political legitimacy as well as maintaining democratic order in a society (Kumar, 2017). India being a democratic state has always been projected as one committed to welfare and redistributive policies. There is a considerable shift in the growth policy of the Indian state from the late 80's onwards. Over the years the Indian state has become pro-capitalist pursuing a neo-liberal ideology. The alliance of the Indian state with the global capital has considerable effect on the redistributive policies of the state (Kohli, 2012). The increased growth in terms of GDP has not been reflected in the real development and welfare outcomes. India remains a state where poor and near poor still constitute the majority of the population (Kohli, 2012). Even though poverty conditions have improved, inequality continues to be widening.

The role of states acting as 'regional leviathans' having autonomy and independence from the central politics is important in the analysis of welfare and redistributive politics in India. Thus the autonomy of the Indian state in a federal system has resulted in substantial variations in the way each state pursue pro-poor welfare policies. We have states like Kerala, Tamil Nadu etc. performing better at social indicators and human capital on one end and states like Bihar, UP etc. that are still backward in achieving developmental goals. The differential welfare strategies of the Indian subcontinent presents a spectrum of welfare and redistributive outcomes across the Indian states.

When it comes to the welfare policies most of the Indian states show characteristics of both clientelistic and programmatic regimes (Kumar, 2017). Regime here is being understood and used in the context of a system that sets norms and procedures of governance and functioning in a society. Hence the paper has chosen the definition by Stephen Krasner (1983), which defines regimes as "institutions possessing norms, decision rules, and procedures which facilitate a convergence of expectations. Clientelistic states appear to be pro-poor in welfare policies, but do not aim at the long term developmental goals. They favour welfare programmes of short term payoffs. Patrimonial relationships involving client and patron operate in such a system. Clientelistic regimes work in political environments where a high level of political competition exists. On the other hand, in the case of programmatic regimes there is a consensus over the welfare policies to be adopted and considerable stability exists in the political programmes. It has been identified by many scholars that clientelistic and programmatic regimes are ideal types in a system of multi class rainbow political parties. Though categorization based on clientelism and programmatic regimes exists, one cannot attribute homogeneity to the states included in these two categories. As Indian states vary in terms of the social fabric, these two categories contain states with extreme characteristics also. Thus the elements like caste and class exercise significant influence in the regime differences. Welfare regimes are also shaped by the varied capacity of the different states and the competitive vote seeking behaviour of politicians in the democracies.

The variations of Indian states in terms of developmental goals have been subjected to research by various scholars. Scholars like Atul Kohli (1983) are of the opinion that differences in regime type make variations in the espousal of pro-poor policies. But there are people like V S Vyas and P Bhargava (1995), who hold a different view in parallel, that success in pro-poor policies are not related to the political party ideologies of the state regime. The reasons which are attributed to the variations in the regime and outcomes are many. This paper thus tries to examine various arguments around welfare and redistributive politics in India, with special focus on the reasons behind the regional regime variation in pursuing the welfare policies. The paper identifies themes like the Extent of political Participation of the lower caste/class, Sub nationalism, ideological factors, structure of politics and political exigencies as the broad indicators of regional variation in welfare and redistributive achievements. The paper tries to study each of them in detail through the studies of scholars like John Hariss, Atul Kohli, Prerana Singh, Louise Tillin, Rajeshwari Deshpande and K.K. Kailash (eds), further substantiating each of the arguments with case studies from various states. Besides this, the paper also throws light on the policy implications and its future prospects of the regime differences and welfare politics in India given the larger political context.

Regime Difference and Welfare Functions: An Analysis

*Extent of lower caste/class participation:
An Indicator of pro-poor welfare policies*

The active participation of lower caste groups in the political and developmental arena is an important indicator that determines economic development in terms of welfare outcomes. Nature and extent to which political mobilisation of civil society expressed in terms of caste and ethnic identities reflect the regime variations (Harris, 1999). Scholars like Roderick Church (1973) in order to extend their argument on the mobilization of the lower class, define lower caste by introducing a fourfold distinction between caste categories. They identify the lower caste as groups between the middle caste (which consist of Sudras belonging to the occupational category of farmers, kisans and middle peasants) and the SC. Lower caste has been thus recognized as a group who finds it difficult to assert political power and possess a common sense of identity of their own. The extent to which states are

governed by political parties that have mobilised the lower caste is reflected through the regime differences and development outcome.

Harris attempts to classify the Indian state into two categories on the basis of the nature of dominance exercised by various caste categories in the political sphere and the extent to which upper dominance has been challenged. Group I consists of states of Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Orissa characterised by a persistent upper caste dominance in which congress has remained in power in a two –party system. Madhya Pradesh continues to be an upper caste dominant state even though Digvijay Singh in the past managed to incorporate lower castes/classes in the politics. Orissa presents a picture where lower caste mobilisation has failed when Biju Patnaik had come up with the middle caste mobilisation with Janatha Dal. Intra elite competition in the party continued to persist. Group II consisted of states of Bihar and UP that had effectively challenged the upper caste/class dominance by the mobilization of the middle castes/classes categories. In these states congress dominance has vanished substantially. Both these states have the largest section of upper caste groups in the Hindi heartland. OBCs constituting the middle class have become politically powerful in these states and congress party had lost its political base since 1990's to parties like Lok Dal and Bahujan Samaj Party. Both Group I and Group II consist of low income states. States like Andhra Pradesh, Gujarat, Maharashtra, Karnataka and Punjab constitute the IIIrd Group. Middle class/caste dominates these regimes. The Congress system has been challenged in these states which have stable and durable political systems. These states in the groups are not homogenous though. The group has A.P and Karnataka that are middle income states at one end and Gujarat, Maharashtra and Punjab are high income states. The success of A.P lies mainly in the charismatic personality of a ruler like N T Rama Rao and the populist policies that have been carried out by his regime.

The state was successful in breaking down the client patron relation by effectively mobilizing lower castes /classes. One of the unique features was the accommodation of the youths of the lower caste groups. In the case of Gujarat there is little evidence to show that there was an ascendancy in the lower caste/class accession to power. Even the recent jump of BJP relies on the upper classes in the upper caste groups. But the shift in power occurred when KHAM system (refers to 'kshatriya' including lower caste kolis, harijans and Muslims) and policies worked, by projecting OBC leaders. In both AP and Gujarat the lower caste had a voice. In Karnataka it is still not very evident whether the middle class dominance has been dazed or not. The state has a conservative leader. Karnataka politics is unstable and no single group exists to dominate Karnataka politics. Moreover the resources have been spread too squeakily. Though a powerful system of democratic decentralisation has been created in Karnataka, little has been done to address the lower caste concerns. In Maharashtra there was always a system of elite pluralist hegemony. Unlike any parts of the country, Dalits have continuously organised in the state. There was a fair inclusion of elites from the SCs and Muslims into the politics. Employment guarantee schemes and poverty alleviation schemes have widely celebrated in the state.

The Group IV states are all the middle income states like Kerala, Tamil Nadu and West Bengal. These are the states where lower caste/class are strongly represented in politics and congress lost its dominance in the early stage itself. In these states, caste/class structure has historically disjointed. Kerala witnessed a high rate of lower caste participation facilitated by the coherent leadership of the communist party. It has challenged the upper caste landed power. West Bengal had the same political party in power. But CPIM in Bengal was a monolithic organisation, which has consistently reduced the commitment to the poor owing to a declining competitiveness. In Tamil Nadu, it was the local regional party that mobilised the lower caste /class groups through cultural nationalism. The regional party has established a cross –cultural political alliance. Harris by comparing various state postulates that, whether belonging to higher, middle or lower income category, it is the political mobilization of the lower caste /class group that determined the regime differences and its

welfare outcomes. He validates it by showing that states where the middle class have been dominant, middle income states like Andhra Pradesh done better than Karnataka and among the higher income states like Gujarat done better than Maharashtra. In each of them the upper caste/class dominance has been challenged to a great extent.

If welfarism is correlational to the electoral success of the political parties, then Harris has failed to explain why in states like Gujarat and Maharashtra political parties with upper caste/ class dominance are continuously gaining electoral victory. Moreover the postulation of Harris runs against the current trends in the voting behaviour of citizens, as the re-election of upper caste dominated states shows there is an increasing trend towards electing parties on the basis of economic development and increasing income measures than representation of ethnic identities of caste(CSDS, Lokniti, National Election Survey 2014) Moreover, some regional parties, though were successful at mobilizing the lower caste /class category are continuing with paternalistic tendencies. Here the construction of welfarism by Harris fails as the lower caste groups still remain at a limited level of political upliftment. However it is appreciable that Harris has also acknowledged the importance of ideology of the political parties and role of history while analysing the regime variations.

Subnationalism and Welfarist Regimes

An alternate explanation for the regional variations and welfare/redistributive outcomes lies in the idea of the level of sub nationalism explained by Prerana Singh. By using statistical methods and comparative historical analysis, she has explained how contemporary social welfare in India has been influenced by the colonial legacy and the neoliberalism of the recent decade. An analysis from the 19th century to the current context of neoliberalism has been attempted through the case studies of 5 Indian states; Tamil Nadu, Rajasthan, Kerala, UP and shadow study of Bihar. Prerana Singh identifies sub nationalism as the strong sense of community and solidarity feelings arising from a shared sense of identity leading to improved social outcomes. Prerana Singh has presented the successful welfare outcomes of Kerala as an example of the function of sub nationalism. She traces the 'Aikya Kerala Movement' that began in the late 19th and early 20th century asserting a strong Malayali identity as the growth of sub nationalism. The state has united against the Brahmin population claiming reservation in Jobs, has led to the establishment of a Malayali identity and the emergent sub nationalism has changed the way the population pursued public services (Singh,2016). Prerana Singh emphasises linguistic unity rather than other identities like caste or class of the state. Moreover she presents the case of Tamil Nadu in terms of the elite sub nationalism that existed from 1970 onwards which resulted in positive outcomes by the two major regionalist parties. The anti-Brahmin movement of the Justice Party in Tamil Nadu can be read on the same line of the Aikya Kerala Movement (Singh, 2016). Tamil subnationalism was identified to be a reason for the increasing investment of the state in education and health as well as for the effective implementation of the social schemes.

The increase in the distribution of public goods in each state is correlated with the extent of sub nationalism. "A feeling of 'my state' among the people of a state with respect to their linguistic in-group seems to make that state view public goods, such as health and education, as something that's beyond a zero-sum game between competing communities" (Singh,2016). The author presents differences in the nature and scale of sub nationalism in which she compares the fragmented sub nationalism in UP to the cohesive sub nationalism in Rajasthan. Sub nationalism in her opinion is also linked with the promotion of values and symbols committed by a group of networks that has a common subnational identity. The linguistic struggle in UP between Hindi and Urdu was identified as a conflict between Hindus and Muslims. The absolute absence of an identity in the state is the reason why the majority of the programmes are favouring a particular minority. Even the lower caste/class mobilization by Mayawati had favoured a single group in terms of welfare and redistribution (Singh, 2016). The quantitative study of Prerana Singh has produced results showing that

states with a high degree of nationalism spend the majority of their expenditure on education and health. The idea of sub nationalism in explaining welfarism and redistribution stands as a unique indicator. However it has multiple contradictions with the idea of lower class mobilization identified by Hariss and Atul Kohli. It throws light on why parties like BJP induces nationalist ideologies in states where sub nationalist tendencies are minor.

Political Ideology: An Indicator of Welfare/ Redistributive politics

The limited success and the variations for the redistributive accomplishments in India is correlated with ideology of the ruling class and the nature of the state (Kohli, 1983). Atul Kohli explains the differential state capacity in reducing poverty through proximate and distant variables. Growth rate from yields, irrigation infrastructure, access to finance or security of property rights are the proximate variables. Distant variables constitute political and social power and also bureaucratic effectiveness.

Atul Kohli comes with the example of states like Kerala, West Bengal, Tamil Nadu and Karnataka to substantiate how state variations are reflected in the differential redistributive capacity. In the case of Kerala, historical mobilization of the lower caste/class well before independence, the role of communist party etc. led to successful pro-poor policies. This has translated to effective land reforms, better investment in education and health etc. In the case of West Bengal poverty has come down effectively with the active participation of the communist party. The disciplined party structure having hierarchy has resulted in the successful implementation of tenancy reforms and reduction of tenancy reforms. Kohli examined whether there is a reason why southern states are performing better. Two distinguishing factors that have been identified with the southern states are the challenges to the narrow dominance of the Brahmins and the effective power of the bureaucrats in the policy implementation and delivery. But not all southern states are similar as Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh perform relatively poor in poverty alleviation and policies like land reforms than the state of Kerala. In northern states, the narrow political base of the upper caste and classes and the patron-client relationship of the congress party have negatively affected the welfare and redistributive policies. The importance of the political ideology has been further substantiated by Kohli by showing that differential political rule in similar social conditions can make differences in the way welfare programs work. Left centric parties penetrate in the rural society and engage in redistributive programs. CPIM in Bengal was effective with party structure and was strong and hierarchical in nature with rules and duties defined. In Karnataka, the ideological commitment of the party and leadership of Devaraja UR has produced results in welfare to a great extent. But the changing parties and the inability of the congress party to maintain redistribute policies has had an effect as well. In UP the faction and their ideological favouritism has distorted the redistributive policies. The Janata party coalition was a confused ideological amalgam. The Janata Dal had favoured commercial farmers which has resulted in directing resources to the upper layer of the society. But apart from the party ideology and party politics it is important to look at the way civil society organisations have influenced. It is not only left or the centre regime or the unitary /ordered national developmental state but in the mutually recursive relations between relatively autonomous political regimes and sufficiently robust civil society at the grass roots that determine welfare and redistributive policies in the country (Kumar, 2017).

Structure of Politics and Political Exigencies: An Indicator of Welfare

The considerable shift in Indian states from the 1990's can be understood in parallel with the increasing financial autonomy of the regional states. Tillin, Deshpande and Kailash (2016), presents a wide range of arguments about how states perform differently in terms of welfare/redistribution policies. The book presents six comparative state essays which show the

relationship between public policy and politics. The essay by Deshpande gives the example of the states of Maharashtra and West Bengal. It has been identified that Maharashtra was more proactive in legalising a social security guarantee for domestic workers than an evidently pro-labour state of West Bengal. The reason found was the increasing representation of domestic workers in the trade union was one key factor in representing their interest. This was important in showing how political exigencies and the structure of politics can have more impact on the public policy of welfare than the ideology of the political regime.

Saxena and Sisodia (in their essays mainly look at the case of food subsidy programmes in Chhattisgarh and Madhya Pradesh. They looked at three major indicators, political agency, governmental inter agency cooperation and relationship of government with NGOs. Madhya Pradesh had the backing of an established bureaucracy, whereas Chhattisgarh faced issues of being a newly constituted state. Moreover the paper by Tillin attempts at dividing states into two clusters. The first cluster consists of states which have retained a stable political system. These states have sought to protect public provisioning of social services. States like Kerala and Tamil Nadu have thus introduced various health insurance policies. The states in this cluster are not homogenous though. It includes states like Kerala with left centric democratic socialist parties that were in power for a long period on the one hand and another set of states where competing political parties exist on the other hand. It also contains an incorporationist state like Chhattisgarh where narrow elites dominate the political system.

The cluster two states show a weaker commitment to social services and welfare policies. Welfare policies in these states have a limited role in the electoral success of the regimes. This cluster has states of extreme nature. One level there are higher income states like Gujarat and on the other there are states like Bihar that are economically poor and weaker in state capacity and administrative power. The delivery of the programmes by the bureaucracy has resulted in the inefficient and discriminative allocation of resources. It also contains states like Jharkhand where extreme positions result in lack of purpose of welfare policies. Thus the book shows through various essays that apart from the ideology, political agencies and structure plays an important role in the variations of welfare and redistributive functions of states in India.

Conclusion

It becomes apparent in the current political environment that the welfare policies of a state do not stem from the subnationalist tendencies rather it results in strong and sustained subnationalism. This is visible in the context of many of the southern states of India, specifically in the state of Kerala where a strong resistance against the central government is existing. Though there are multiple reasons behind the variations in the welfare and redistributive capacities of states in India, a combination of these are visible in different scales in the Indian states. These reasons and multiple outcomes present a set-off lesson to be learned on how effective a state can perform welfare outcomes. Moreover factors ranging from history to political ideology and party structure changes the way welfare functions have been carried out. In the current neo-liberal content each state regime having financial autonomy alters the way policies are framed. The level of national political interference in state is depended on the extent to which each state performs in its pro-poor welfare policies. The various arguments thus presented in the paper have larger national and regional specific implications to the policy formulation, implementation and delivery.

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