

*Dr. Hemant Kumar (Ph.D., M.Phil.)*

**Programme: Master in Social Work,  
CC-10, Semester-III,  
Department of Sociology, Patna University**

### **Social policy all about:**

To understand the evolution and impact of social policies in India, we must first define the often misunderstood term “social policy”. The London School of Economics very succinctly defines it as a policy ‘concerned with the ways societies across the world meet human needs for security, education, work, health and well being’. Given that the term has a very broad and elusive definition; it brings under its purview a very wide range of government policies impacting several facets of human life.

India, being a very large country has had a very haphazard record of social policy planning and implementation. It is marked with authority overlapping between the Centre and States and the discord between a wide varieties of actors involved. This overlapping authority and discord have prevented India from formulating a singular set of social policies with a singular set of goals.

In essence, social policy or rather, the complex web of related policies, schemes and institutions that are concerned with the social conditions of economic activity ñ reflects the broad social contract between capital and labour. In developing economies this refers to the social contract between capital and labour specifically for the management of the development project. The latter in turn has been defined for much of the past half century, as the project of increasing material welfare for most of the citizenry through economic development, using the agency of the nation state.

For many developing countries, including India, this project remains partially or largely unfulfilled ñ although this state of incompleteness still has not prevented it from being very nearly abandoned in several instances. It is increasingly evident that social policy has a significance that goes beyond even the valid concerns about basic equity and minimal living standards, which form part of the social and economic rights of citizens. In fact, it can play a major role in the capitalist development project, at several levels. At the most basic level, social policies of different types are crucial to the state's capacity to manage modernization, and along with it the huge economic and social shocks that are necessarily generated. Thus, for example, social policies of affirmative action in parts of Southeast Asia (as in Malaysia) have been essential to maintaining ethnic harmony over periods when existing income inequalities and social imbalances across groups within the aggregate population would be otherwise accentuated by economic growth patterns.

Similarly, when overenthusiastic and possibly insensitive developmental projects overturn existing local communities or destroy material cultures without satisfactory replacement, social policy can become the basic instrument for rehabilitation and renewed

social integration. The massive human shifts (geographic, economic, social) that most development projects entail are potentially sources of much conflict, and often social policy is the most effective means of containing such conflict or at least keeping it within levels that do not destabilize society or derail the development project itself.

The second important, and related, role of social policy is of course that of legitimization ñ not only of the state, but of the development project itself. This need for legitimization arises both for the long run process and in terms of short run crisis management. Thus, over the long run, or planning horizon, it is especially important in growth trajectories that rely on high investment and savings rates, thereby suppressing current consumption in favour of high growth for larger future consumption, and which therefore imply sacrifices typically made by workers and peasants. In such a scenario, social policy that is directed towards providing basic needs and social services to those who are otherwise deprived of the gains from economic growth in terms of increased current consumption would be not just important but even necessary to ensuring social stability and continuity of the process itself.

The Indian development experience in the second half of the 20th century the post Independence development experience of India has always excited much interest, not least because, while India is one of the poorest countries in the world in terms of per capita income, it is also the world's largest liberal democracy. Furthermore, it has managed to retain this political system, however inadequate and flawed, while many democratic experiments in other countries have foundered and occasionally collapsed. This raises the obvious question: to what extent has this influenced the nature of social policy in India? Have the pressures on the state that result from democratic functioning meant greater attention to particular types of social policy, and which social groups or classes have they benefited? Why has democracy itself not resulted in greater attention to the provision of basic goods and minimally acceptable levels of public services for all citizens? These issues are further complicated by the fact that India has not only a system of liberal democracy but also a federal polity, in which a substantial number of the concerns which are particularly important from the perspective of social policy (land reforms, education, health, rural infrastructure) are either specifically state government subjects or are concurrently under both state and central governments. This in turn means that the different political groupings in different state governments can have significant implications for both social policy and its effects. This partly explains why there is so much regional variation in terms of major demographic, economic and social variables across states. There is a further dynamic as well, in that certain types of social policy, as discussed above, have ripple and process effects which affect the various classes in society directly, but also determined their desire and appetite for further public intervention. This point is elaborated below, when the specific experience of some states is considered. But first it is necessary to provide a brief review of the development experience in general.

### **Social policy in the Indian development process:**

Political theorists may be tempted to draw insights from the rather haphazard pattern of social policy implementation in India, finding in its very lack of direction and vision some association with the chaotic democratic polity within which it occurred, and the variegated demands which were sought to be fulfilled at different points of time. Most social policy provisioning has not

been universal in terms of actual effects, even when it has been declared as such. Rather, it has been directed to specific (and restricted) target groups. And almost always, these groups included those with sufficient political voice, such as urban organised workers, or increasingly in the 1990s, particular caste groupings. There have also been much trumpeted attempts to include (in however limited a fashion) a small proportion of those who naturally appear to be 'deserving', such as households under the poverty line, women from lower income groups, and so on. However, because such provisioning, whether in terms of protective legislation or in terms of actual resource transfers, has been extremely limited relative to the scale of requirement, it has meant that social policy has not been a basic instrument of development strategy in the manner outlined in the previous section. Rather, it has emerged essentially in the form of ad hoc responses to particular demands emanating from groups that (at least temporarily) have acquired some degree of political voice.

### **Social Policy & Planning in India & Origin of Five Year Plans**

Though the planned economic development in India began in 1951 with the inception of First Five Year Plan theoretical efforts had begun much earlier even prior to the independence. The Setting up of National Planning Committee by Indian National Congress in 1938, The Bombay Plan & Gandhian Plan in 1944, Peoples Plan in 1945 (by post war reconstruction Committee of Indian Trade Union), Sarvodaya Plan in 1950 by Jaiprakash Narayan was steps in this direction. Five-Year Plans (FYPs) are centralized and integrated national economic programs. Joseph Stalin implemented the first FYP in the Soviet Union in the late 1920s. Most communist states and several capitalist countries subsequently have adopted them. China and India both continue to use FYPs, although China renamed its Eleventh FYP, from 2006 to 2010, a guideline (guihua), rather than a plan (jihua), to signify the central government's more hands-off approach to development.

After independence, India launched its First FYP in 1951, under socialist influence of first Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru. The process began with setting up of Planning Commission in March 1950 in pursuance of declared objectives of the Government to promote a rapid rise in the standard of living of the people by efficient exploitation of the resources of the country, increasing production and offering opportunities to all for employment in the service of the community. The Planning Commission was charged with the responsibility of making assessment of all resources of the country, augmenting deficient resources, formulating plans for the most effective and balanced utilisation of resources and determining priorities.

The first Five-year Plan was launched in 1951 and two subsequent five-year plans were formulated till 1965, when there was a break because of the Indo-Pakistan Conflict. Two successive years of drought, devaluation of the currency, a general rise in prices and erosion of resources disrupted the planning process and after three Annual Plans between 1966 and 1969, the fourth Five-year plan was started in 1969. The Eighth Plan could not take off in 1990 due to the fast changing political situation at the Centre and the years 1990-91 and 1991-92 were treated as Annual Plans. The Eighth Plan was finally launched in 1992 after the initiation of structural adjustment policies.

For the first eight Plans the emphasis was on a growing public sector with massive investments in basic and heavy industries, but since the launch of the Ninth Plan in 1997, the emphasis on

the public sector has become less pronounced and the current thinking on planning in the country, in general, is that it should increasingly be of an indicative nature.

**Outline of Various Five year Plans:**

- **First Plan (1951 - 56) Target Growth: 2.1 % Actual Growth 3.6 %.** It was based on Harrod-Domar Model.
- **Second Plan (1956-61) Target Growth: 4.5% Actual Growth: 4.3%.** (Plan is called Mahalanobis Plan).
- **Third Plan (1961- 66), Target Growth: 5.6% Actual Growth: 2.8%.** Its aim was to make India a 'self-reliant' and 'self-generating' economy. Three Annual Plans (1966- 69) euphemistically described as Plan holiday. During the Annual Plans, the economy absorbed the shocks generated during the Third Plan.
- **Fourth Plan (1969 - 74) Target Growth: 5.7% Actual Growth: 3.3%.** it proposed to achieve two main objectives: 'removal of poverty' (Garibi Hatao) and 'attainment of self reliance'
- **Rolling Plan (1978 - 80)** there were 2 Sixth Plans. Janta Govt. put forward a plan for 1978-1983 emphasizing on employment, in contrast to Nehru Model.
- **Sixth Plan (1980 - 85) Target Growth: 5.2% Actual Growth: 5.7%.** The Plan focused on Increase in national income, modernization of technology, ensuring continuous decrease in poverty and unemployment through schemes for transferring skills(TRYSEM) and seats (IRDP) and providing slack season employment (NREP), controlling population explosion etc.
- **Seventh Plan (1985 - 90) Target Growth: 5.0% Actual Growth: 6.0%.** The Plan aimed at accelerating food grain production, increasing employment opportunities & raising productivity with focus on 'food, work & productivity'
- **Eighth Plan.** The eighth plan was postponed by two years because of political uncertainty at the Centre.
- **(1992 - 97) Target Growth 5.6 % Actual Growth 6.8%.** Worsening Balance of Payment position, rising debt burden, widening budget deficits, recession in industry and inflation were the key issues during the launch of the plan.
- **Ninth Plan (1997- 2002) Target Growth: 6.5% Actual Growth: 5.4%.** The Plan prepared under United Front Government focussed on "Growth With Social Justice & Equality "
- **Tenth Plan (2002 - 2007) Target Growth 8 % Actual Growth 7.6 %.** Recognizing that economic growth can't be the only objective of national plan, Tenth Plan had set 'monitorable targets' for few key indicators (11) of development besides 8 % growth target.
- **Eleventh Plan (2007 - 2012) Target Growth 9 % Actual Growth 8%.** The broad vision for 11th Plan included several inter related components like rapid growth reducing poverty & creating employment opportunities , access to essential services in health & education, specially for the poor, extension if employment opportunities using National Rural Employment Guarantee Programme, environmental sustainability, reduction of gender Inequality etc. The issue of Price Stability remained resonating for more than half of the Plan period.

## **Twelfth Five Year Plan (2012-17)**

The Twelfth Plan commenced at a time when the global economy was going through a second financial crisis, precipitated by the sovereign debt problems of the Eurozone which erupted in the last year of the Eleventh Plan. The crisis affected all countries including India. Our growth slowed down to 6.2 percent in 2011-12 and the deceleration continued into the first year of the Twelfth Plan, when the economy is estimated to have grown by only 5 percent. The Twelfth Plan therefore emphasizes that our first priority must be to bring the economy back to rapid growth while ensuring that the growth is both inclusive and sustainable. The broad vision and aspirations which the Twelfth Plan seeks to fulfil are reflected in the subtitle: 'Faster, Sustainable, and More Inclusive Growth'. Inclusiveness is to be achieved through poverty reduction, promoting group equality and regional balance, reducing inequality, empowering people etc whereas sustainability includes ensuring environmental sustainability ,development of human capital through improved health, education, skill development, nutrition, information technology etc and development of institutional capabilities , infrastructure like power telecommunication, roads, transport etc ,

The policy challenge in the Twelfth Plan is, therefore, two-fold. The immediate challenge is to reverse the observed deceleration in growth by reviving investment as quickly as possible. This calls for urgent action to tackle implementation constraints in infrastructure which are holding up large projects, combined with action to deal with tax related issues which have created uncertainty in the investment climate. From a longer term perspective, the Plan must put in place policies that can leverage the many strengths of the economy to bring it back to its real Growth potential.